

Divergently Together

Creative
Climate Action

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme



Shared Island
Initiative



Taighde Éireann
Research Ireland

Insight



Dublin City University



Comhairle Contae
an Chabháin
Cavan
County Council



Fermanagh & Omagh
District Council
Comhairle Ceantair
Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí



CUILCAGH
LAKELANDS
GEOPARK

Divergently Together Report

A project as part of the Creative Ireland Programme, Creative Climate 2024-2025, with Shared Island funding

Who are we?	2
About this document	3
Project Overview	4
At a glance	5
Laying the foundation	13
Who we worked with	19
Ways of working	22
Co-creating	26
What we did	30
Co-Designer Stories	46
Project Artists' Stories	55
Project Impacts and Outcomes	60
Sharing the Learning	65
Recommendations	66
Appendices	69

*Data analytics - Data is information, like numbers, words, or pictures. Data analytics means looking at that information to understand what's going on and decide what to do.

Who are we?

Divergently Together is a project by AlanJames Burns with Insight - Research Ireland Centre for Data Analytics at Dublin City University.

Insight

Insight is one of the largest **data analytics*** centres in Europe. We support 450 researchers who work with data in many ways, like collecting it, understanding patterns in it, building tools that learn from it, and making sure data and AI are used fairly, safely, and responsibly.



AlanJames Burns

AlanJames Burns, is a neurodivergent and environmental artist. They make art that has powerful messages and is often linked to a place or community. Through their art they look at disability, climate change and the human mind. In their projects, AlanJames Burns works collaboratively with other visual artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers and scientists.

About this document

This is the report for Divergently Together for Creative Ireland.

This part of the project ran over two years, so there is a lot to share!

This document has **13,202 words**, reading at a slow pace (100 words per minute), it will take [2 hours and 12 minutes](#) to read the full report.

You can use the [Table of Contents](#) above to get to the section of the document that is most interesting to you. Just click on the heading and it will **'jump' to the section** in this document.

Throughout this document we model different types of accessibility. Some sections are written in Plain English, some as an Easy Read, others use visuals to explain a message. These are examples of how to present content.

- There is an [Easy Read](#) summary of this report.
- Alt text on images
- Plain English is used as much as possible
- When unfamiliar words/phrases are used they are explained (look for the blue boxes)
- Headings are used to make this document easier to look through and to be more Screen Reader Friendly
- We use a Neurodivergent friendly font
- Videos linked in the report have captions

If you would like any more information about the project or the formats we have provided are not accessible to you, please contact studio@alanjamesburns.com and we will do our best to get you the information you need.

Project Overview

Divergently Together is a shared-island community engagement project that enables disabled and neurodivergent communities to take part in climate action. The project supports a **just transition*** and breaks down stigmas about neurodiversity and disability.

***Just Transition: means creating a future together that is fair**

Divergently Together is jointly funded by:

Creative Climate Action fund, 2024 - 2025, an initiative from the Creative Ireland Programme with Shared Ireland funding by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport /An Roinn Cultúir, Cumarsáide agus Spóirt in collaboration with the Department of the Taoiseach, and Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland Discover Programme, 2025 - 2026.

The project is led by artist AlanJames Burns in collaboration with Dublin City University, Insight Research Ireland Centre for Data Analytics, supported by Cavan County Council, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Dublin City Council and Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark.

Jointly funded by:



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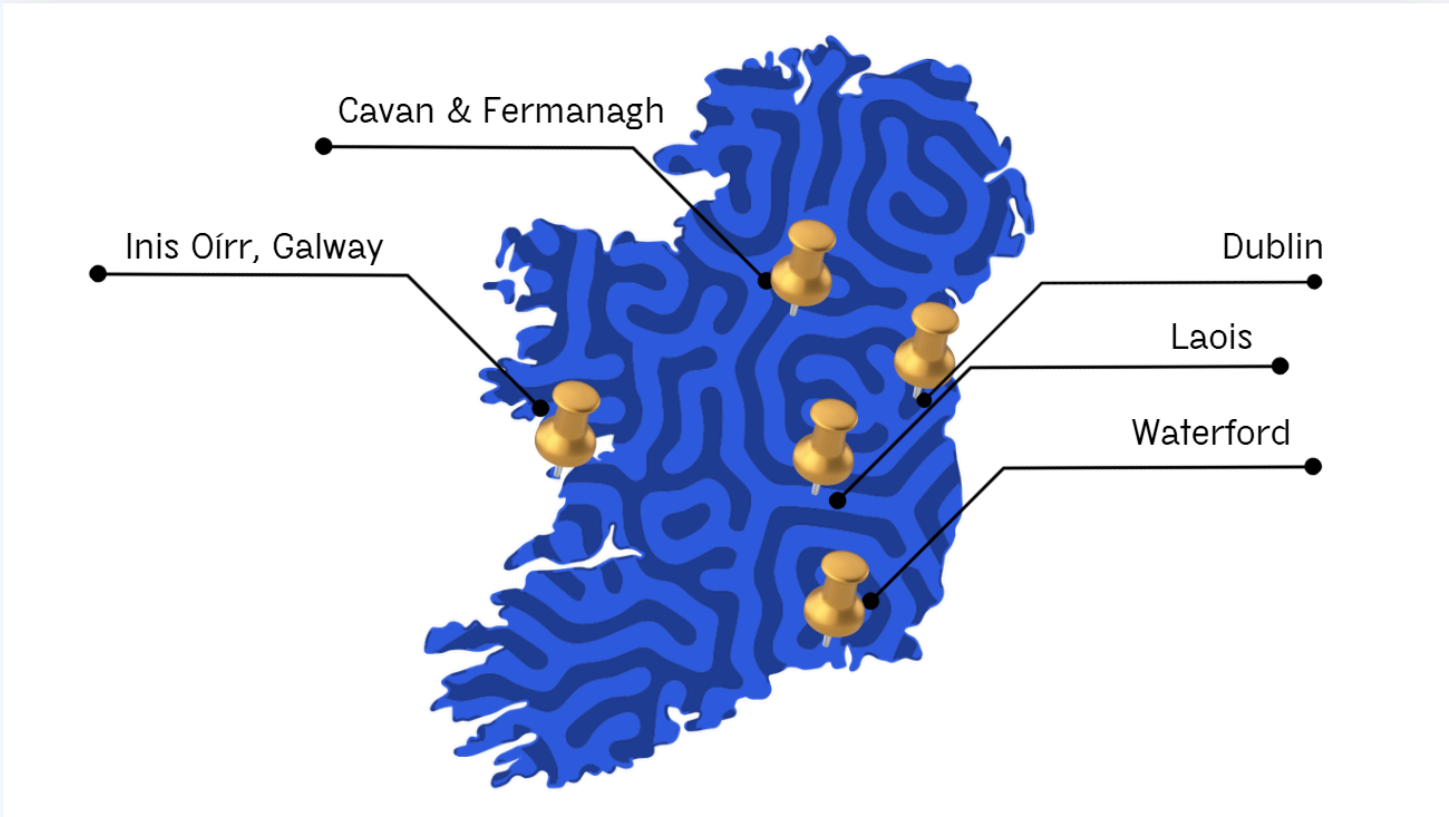


Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council



CUILCAGH
LAKELANDS
GEOPARK

At a glance



409
directly engaged
by the project



We spoke in depth
about the project to
150 people



By sharing the
project widely
we have reached
45,345 People



We sent
surveys to
70 people



We sent our report
on 'Accessibility &
Creativity in Climate
Policy' to
450 people



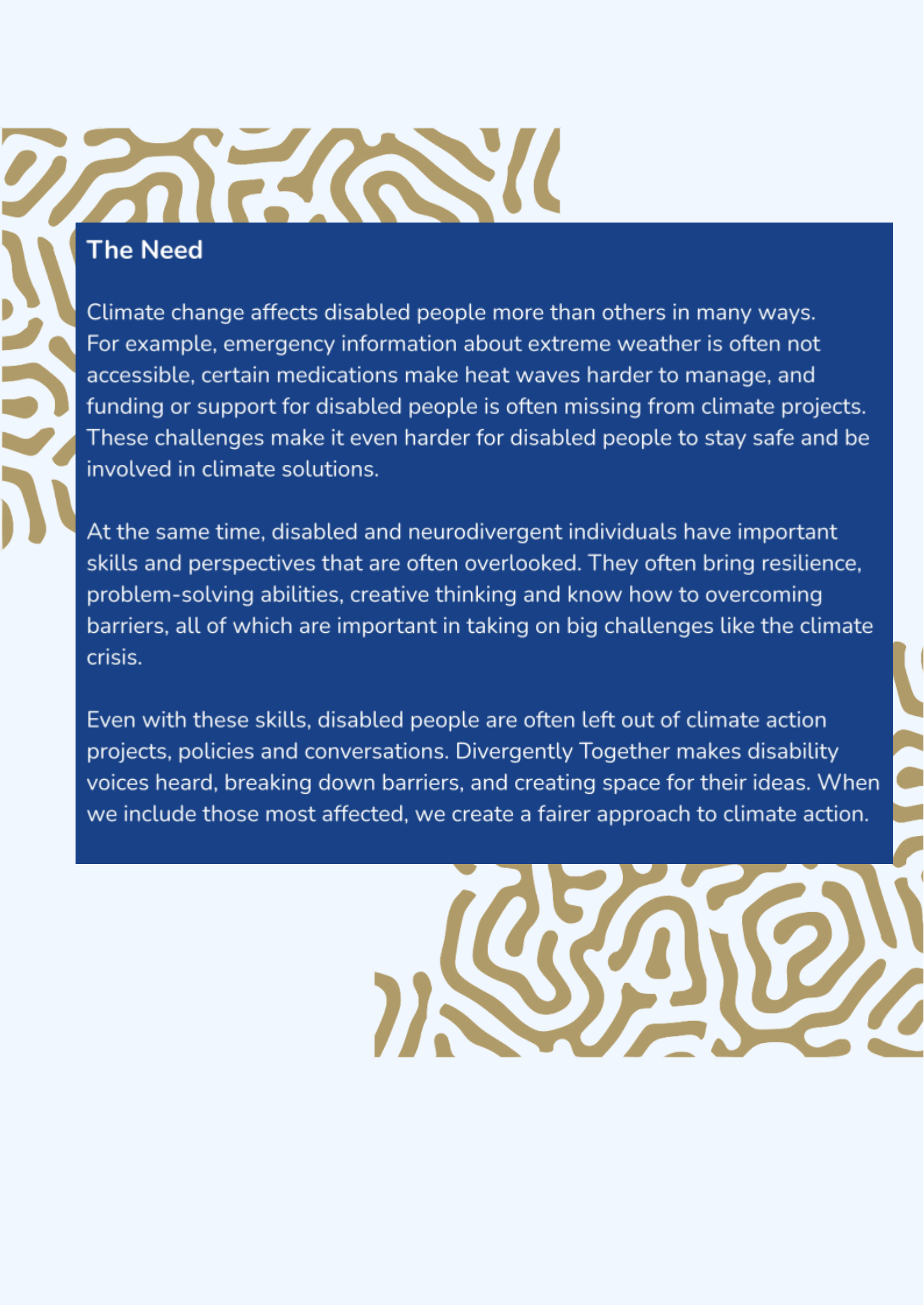
Through talks, taking part
in workshops, and doing
interviews, we estimate
that we reached
2,742 people



Through our website,
mailing lists and partner
outreach we reached
approximately
3,000 people



On Instagram our posts and
reel reached, 208 accounts.
Our stories reached
22,725 people



The Need

Climate change affects disabled people more than others in many ways. For example, emergency information about extreme weather is often not accessible, certain medications make heat waves harder to manage, and funding or support for disabled people is often missing from climate projects. These challenges make it even harder for disabled people to stay safe and be involved in climate solutions.

At the same time, disabled and neurodivergent individuals have important skills and perspectives that are often overlooked. They often bring resilience, problem-solving abilities, creative thinking and know how to overcoming barriers, all of which are important in taking on big challenges like the climate crisis.

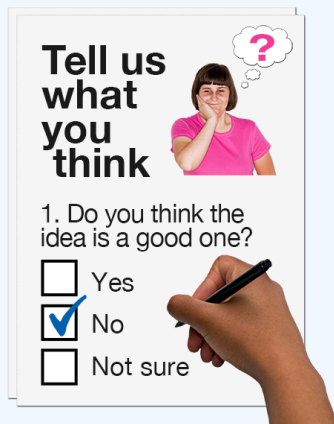
Even with these skills, disabled people are often left out of climate action projects, policies and conversations. Divergently Together makes disability voices heard, breaking down barriers, and creating space for their ideas. When we include those most affected, we create a fairer approach to climate action.

Project Goals

Learning how to make change.

	We wanted to highlight how climate action and disability overlap.
	We helped people to express themselves creatively. We taught them about climate action.
	We encouraged the people we work with to think about accessible climate action.
	We showed people what accessibility can look like.

Motivation - feeling more able to change or to take action.

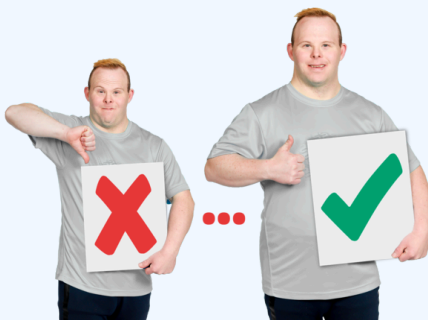


We showed how creative and different ways of thinking can be useful in climate action.



We created a community by bringing people together from different skill sets, like:

- Climate experts
- Artists
- Policy makers



We built people's confidence to make change in their community.

Opportunity - barriers removed, more chance to take action.



We empowered neurodivergent communities by making art together.



We helped the voices of neurodivergent people and communities be heard.



We broke down stigmas about neurodiversity and disability.

Key Achievements

Increased awareness of links between disability and climate action.

At our Neurodiversity Training over half the room had never heard of [alt text](#). At the workshop in Galway none of the participants were familiar with [Easy Reads](#). A survey to Climate Policy workers in Ireland and Northern Ireland showed that only 17% understood eco-ableism* (see [Appendix 1](#)). This project has shared skills through workshops and events giving people not only greater awareness but tools for action. We have also become connectors for resources and people, creating pathways for people and organisations to find each other. We hope that these seeds will begin to flower into new ways of working together.

*Eco-ableism: Choices that are made which are good for the environment but, exclude disabled people. For example, cycle lanes put in but paths are made smaller, paper straws might not be safe for some people, using difficult language and large documents which are not accessible.

Self advocacy (knowing what you need and asking for it)

Through a radical approach to care, the project created safe spaces for expression and crafting a sense of community. This laid the foundations for our co-designers to be able to say what they need to work well. Many had not experienced inclusive or supportive spaces before. After the project they know what that looks like and what they can ask for in other places. Additionally, other people who worked with us such as photographers, accommodation providers and workshop leaders also described how they learned new things about themselves which will help them in future work.

Influencing public sector (part of society that is run by the government to provide services for everyone)

We worked with the Climate teams in our local areas Cavan, Fermanagh and Omagh. As well as this we connected with Codema, Climate NI, the Department of Environment, the Department of the Taoiseach and the National Disability Authority. Through these conversations we hope that Divergently Together will help create more inclusive policy for climate action in Ireland. This type of change happens over a longer time than the life of this project. However, we have seen positive signs of change and had feedback from these groups that they are going to act on the things they learned.

Influencing business and tourism

Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark and their business network saw the opportunity to increase tourism. They were motivated to bring more visitors to the area and saw access as the 'right thing to do' for their community. The GeoPark is adding access and inclusion into their training for new Ambassadors and Youth Ambassadors. They also created a 'Know Before You Go' document for the Cavan Burren Park and have committed to creating these for all 32 partner locations. This will increase access to nature in the area which is hugely important for people to form connections to their environment and feel motivated to protect it.

Creation of 'Unmasking Nature: Sensory Burrow'

Unmasking Nature is an art project which is growing, changing and developing. It explores sensory stimulation (stimming) with nature. We created two connected experiences:

'Foraging for Senses', an outdoor event that guides people through the landscape, encouraging them to follow their senses and emotions to find what feels good.

‘The Sensory Burrow’, is a quiet, relaxed indoor space that offers a place to recharge. Within the Burrow you’ll experience nature through all your senses. These natural objects have been gathered from nature and provide gentle stimulation and boost calmness, bringing the outdoors inside. It also includes a [video artwork](#) made in collaboration with artist Emma Mohan O’Grady, capturing the act of stimming with nature. These experiences of nature show us that we can create sensory tools and spaces with materials that are better for the environment.

Building empathy for the more-than-human* world

Exploration of more-than-human worlds through neurodiversity

created new and exciting ideas. In the creative activities by the co-designers, they presented ‘deep dive’ information. For example:

*More-than-human is a phrase that is used to describe nature in a way that includes humans. We are part of nature not separate from it.

- ❖ ‘Conversations with Lichen’, a set of cards and reflections that share how lichens can teach us to pause, notice the overlooked, and remember that differences are not weaknesses.
- ❖ An artwork exploring how weeds echoed the neurodivergent experience, asking us not to change who we are, but find the right ground to grow.
- ❖ A poem from the perspective of a caged parrot. The poem reflects on the human search for connection, acceptance, and a place to call home.

Through these creative projects the co-designers shared experience, highlighted diversity and explored new ways of accessing the world around us.

Development of project team - Neurodiverse (ND) ways of working

As a team we all have diverse lived experience and this made the delivery of the project rich and rewarding as it was a topic that was personal to us. However, it also made it more complex. We embraced this experience as a core part of the project and have tracked our learnings for future projects and others to draw from. In addition to our professional development, many of us have gone on personal journeys of growth, as humans outside of professional capacity.

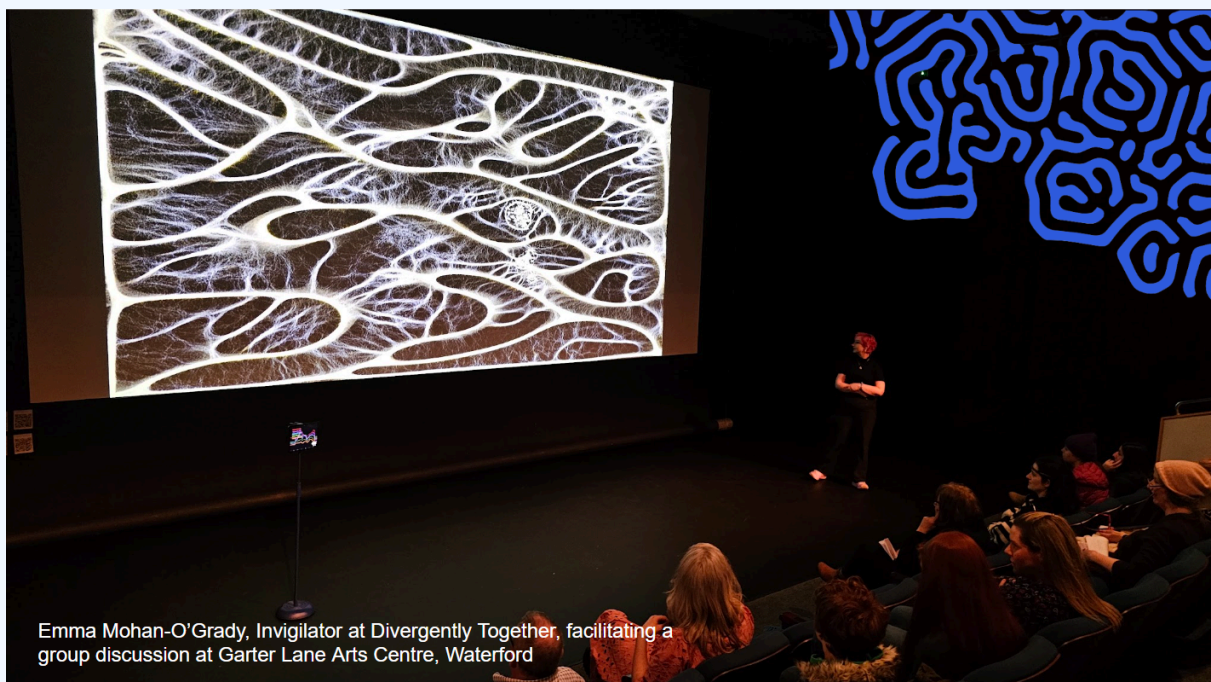
Laying the foundation 2024

5 workshops

4 Local Climate Action Teams

9 Open discussion

300 Participants



Launching the project and having island-wide conversations

In phase 1 of the project concentrated on the wide spectrum of disability across 4 locations.

- Waterford: February 2024, Garter Lane Arts Centre
- Cavan and Fermanagh Omagh: June 2024, Cavan Townhall
- Inis Oírr, Galway: September, 2024, Áras Éanna Arts Centre
- Laois: November, 2024, The Link Centre with the Urban Farm

From urban perspectives in Waterford to rural insights in Cavan and the unique challenges of island life on Inis Oírr, each location has contributed vital understandings about the intersection of climate change and disability.

We brought the artwork 'Augmented Body, Altered Mind' by AlanJames Burns to each location. The artwork examines correlations between the natural world, neurology, philosophy, and neurodivergence.

We invited disability groups and climate action officers to private viewings of the artwork, which sparked interest and inspired important conversations about disability and climate. At each location the format of the engagement was different, from facilitated gallery conversations, to an in-depth workshop day and going to meet people on location.

The artwork served as a powerful tool for bringing people together, encouraging them to share their thoughts, experiences, and ideas.

A notable story emerged from one of the attendees, who had a vision impairment due to a brain injury. He shared how excessive rainfall, combined with bright sunshine, creates significant barriers for him as he

struggles to see silver street poles, which can become invisible against changing weather conditions.

Story shared at Waterford exhibition

The autistic teenager who had come to the exhibition yesterday came back with all his friends. They took turns on the headset and were giving each other challenges to inflict upon the wearer. Much fun was had and they stayed for nearly an hour

Note from team member at the event in Cavan Townhall

After taking part, how likely are you to take action on climate action and disability rights?

Likely, I definitely have a changed perspective on how to approach these two very large topics, still too large to do all and be all for all but it feels like a great start

Public sector cultural worker, took part in Galway workshop

“I passed a family coming from the exhibition when I was coming back from a break, the daughter was speaking animatedly about the exhibition, and seeing all the colours lighting up when they connected the headset to their brain: ‘my brain lit up all the colours’”

Team member working at the event in Co. Galway.

Will you tell others about what you learned? If yes, who will you share it with?

Yes, my friends.



What we learned in from these conversations

- The experience of climate and disability can be emotional.
- For disabled/neurodivergent people, finding themselves represented at each event was a positive experience.
- Climate change is a political topic and not everyone believes it needs action.
- People are already feeling the effects of climate change.
- Humour and play were a helpful way to balance the seriousness of the topic.
- There is very little awareness of the links between the climate emergency and disability. There is a need to take things slowly and explain terms.
- People understood, and had positive reactions to the idea of collaboration.
- People thinking in different ways was seen as positive.

- Meeting people where they are is important.
- Accessible documents were greatly appreciated and set the tone.
- Acknowledgement of the team's lived experience and invitation to share what is needed to 'be their best self' was a good way to relax people into the room.
- Building new relationships takes time and trust.

Understanding Neurodiversity (ND)

At the start of 2025, we organised **neurodiversity (ND)** training. The goal was to **help everyone understand** better how to work with neurodivergent people.

The training was **useful for all** team members. Even people who already had lived experience of being neurodivergent **learned new things**.

They got to hear about different kinds of experiences and **find new tools** and ways of working that could help them.

There were **20 people** at the training. They included **artists and creatives, researchers, project team members**, and people from the **Dublin City Climate Office**.

→ **Fiona Earley, DCU Autism Friendly University Coordinator** spoke about Adults with Autism.

→ **Trevor Boland from DCU Disability and Learning Support Service** presented on Accessible Documents.

- Over half the room did not know what alt text was.
- Many did not know about tagging headings on text documents to make them screen reader friendly.
- Many did not know about accessibility checkers available for documents.



Survey Results [Appendix 2.](#)

[Know Before You Go](#) document for the day.

“That the world we live in seems at odds with the experience and difficulties of people with lived experience of disability, and the world is getting increasingly busy and difficult to navigate for many.”

Member of the Dublin City Council's Climate Team

Who we worked with

Group	Goals for this group
Project Partners Insight, Creative Ireland, Research Ireland, Dublin City University, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Cavan County Council, Dublin City Council	● Working together including cross border collaboration ● Greater inclusion in climate action in their areas/organisations ● Engage wider public
Neurodiverse (ND) Co-Designers The selection of the project co-designers happened through an open call where people could apply. We linked with local climate and art teams including the Creative Ireland local associate to reach people.	● Improved awareness of climate and disability. ● Development of creative expression and climate literacy. ● Give voice to underheard groups in Climate Action in Ireland. ● Feel confident they can make change in their community. ● Leave a legacy.
Project Artists AlanJames Burns was the lead on the project and was responsible for the vision and development of the project throughout. Ailbhe O'Connor, Emma O'Grady, Richard Forrest, Ríon Duffy Murphy and Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan were also asked to bring their insights to the project. All project artists have lived experience of ND.	● Personal and creative development. ● Increased confidence in working in socially engaged practice. ● Increased knowledge of the intersection of climate and disability. ● Create community as they bring knowledge from this project into future projects.

Local Climate Teams & Policy Workers The project engaged the local climate teams in Cavan, Fermanagh/Omagh, Laois, Galway and Waterford in Phase 1. Then worked closely with the Cavan and Fermanagh/Omagh teams into Phase 2.	• Greater awareness of how to include the disability community in an authentic way in local policy. • Greater cross departmental and cross regional cooperation. • Influence policy towards a just transition.
Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark Located across the counties of Cavan and Fermanagh, and is the only cross-border GeoPark. It is home to a fascinating variety of geology, natural landscapes and historic sites. We also worked with the Geo Park business network, a group of businesses located within the park.	• Greater awareness of how to include the disability community in recreation and tourism in this area. • Increase awareness of accessible communication and creative approaches to inclusion. • Increased empathy to inspire action
Project Team We all came to the project with our own lived experience of ND and disability. From the outset we realised that this experience was part of the project and should be acknowledged and reflected on so we could share some of our key learnings for future projects and teams.	• Increased skills/capacity - including working at scale and within pre-existing systems • Confidence in advocating for access accommodations • To feel supported and valued • Bring this experience to their future work

General public Contact with the public happened during our temperature check, via our online engagement, and through the final ‘Unmasking Nature’ event. Additionally the project was disseminated at conferences, workshops and events organised by external organisations.	• Enjoyable, educational experience • Greater public awareness of intersection of disability and climate • Increased empathy to inspire action
Climate Sector Codema - Dublin’s Energy Agency, Department of the Environment (Republic of Ireland), Department of the Taoiseach, Climate Northern Ireland	• Influence policy so that there is more inclusion of disabled people in climate action plans • Raise awareness of eco-ablism • Educate policy makers on ways they can be more inclusive



Ways of working

Working as a Neurodiverse Team

Working together as a group with varied lived experiences of neurodiversity and disability was both an absolute joy and an intriguing puzzle! We were constantly learning from each other while also delivering the project. This learning was invaluable, but it also added extra layers of work and time. Below are some of the strategies and insights that came out of this process. We share them in the hope they can help others build more accessible and inclusive working environments. We have also created a short guide on [working as a neurodiverse team](#).

Team Debrief

A team debrief was held over two days and as part of this a facilitated workshop with Fiona Byrne was designed to provide a formal opportunity for feedback on the project structure and direction, as well as team dynamics and personal growth.

Together we told stories of the most significant change from our perspective. All the stories from the team related to the delivery of the project, the themes of the project and personal experiences - often overlapping and intertwined. Personal changes were referenced as the most significant, framed not in terms of 'progress' but often as a return or going back to something they had lost, suppressed or hidden.

We had a discussion on the idea of less or more, rather than good or bad, this allowed a wider conversation about the project going forward. There was a sense of pride in what had happened so far and a need to celebrate wins. A desire to stay in touch with nature was voiced and

also a need to keep structure. We also acknowledged that we should admit limitations and work within these on a personal and project wide scale. There was also a conversation about the Sensory Burrow and how users can touch on heavy topics and that the team may become sounding boards for users. While some of this can be self-managed, it is important that we support one another and are aware of the emotional weight that comes along with the project at times.

At the end of the debrief we described the project sensorially considering how it made us feel throughout our whole bodies. This brought up some beautiful and complex descriptions of the meaning of the project for each of us:

“An excitingly murky smell”

“The project is visually rich and stimulating like a fractal”

“It tasted tart, like an exploration that opened your palette, revealing subtlety and nuances”

“Sound, rustling. A sense of something happening but you’re not sure what it is yet”

“Felt like sunlight on my face”

These remarks show a sense of possibility that is felt by the team. A sense that there is a lot going on that could go in many directions. As an ND team it may not be surprising that the project is not laid out before us in a straight A to B to C order. The imagery evoked is dense, thick with meaning. There is also a joy in the unusual that permeates the comments, inhaling a murkiness with pleasure, the excitement of sour tastes, and leaning in to discover the source of the rustle instead of assuming it’s something sinister.

The project was described as “mossy”, “earthy”, “cozy”, “nourishing”, “bountiful”, as well as “frisson”, “sour”, “rocking”, “beautiful and spiky like a thistle rosette”. It is like nature, diverse, and rather than thinking of these elements being divided across a dichotomy of good or bad, it is better to ask what these bodily experiences offer us and what they have taught us along the way.

Process is key, we are at all times in a state of becoming.



"Supporting a neurodivergent team for nearly two years has created capacity and capability that will extend far beyond this project. The growth in the team to lead on projects like this has been exponential. Seeing that development of neurodivergent leaders has been a real joy of the project." - AlanJames Burns, led artist

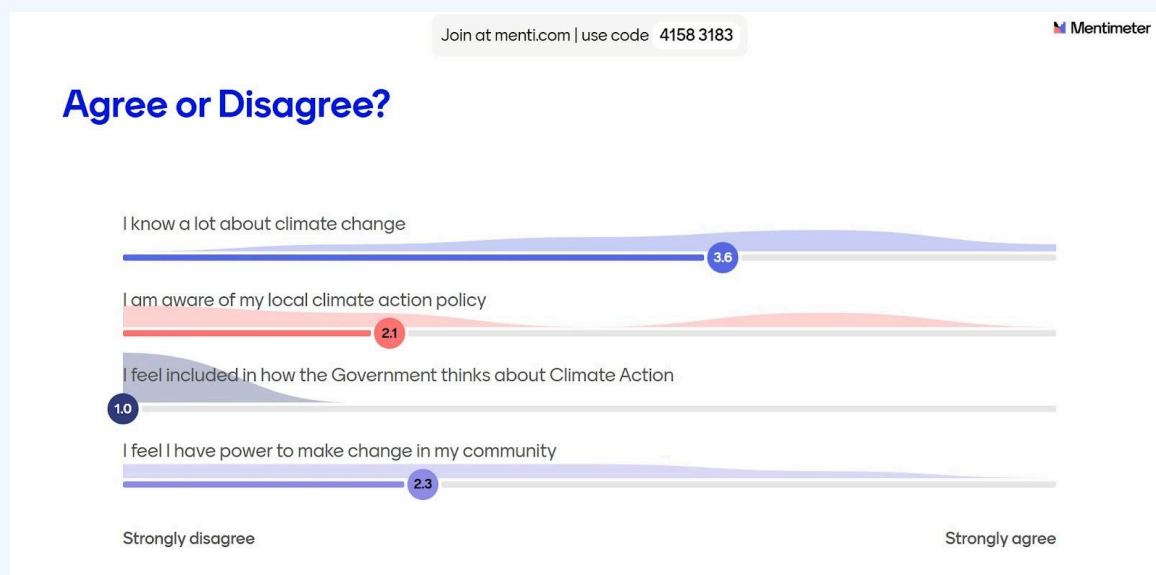
Working with Neurodivergent Co-designers

We wanted to build stronger connections with people who have lived experience of neurodivergence. We worked with a smaller group over a longer time so that trust could grow. The process was flexible, a bit like an ecosystem that changes over time. We started with an open call, held an introduction session, then ran an online workshop, and finally met in person.

When people signed up, we asked about their motivations, their connection with the more-than-human world, and their past experiences in the arts or climate action. Many people spoke about care, empathy, interconnectedness and nature as a part of who they are. They also shared harder feelings, grief, despair, urgency, and responsibility. However, some also described how nature can restore.

We also learned practical things about lived experiences of neurodivergence and disability. People used different words to describe themselves, showing how language can shift depending on personal choice and cultural context, especially across the border between North and South.

Responses to introduction Zoom Menti Metre:



What We Did

Co-creating

- 19 Online workshops
- 5 In person workshop days
- 7 ND co-designers
- 10 ND project team
- 6 Artists
- 16 Advisers and experts

Hybrid Format - different ways of taking part



A mix of **online and in-person** sessions took place. The online sessions were an opportunity to reflect, ideate collaboratively and bring in expertise to broaden our understanding.

Sessions were led by the Divergently Together team and artist AlanJames Burns. We also invited speakers:

- Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan, is an Irish-Indian writer, performer, and cultural consultant
- Dr Verity Burke, founder of the Unnatural History Museum and John Pollard Newman Fellowship in Climate Change and the Arts at University College Dublin
- Dr Keren MacLennan, Lecturer, Department of Psychology and Autism researcher, working from a Neurodiversity paradigm perspective.
- Dr Steven Kapp, Developmental psychologist, Researcher in Stimming and Senior Lecturer in Psychology at University of Portsmouth

Trivia House, 25 & 26 April 2025

Day 1 ● Otherworlding Meditation Exercise with Ailbhe O'Connor, project artist ● Policy and language with Dr Fiona Byrne, embedded evaluator ● Showing Augmented Body, Altered Mind by led artist AlanJames Burns ● Ecosomatics Workshop with Pritha Kundu, DCU researcher on Dance and ND	Day 2 ● Moving in the Environment with Pritha ● Brain Computer Interface Demo with Ahsan Awais from Insight ● Biodiversity with Heather Bothwell, Geopark Ambassador ● Stim Sculpting with Ailbhe
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Creating a **welcoming space** sets the tone for the engagement.

Care was a big topic. A [Know Before You Go](#) document set the scene before the day began. Then in the morning the group were asked to describe themselves as a type of weather and say how they can be supported within the group. This was a simple action that was greatly appreciated. One person mentioned never having been asked this before and said thank you for asking. The relaxed nature of the space allowed for people to self regulate.

Key themes and interests surfaced:

- Feeling of **being overlooked in the past** was strong, there was a great appreciation of the care that had gone into creating the space for the co-designers to work in.
- There was a big interest in **relating the ND mind and body to more-than-human-nature**, how plants and animals reflect the ND experience but also nature as a restorative and non judgmental space.
- Questions people had around technology were about ways to understand the brain more than what functions it could serve, there was a sense of wanting to **understand themselves** through this process.



- Using **sustainable and natural materials** was emphasised by the co-designers.
- Policy was dense and breaking it down could be done by looking at communication rather than language. There are so many **ways we communicate**, not just written words.
- Activities with a lot of **movement** were appreciated. Doing a

“Having Tara Smith, the Climate Action Officer from Cavan present was brilliant. It opened up genuine dialogue between participants and policy makers” - team member

“Grateful - plants as fidget toys blows my mind.” - co-designer

“I am five plants in one pot, the trick is knowing which one to look after.” - project artist

“Things happen when there is will and community and we have both!” - co-designer

number of activities, changing up the space and leaving the room at times, all meant that the amount of time sitting and listening to someone else was limited.

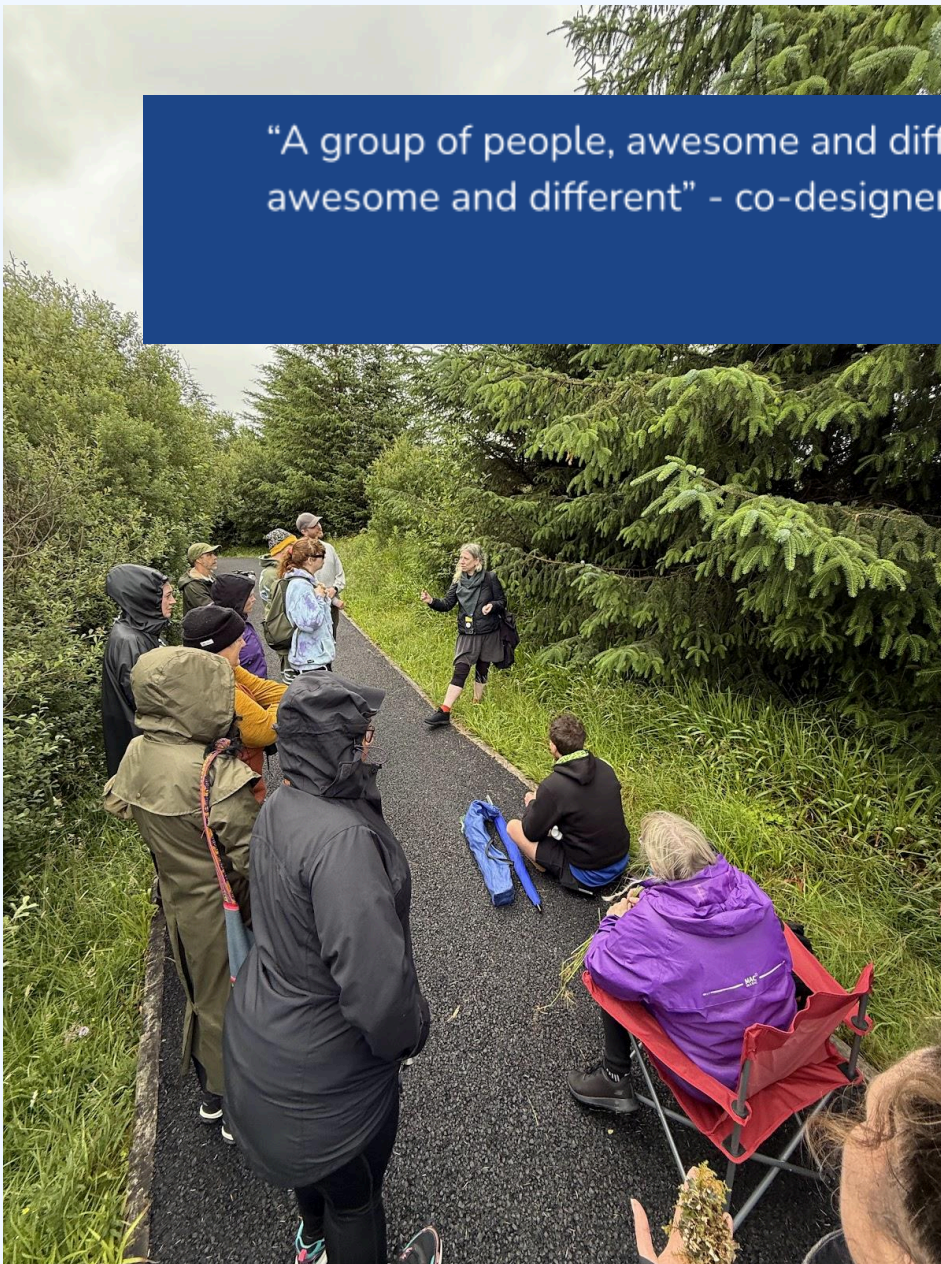
- Feedback from the team was not to do too much, rather to **focus in and go deep**. How the co-designers work is expansive and interconnected, everything leads to something else, so there is a need to help with focus.





Foraging Walk and Exploration Day, 5th July

“A group of people, awesome and different, and all the plants are awesome and different” - co-designer comment



- Being outdoors was appreciated - “a lot of her needs are already being met. With indoor events she would need a lot more access requirements.”
- Musings turning into knowledge through talking and exploration.
- Heather the GeoPark guide noted how creativity offers ways into the subject through emotion - “It's the poetry that moves me. The

things that get you up in the morning. Yes the science of it is good, but the poetry!”

- Simplification and classification have been designed to help us understand but neurodivergent brains seek out the complexity.
- The idea of trees swaying to adapt and rigid structures breaking resonated with people. The swaying was related to stimming and natural movement.
- Language was brought up in relation to neurodiverse terms for things. For example relating **spoon theory*** to plants and nutrients. There was a desire to reconnect with the Irish language.
- The connections between neurodiversity and nature are much stronger than before.

Spoon Theory: Is about having limited energy. We start each day with a number of spoons. Everyone has a different number. To do a task you use a spoon. Not everyone is able to do the same amount of tasks each day. This is not because they are lazy. It is because they don't have enough spoons.

Production Days, 8th & 9th August

Production days were designed as a space for the co-designers to regroup and push the development of their ideas. At this point the group were working on individual and collaborative projects.

“I left my mask in the car as I didn't need it here.” - co-designer

“This group is the most non judgemental people” - project photographer

The group noted being more comfortable at this point in the project. The openness and sharing at the start of the session had become a regular habit and people were very clear about their needs for the day.

The day consisted of:

- A presentation by Maria and Howard on lichen, exploring how looking closely can open us up to the expansiveness of more-than-human nature.
 - Maria Cullen is a research scientist specialising in geology, ecology and lichenology. She is one of Ireland's foremost mycologists.
 - Howard Fox is an ecologist and botanist who has researched and published extensively on lichen and lichenicolous fungi.
- A walk to identify the route and locations for the interactive event and artwork.
- Group work, each person focusing on how to develop and prepare their ideas for the public event.



Walking the land together was enjoyable and there was so much knowledge shared between the group and the visiting experts. This exchange of knowledge was in both directions. Throughout the walk Howard wrote music to the rhythms of growth and sang Latin names of fungi and lichens. The co-designers really enjoyed this and more musical amongst the group joined in harmonies and discussed what beats different varieties of lichens should have.

One team member noted that: “Unmasking may be freeing but it leaves a person vulnerable and can become frightening at times. To truly express oneself is a brave task and requires support from others to let that person know it is safe to unmask”.

This was hugely important to keep in mind for the public event.



‘Unmasking Nature’, 10th September

Neurodivergent Perspectives on Climate and Biodiversity

On the 10th of September we delivered ‘Unmasking Nature’ at the Cavan Burren Park, this consisted of a nature-based sensory burrow and a ‘foraging for the senses’ experience, which explored the unique ways neurodivergent minds move through the world.



For the event we collaborated with the Cavan Burren Park at CUILCAGH Lakelands Geopark which spans the border between Cavan County Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. It features unique geological formations, rich biodiversity, cultural heritage sites, and promotes conservation, education and sustainable tourism. This location significantly influenced the development of Unmasking Nature.

The invitation for the event was to “**Come, stim with nature: touch grass, hum to the rhythm of dappled light, eat dirt. Trust your senses.**” Awash with texture and tiny details, Unmasking Nature’s

guided geopark experience was shaped by sensory cues, rather than traditional mapping techniques.

Works from Our Co-Designers

There were also opportunities to experience individual artworks produced by the co-designers creative responses to the site, which included “deep dive” information points.



Among these artworks was ‘Conversations with Lichen’, a set of cards and reflections that share how lichens can teach us to pause, notice the overlooked, and remember that difference, multiplicity, and relation are not weaknesses but in fact, the oldest survival strategy on earth. The co-designer reflected on their work, saying:

“Lichens remind us that being is truly singular: every body is a holobiont, a community of symbionts living and thinking and moving together. Lichens make this truth visible as they challenge the norms of

the world: fungi, algae, bacteria and yeast co-creating one life. As a neurodivergent person, I see myself in their symbiotic lifeways: plural, porous, never neatly one thing, surviving at the edges, often unseen or invisible (despite their making up much of the earth's biomass!), hoarding softness, thriving through entanglement. They have made me think differently about time, about care, and about community.”

Plain English Version:

Lichens remind me that nothing lives alone.

Every living thing is a small community of many parts that work together. Lichens show us this clearly. They are made of fungi, algae, bacteria, and yeast. All of these live together as one life.

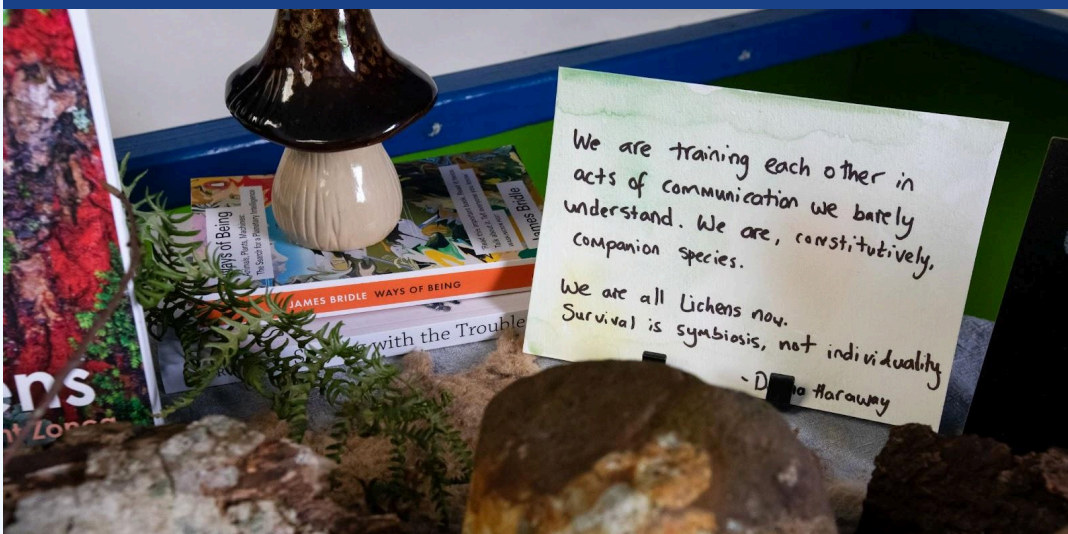
As a **neurodivergent person**, I feel close to lichens.

They remind me that life can be **mixed and shared**, not just one clear thing. Like lichens, I can be many things at once.

I sometimes live or work in places that are not seen or understood by everyone. Lichens are often small or hidden, but they are very important to the world.

Lichens help me think in new ways about **time, care, and community**.

They teach me that life grows best when we are **connected and support each other**.



Another artwork, a large cloth painting of the so-called “ordinary” plants of the Cavan Burren, invited us to consider them in relation to the neurodivergent experience. It speaks of not changing who you are, but finding the right ground to grow, where difference is recognised as potential rather than fault. Dismissed as “weeds,” yet carrying curative and healing properties. The plants’ power often goes unnoticed, revealing itself only to those who take the time to observe, learn, and understand.

“When given the right space to grow and be truly seen and understood, what seems out of place reveals deep strength and value. My art seeks to honour that resilience and hidden magic”.

A poem advocating for freedom and belonging was told from the perspective of a caged parrot. It could be heard loudly squawking in a nearby garden, while the group observed a local bird flying free overhead. The poem reflects the human search for connection, acceptance, and a place to call home.

Through these artworks the co-designers shared experience, highlighted diversity and explored new ways of accessing the world around us. In addition to the artworks there were insights from invited professionals and experts in the areas of fungi, food foraging and biophilia.



At its core, Unmasking Nature asks,

“What does it mean to be neurodivergent in nature?”

During the Unmasking Nature event, together we explored how natural environments proffer a sense of ease and belonging within them. Participants were urged to open themselves up to what's often overlooked, to experience nature's richness from a different vantage point, and to break free from the confining patterns that shape how we sense, move and feel our way through the world.



For the event a ['Know Before You Go'](#) document was created.

A private event for the GeoPark business network was held before the public event. Since their involvement with the project the network has committed to:

- **Creating a 'Know Before You Go' document for their 32 partners and for future events.**
- **They have added inclusion as a training module for GeoPark ambassadors, including for a new Youth ambassador programme.**

Feedback from attendees:

"I thoroughly enjoyed the event, very inspiring and informative."

"I found the event to be really inspiring on a creative level, I learned a lot about nature and our environment. I also got to meet other neurodivergent people and felt a true and real connection to both the people there and the world around me. Thank you so much for organising it really affected me positively."

"I loved all the presentations, the approach and inclusively of the event. The idea of using natural objects for comfort is something I do instinctively but never understood why until today. It's really helped me to feel more accepting of myself."



Accessibility & Creativity in Climate Policy, 1st October

Working with the climate teams in Fermanagh Omagh and Cavan, and alongside our ND participants we identified language as one of the barriers to engagement for ND audiences (and the wider disability community). To look at this issue we designed a day around this theme where we could share our learnings alongside invited experts and get people excited and inspired about accessible communication.

“I’ll be more aware of different ways we experience the world and bring that into my work.”

“I’m making stim boxes and a small sensory space in our office.”



We brought together an **invited group of 27 people**, including policy makers across climate and inclusion, expert facilitators, ND co-designers and artists. This event reimagined accessible communication not as a box-ticking exercise, but as a powerful, creative skill with the potential to transform how we connect with diverse audiences.

In addition to the content of the day itself we modeled accessible approaches including [‘Know Before You Go’](#) information, **ISL interpretation** and **Relaxed Entry**.

We also set up ‘Unmasking Nature Sensory Burrow’ so that people could experience the sensory environment and create their own sensory boxes to take away.

Feedback from participant follow up survey:

“We are implementing Know Before You Go guides across our 32 businesses, into our events and at Geopark Sites. We are currently developing a new website and accessibility is a priority in its development. We are also more aware of including more diverse persons into our content.”
- Karan McLernon, Development Officer: Tourism and Business, Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark

“The Enabled project and Music man project, I'm going to introduce nature as a stimming tool. Instead of plastic. Discuss with the team how we can best provide [know before you come] guides. Also, provide a suggestion box so we can look out for things we might not be supporting” - Julie Anna Richmond, Divergently Together, co-designer

“I will work within my capacity to try and see how easy reads and alt text can be better utilised within our team's new strategies moving forward.” - Climate Education Officer, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council

The running order for the day is in [Appendix 3](#).

[A written report](#) was commissioned from Sybil Cope, communications consultant. The report captures learning from the day and highlights the need for greater awareness of the intersectionality of Disability and

Climate Action. This is reflected in the comments from across various industries:

Professor Tomas Ward, Director, Insight SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics

“I’ve been blown away by the natural, organic way Alan James Burns and the team bring very different people together, without forcing them to ‘sing the same tune’ and help us express our research to new audiences at scale.”

Dr Junaid Akhlas, Research Ireland – Scientific Research Officer

“This is the first time I’ve engaged at this level with such a diverse group. It opened my eyes to barriers and terminology I hadn’t considered. We often design for the many, but not for all.”



Siobhán Keogh, Climate Resilience Researcher, Climate NI

“Making the world more accessible for people with diverse needs makes it better for everyone. We need less performative solemnity, more creative solutions.”

Tanya Banotti, Creative Ireland

“I found the day very useful. It was an opportunity to connect with others working on climate action, to learn from what Divergently Together had themselves learnt as part of their two-year project and to come away with useful ideas to implement. There was a sense of generosity, fun and openness shown by all who attended.”

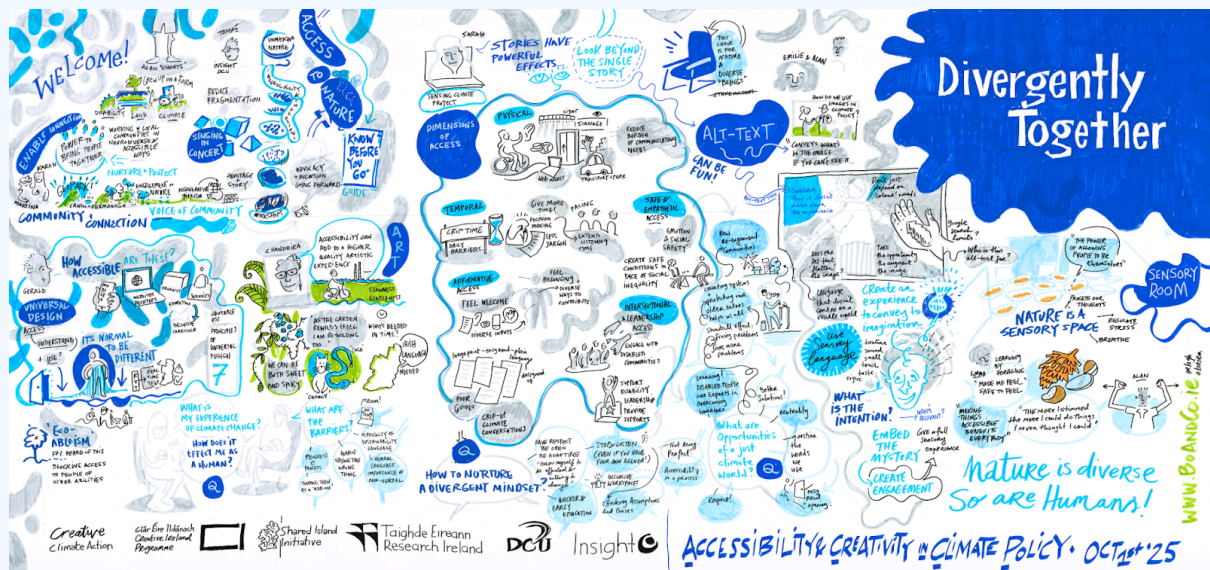
Greta Szabó, Department of the Climate, Energy and the Environment

“I hadn’t met ‘eco-ableism’ as a concept before, but now I know it needs to be part of my work. Accessibility of the Climate Action Plan is a real issue.”

Katie Harrington, Decarbonising Dublin / CODEMA

“The day has been mind-altering and humbling. We’ll definitely add a ‘Know Before You Go’ guide to our festival and budget for ISL interpreters for the future. Access should be embedded; done slowly and purposefully, not as a tick-box.”

A visual report was produced by Orlagh O'Brien:



Co-Designer Stories

The following are two interview summaries from our co-designers. After these are additional comments from each of those who took part in the project. It is worth noting that throughout collecting comments and interviews people noted that words were difficult for them and often they stopped to express that they were struggling to fully describe their experiences in words. Additionally, the way that people expressed themselves often resulted in trailing comments, or moving back and forth between topics, this reflects the non-linear nature of ND thinking. Below is a collated version of their thoughts but it should be noted that it does not fully capture the richness of their experiences.

Interview 1

Summary:

- **Safe spaces**
- **Support of the team and group**
- **Personal growth**
- **Expansive nature of project**

Lorraine's motivations for taking part were linked to the intersectionality of the project, the coming together of the topics of environment and neurodiversity. She is a climate activist and has taken part in many direct actions such as protests. Having returned from a period abroad, this project offered a paid opportunity to pursue her political and creative interests, while also meeting people from a rural cross border community, who were also neurodivergent, the project 'ticked so many boxes' for her.

What she expected to find was community and a creative outlet but the project “...was way more than I would have ever imagined it to be”. She was complimentary about the amount of input from the team and the invited facilitators: “I was also impressed that there were so many facilitators, you know? Like, so often when you go to things, you might have one, two facilitators”. She went on to describe the project as “expansive”, that it was not just related to the core group but that “it's really outreaching much more”. The prep work by the team was recognised and appreciated “I can see how much work was put in even before bringing the group together”, describing the team as having “fantastic skills” and also acknowledging the barriers the team had overcome to deliver the project “..at the end of the day, I think, the fact that a whole bunch of neurodiverse people can be organised is quite a skill. I am teasing with that, but... you know!”

The care that was put into creating spaces was something she talked about a lot in the interview and expressed gratitude for: “And to meet the needs of everybody and all of that, just all these details, here's fidget toys, here's a weighted blanket, here's constant tea and coffee... It's just, all these needs being met that, you just wouldn't get in any other kind of group.” Additionally the ability to listen was mentioned as a basic but valuable aspect of the project, “my opinion of the group, or of the project team, would be great listening ability (...) Anytime I was talking to anyone about something they really, really listened”.

It was not just about the needs being met but what resulted from this inclusivity that was important to Lorriane: “I noticed, what I've seen that would happen within the group is that, there was so much freedom and so much room, so much space allowed. So that as a group, we could find our ways...”.

This was the most significant change for her “really simply of being in the company of other neurodivergent people. You know, because, there were people who actually were in tears about how welcomed they felt in this space of the group, and that comes from a wounded place, you know? That maybe they haven't felt that safe in groups before....” She described her excitement to talk with the group as they are unpredictable and she finds this refreshing, “and they'll just show up in their, hopefully, in their unmasked way. That was just really, I just was like, these are some really, really interested people”. This feeling of a kinship with the other co-designers appears to stem from a shared sense of not fitting in, “we all have that, you know, where people don't quite get or understand us, and actually... you know this space welcomes all (...), that's really, really significant. And for me, I've started to explore more about what my dyslexia means to me...”. The space has allowed her to think more deeply about her own experiences, “it has had a really positive impact on me and it really gave me a sense of belonging, a sense of acceptance, within myself, in a group, and a sense of appreciation”.

As well as this personal growth, Lorraine referenced some professional growth and a shift in perspective as related to climate action. She described her previous involvement with direct action and how this was about “getting the attention of people”, and that this project has demonstrated a new approach which is more about reaching out to “people in professional roles”, this offered her “ways in which I may not have considered before..”. It also made her more aware of others' experiences and she has brought this into her practice as a facilitator. She described hosting a Culture Night event and bringing her learning to the space to create a more relaxed atmosphere: “I was kind of, creating more invitations. Like I witnessed from the group, for example”.

Interview 2

Summary:

- **Climate anxiety and barriers**
- **VERY excited about the natural materials for stimulating**
- **Personal growth**
- **Care and feeling safe**
- **Nature as regulation**
- **Irish language for expression**

Niamh is a youth drama facilitator and actor. She was drawn to the project as she felt “that I would get to meet some like minded people and really find out more about myself as a ND practitioner”. She spoke about a deep connection to nature and how the climate crisis was a topic that often weighed heavy in her thoughts, expressing that “there was a lot of guilt” around how she moved in the world. She hoped that this project would be a learning opportunity in relation to this topic which had been “concerning to me. I have never known how to like help or do anything really. I have always loved nature and I have always really connected to nature, and animals in particular. I was kind of hoping that it would educate me more in that realm.”

Niamh had experienced barriers in relation to climate action, expressing difficulties in finding out information about what was happening and what she could do about it, “if I was going to say investigate anything to do with the environment it was not accessible to me because I did not understand what the hell was going on”. She also encountered barriers in the built environment describing how many buildings feel unrelaxing for her due to a lack of nature indoors, “I just feel a lot calmer when I see a plant, and now, through the program, I know that, because my

brain is like, there's green, there's something living in here! That means it's safe."

This feeling of safety is an interesting one, because if we don't feel relaxed or safe in a space it is hard to engage well within that environment. She described setting up spaces for better interactions as "something very, very simple. That they can implement that doesn't cost a lot of money". She also noted that although the outdoors is her happy place, that this is not the same for everyone, "you have some neurodivergent people who just will not want to go outside, like, that is not their safe environment" and she explained how bringing nature to them in a controlled way can have beneficial effects. She was particularly interested, or in her own words "really got hyper-fixated on", the stim toys using natural materials, going as far to say it "blew my fricking mind and how has noone thought of this before!". She described how she will be using some of these techniques in a school in Cavan for people with profound needs, creating sensory stories with them.

As referenced above she found that project was somewhat of a journey of self-discovery, describing it as "a very... personal journey for me". She had gone into the project expecting community, which was there, but hadn't expected it to be so personally affecting. This was to do with timing in her own life around diagnosis, "...like near the very end, maybe just after the mid-point I got my ADHD diagnosis. So yeah that was a bit of a journey for me as well, it was so useful for me to have this group, like I think if I didn't have that then it would have been a very different experience because (...) I am figuring out how this works"

On a practical level Niamh commended the work of the team and felt supported through the logistics of the project, "I would say there was a

person centred approach. So the likes of even invoices that was, to have Laura and Ailbhe (...) I wouldn't have been able to do that without someone to help me". She also describes a tailored approach to learning in the project and that "each individual's personal learning and the way they learned and what each of their journey was, like mine, was very different to somebody else's".

An interesting topic raised by Niamh, when asked if there was anything else she wanted to share, was her connection to the Irish language which came up through this project. Despite a dislike of written Irish she described how speaking Irish opened up something for her, a type of freedom of expression that she does not feel with English words: "When I'm speaking in Irish, I'm able to just (...) I'm still investigating this as a neurodivergent person. It sits more comfy in the body in terms of, it's very emotional, it's very indirect. Hiberno phrases, they come from Irish phrases, and they're really indirect. Nothing means what it's meant. to mean, which... it's kind of brilliant. Whereas in English, I'm always trying to find the right word. And I got really panicky."

In Their Words

Further thoughts and comments from the Co-Designers

"Thank you so much for holding this space for us over the past few months. The sessions have been so valuable for me, both personally and in terms of my art practice. Working on Conversations with Lichen through this project really opened a pathway in my practice, thinking of lichen as Symbiokin has given me a strong conceptual and poetic ground to work from. It allowed me to weave together ecology, neurodivergence, and art in a way that feels true to my experience as a neurodivergent person. Just as important has been the connection with other neurodivergent people. Being in a space where attention,

perception, and difference were not only understood but valued was incredibly nourishing. The exchanges in person and on our Friday calls will stay with me, and they've deepened my sense of how vital it is to keep building these kinds of communities. I'm carrying forward both the lichen project itself and the sense of solidarity and shared creativity I felt in this group. Thank you again for making that possible."



"The biggest advice I'm going to take from the day is to be more plant and be careful with how quickly I use up my spoons. This has really helped me already. It's an easier way to remember to pay more attention to what my body needs, to listen to my body and mind. I've spent my life constantly being judged and criticised and not treated very well by people around me along with my relatives. To protect my mental health I cut myself off from people kept my distance. I didn't have to do that on this project. I could be me and feel accepted. To join this project has given me hope for my future. I have felt at peace

surrounded by like minded people who love and enjoy nature and are also passionate in looking after our environment.

I love the *Know Before I Go* books. It's something that I always wanted before I go anywhere, especially the photos. These are really helpful."

"I feel like it was a real safe space for developing as a person and stuff like that (...) Cavan Burren Park felt like our spot".

"That made me want to see that type of space for neurodiverse people, all over the country. And just to see, you know, because it just felt like we got kind of lucky, you know? Like, oh, hey, we found this lucky thing, and we all got to do it (...) it just seems like a very good vehicle for helping like-minded people connect, in such a safe way and stuff like that. And so I was just like, oh, this is... because it's cool... it's like a cool thing to see people, like interacting with it after it's been made. But the (other) neurodiverse people that interact with it still had a really different experience than we had. I wish it was a thing that more people had access to."

"The highlight for me was the sharing circle in the afternoon, because I'm always about cutting to the heart of things and even just to be able to express emotions in a group of people, outside, is such an important, amazing thing. And it speaks volumes for how important the project is."

"And it's just like, if we could just allow people the space to just get whatever it is they want out of themselves to be expressed. It just allows for so much more creativity. And I'm happy that people like Eoin and Melissa who were brought in as experts, in a way are part of the group and contributed and it means a lot to them too. Anyone involved in the project receives."

“I loved it. I'm going through burnout at the moment. Nothing to do with the project, own stuff. I haven't had a chance to digest it all properly. I loved the project and the work. Because of the burnout, it was really nice to be told to stop, take a break, and come back. Like Ailbhe saying 'okay, just go take a break now and come back'.

“Maria and Howard 'we can sing everything' 'there's lichen everywhere' you can't unsee it”.

“I'm still processing, the main thing was it was such a beautiful event, like, the way it actually came together in the end, you know, and it was a shame that there weren't more people there to see it with the huge amount of work. My two friends who came were enthralled by the whole thing. And how great that you can replicate it again in so many places. It really worked. As well, just my general feeling was that it felt like a very, very safe space for everybody that was there.”



Project Artists' Stories

AlanJames Burns



The idea for the project emerged from my own personal experience of growing up neurodivergent with hidden disabilities, special interests and hyper focuses . I am from a rural environment, a farm. In that environment I wanted to give back to the land rather than continuously extract or take from it. This created a special interest for me in addressing the issue of the climate crisis.

There is a lack of knowledge about disability and climate change. Many people are unaware of how climate change disproportionately affects disabled people. And yet, disabled people hold essential wisdom that our society desperately needs at this time of climate emergency. This includes resilience, adaptability, resourcefulness, specialised knowledge, community care, non-linear thinking, the ability to navigate barriers and obstacles, and the ability to challenge established ways of thinking. We are at a critical point in which we can build more universally-accessible environments for everyone.

Meeting the co-designers and sharing this journey with them has been an enriching experience. Literally being divergent together was such a pleasure, to unmask and create together in environments we shaped for ourselves and our needs. A particularly powerful bit of feedback was one of the co-designers saying "I'd never been in a space like this before." It has been really rewarding to witness the growth in self-awareness, self-advocacy for inclusive spaces and see a real confidence in people's own abilities and strengths grow.

Creating the Sensory Burrow was a pivotal moment for me. Replacing plastic stim tools with pine cones, seeds and other natural materials led to the idea of creating an entire sensory space that brought the outdoors in. This is not only about the materials used but also about creating important access to nature for those who cannot get out for various reasons. We have brought the Sensory Burrow to two big conferences and this worked really well for people, inside all day in an intense learning situation the burrow was a haven for recharging and regulation. We are now looking at bringing the burrow to a care facility and working with residents and staff on how it could be integrated into their work and environment.

Bringing this work out into the world is so important for me. With the team, I have been engaging a lot with scientists and researchers, and building relationships with government bodies and environmental organisations. We have reached out to many public sector workers including the Department of Taoiseach, Climate NI, National Disability Authority and Local Climate Teams. This is an opportunity to influence policy and talk about the importance of accessible approaches in a just transition. Seeing the Geo Park implementing accessible practices into existing projects, using 'Know Before You Go' nature inclusive guides and training their ambassadors to facilitate tours for disabled communities is huge. Knowing that the project has made this really big change in how a whole organisation works is just incredible.

There is an overwhelming need for this type of project and we have been contacted by a huge amount of people interested in working with us, which is amazing! I am very excited about the future of this work.

Emma Mohan O'Grady [\(watch the video\)](#)



I have Autism and ADHD.

Although my diagnosis does not define me as a person, it is there and as a result I must navigate the world differently to neurotypical people.

One day working on this project, I was feeling overwhelmed by things I had going on in my personal life. I was distressed and it upset me that I couldn't

hide it. Alan suggested to me to take a break and go outside to wander by myself a little.

My friends and I have always joked about going outside to cope with life by ordering each other to "go touch grass". I didn't realise how true that statement was. I went outside and touched grass and flowers and I learned how to feel my feelings and that it was safe to do so. I just started touching things. I began to interact with the greenery around me, I made a daisy chain. I played with leaves and stimmed by doing repetitive movements with everything around me. My body instinctively knew what to do. No restrain needed, no mask worn.

I allowed myself to be myself, emotions and all. To exist without expectation and fear of being judged and perceived by people around me. I could be my authentic autistic self in nature. When I was younger, I used to love being outside in wooded areas and parks. It was my

preferred place to be, how could I have forgotten something that was so important to me?

Foraging not only changed my mood but my outlook. It made me feel that it was safe to feel. I have learned letting myself feel things in my body is not dangerous and not always an explosive situation like in my past lived experience. This feeling followed me into my personal life too and friends had commented on my demeanor that something about me was different. I want to help other people like me know that they can feel like this too. That they have a place to belong and be and live. That there are other ways of being.

I know where I belong now.

I still cannot believe how lucky I am to have this experience.

Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan [\(read more\)](#)



I am a late-diagnosed autistic with ADHD. I grew up disliking being in nature because of many sensory issues I have with insects, things touching bare skin, humidity fluctuation, temperature fluctuation, allergies, and also several mobility issues that prevent me from enjoying things like walks and hikes. It was really in lockdown that I found myself cycling out to Clontarf to look at the sea, and noticing and

appreciating the natural world a lot more as the urban world reduced down to a muted hush, and in turn writing about nature a lot more in my poetry.

For Divergently Together, I've been tasked with listening to, questioning and prompting participants in the project on how nature resonates with their neurodivergence, or vice versa, with a focus on language and imagery.

Historically, much of neurodivergence is discussed negatively with words like disorder, limitation, and a strong focus on productivity in school and work, and assimilation into social situations at the expense of our own well-being. For me personally, discovering phrases like sensory, pattern recognition, special interests, over/understimulation, were all things that helped me sort out the tangle of confusion that I had understood to just be simply the word 'wrong'.

In nature, there are many processes and descriptors that simply describe what something does in a neutral way. A fallow period doesn't mean 'lazy' or 'bad', is it simply a necessary part of a process to ensure balance within a cycle. In terms of our human relationship with nature, the Divergently Together team often use the word 'foraging' instead of simply 'looking for', to indicate that their process of knowledge gathering is about responsible and sustainable interactions rather than depleting a resource.

One example that stood out the most to me during one of the discussions was the example of brambles. "Known for its thorns / not valued for its fruits" is a beautiful line of a poem written by one of the participants Lorraine Montague. We can be both sweet and spiky in

equal parts, and that is no bad thing: spikes make for good protection from things that harm us.

English really doesn't suffice when discussing nature and agriculture in Ireland, as Irish has much more nuance, and holds a lot more information within about the behaviour, time-scale, locality, and patterns of particular living things. (...) 'imeall' in Irish, referring to its location at the edge of things, in the margins, a term that definitely resonates with our community.

Ailbhe O'Connor



I would identify with the trifecta of dyslexia, autism, ADHD, and I can feel that different elements of them have their different strengths and weaknesses, the like, some of them are like massive burdens and then some of them make for great creativity.

I had viewed a webinar on Alan's website with Sarah Bell and I was blown away by it. I thought the information was so clear on point, and well put together. That piece of work made the link between climate and disability so clear that it is kind of hard to backwards from that.

I am interested in all things, and find it hard to narrow it down. But for me environmental concern is at the centre of everything that I do in my life. So this project has been finding how I slot in and can bring my

interests and expertise. I am confident in one regard, that is the amount I am learning! Because we work in a team it is not just my own learning any more, there is information being brought from multiple areas of expertise.

“As a neurodivergent artist, I see first-hand the power of thinking differently. It’s through imagination, creativity and coming together as a community that we can shape a more inclusive and sustainable future”

AlanJames Burns, Lead Artist

I think part of the definition of being an artist is being interested in many areas, so part of our role in society is to be connector points or nexus where we bring together different, different people, different interests, different partnerships, different groups.

I have a lot more than I have ever been able to give until I was brought into a project where my neurodivergence was put centre stage, like how can we help you. I've grown more professionally in the past nine months than I have done in the nine years previously. I think my employability has benefited and out of that is access to resources, so that is your whole life really!

I am so proud of what I have achieved.

Project Impact

How Divergently Together led to real change

Sensory Burrow



The development of the sensory burrow is an output with lasting impacts. In creating the burrow we reimagined and redesigned a traditional sensory space. Normally in these spaces there is a large amount of plastic and artificial materials. We looked at what these items are used for and replaced them with objects gathered from nature. We are continuing to work with our project partners and discovering new partners, with plans for a tour in the future. So far, over 12 organisations have reached out with interest in using the learning from the Sensory Burrow in their

projects. We are also planning to bring the Sensory Burrow into care facilities, creating access to nature for those who, for many reasons, have limited access.

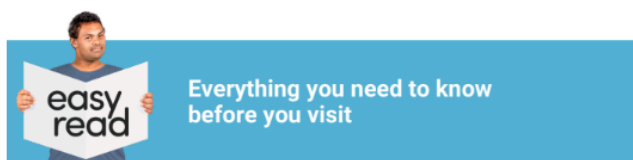




Know Before You Go's for accessing nature

During the project we saw the importance of nature for regulation. With this in mind we have begun, and will continue to, include access to nature as part of our Know Before You Go Documents. The Geo Park created a “Know Before You Go” guide which gives clear sensory and access information, as well as suggesting quiet opportunities in nature. The Geo Park team now looks at climate and disability together, not only through a scientific lens but through human experience. This shift in mindset and behaviour change is hugely important in leaving behind a legacy of the project which will affect their work into the future. Leading by example through this process we are advocating for the inclusion of access to nature as a key element of Know Before You Go documents.

Know Before You Go Cavan Burren Park



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1

Calf House Dolmen Trail



This is the most accessible trail.
It is 1.3 kilometres long or 0.8
miles. It is a 25 metre climb.



The route starts in the car park
and takes around 35 minutes to
complete.



You will see Tullygobbin Wedge
Tomb, Tullygobbin viewpoint,
Lost Valley viewpoint, Calf-
House Dolmen tomb and Karst
Limestone.

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ND co-designers

- Through expert talks and workshops the co-designers **expanded their knowledge** of climate action, biodiversity and biophilia, all with a ND lens.
- Each of the co-designers created a personal artwork exploring the connection between neurodiversity and nature, developing their **creative practice** through the group experiences.
- At the start of the project a menti metre shows that most participants felt they did not have the tools to effect change. After the project the **confidence** of the co-designers was much greater, shown by the interview and comments in this report..
- The co-designers have individual art practices across dance, theatre, visual art and music. All have expressed the desire to bring the learnings from this project into their own work in the **future**.
- Many spoke about feeling like they could **be themselves** and start to understand themselves better because of the time and space the project provided.



Project Artists

- Project artists listed both **personal and creative development** as benefiting from the project. Gaining new skills and insights for professional practice, alongside a **freedom** to explore their own experiences of ND.
- Through **collaborative experiences** the artists contextualised their own experience within a ND group. They also engaged with experts in foraging, biodiversity and climate. Increasing their understanding of the intersection of climate and disability.
- There was a real feeling of being part of something special. This has **created a community** of peers which continue to support each other after the project ends.

Local Climate Teams and Policy Workers

- Local Climate Teams are often small and overstretched. The project provided **research and information** on the intersections of climate and disability that was a knowledge gap in these teams.
- Once this intersection was clear the question of **how to address** it was able to be discussed.
- **Language** was highlighted as a key barrier; the project provided key takeaways for the local climate teams.
- The policy workers who had contact with the project have a **greater awareness** of accessible communication methods.
- Before the project the Climate teams from **North and South** of the border had not met. Additionally in Cavan the **arts and climate** team had not been in the same room before a meeting with the Divergent Together team.
- Policy change is slow but we can see **attitudinal changes** on the ground, and **greater awareness** at a Departmental level. This is an indicator that the project could lead to an *increase in accessibility* within climate policy in the **long term**.

Project Team

- The project provided a **paid** working opportunity.
- They gained **experience** of working on a project of scale.
- Research and experiences across the project built their **literacy** in relation to climate action and disability.
- Through the project the team could explore their own working styles and gained confidence in **advocating for access** accommodations.
- **Expanded their network** into interdisciplinary areas such as policy, biodiversity, museology, and science.
- Many team members are self employed workers with other creative projects where they are implementing access across their own **external projects**.
- The DCU Insight team expressed are adding **stim boxes to Insight meeting rooms** alongside the information about accessible communication.

Geopark business network

- Staff gained the **knowledge and confidence** to ask questions about access needs and to adapt sites and programmes.
- They are **meeting neurodivergent needs** more intentionally across visitor information, guided experiences and site design.
- Local **networks** help carry this work forward. Such as:
 - Regenerative Tourism Business Network (32 members): businesses



that restore places, create jobs and protect skills, such as thatching.

- Geopark Ambassadors (30): local storytellers and guides who share heritage and model inclusive practice.
- Their Geopark status helps spread these lessons **across more than 200 Global Geoparks**.

Why it matters

- The project moved from education and advocacy to real change: clearer information, calmer options, better questions, better design.
- Creating welcoming spaces for neurodivergent people means they can have increased participation in conversations that really matter.
- Inclusive design for neurodivergent people can improve the experience for a wider audience.
- Networks create a ripple effect, from one project to community practice, policy and international sharing.
- All of this helps shape a more inclusive future.

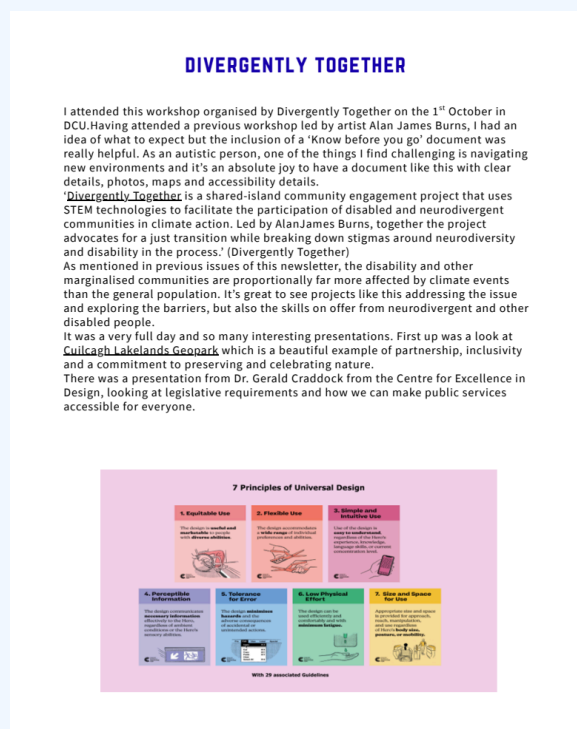


Sharing the Learning

Throughout the project we have jumped at the opportunity to spread the word about what we are doing with Divergently Together. This has been through presenting at conferences, bringing the Sensory Burrow to big events like the Creative Ireland Shared Island conference and the Codema Decarbonising Summit. As well as, engaging on social media, writing articles and even a book Chapter pending publication (Lived Experiences of Neurodivergence and Climate Change edited by Dr Rhonda J. Moore). We have done interviews for other studies and talked widely with our peers about the importance of thinking inclusively about art, disability and climate action (project dissemination list is in Appendix 4). We have estimated that we have **reached 2,742 people** in this way since beginning the project.



Left: Ailbhe O'Connor presenting at ^TEND, Art & Care, Manorhamilton. AlanJames Burns joins remotely on the big screen.



Right: Screen shot from the Dublin City Council Climate Team Newsletter of a review written by Cliona Kelliher.

Our Learnings

Working with a ND team

There were a lot of learning opportunities through this project and many were acted on and implemented. These are some of the key learnings we experienced:

- Need for an Access Rider for the whole team, created and given to project partners and venues. This has been created in our [‘Working as a Neurdiverse Team’](#) document.
- Need for a longer onboarding period with institutions to understand the systems one-to-one, not just reading through large instruction documents.
- Flexibility of the project was both beneficial and stressful for the team. Understanding what is stable and what can change, helps set a foundation for the team.

Working on Shared Island Projects

Throughout the project we had the understanding that we were ‘the same but different’. The shared lived experiences, love of nature and creativity that was brought from across the island was commendable. But there were some initial learnings that could be kept in mind for future projects.

- Cross-border engagement needs to accommodate both Irish and British sign languages.
- Creative Ireland is better known in the Republic of Ireland and as such, our outreach seemed to reach more people in this region. More time in advance of the first call out with Northern Ireland partners could help with this balance.
- Payment of co-designers, expert speakers etc. was made more complex as they did not have Republic of Ireland tax clearance certs.

Working in Climate Action Project

Climate Action and ND is a big topic and was something we were aware wasn't being tackled in most local and national climate action plans, in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

- Working with local stakeholders across arts, climate science and local authorities worked well. It allowed for a sharing of experience and building on understanding around each other's role in Climate Action.
- Understanding the different policy contexts of each of the local authority partners was helpful in knowing where they could help us and where we could help them. Going in with an exploratory mind set was key.
- Being in nature was hugely important for the project and was mentioned by all the co-designers as helping with their regulation and stress. However, Ireland is a tricky place to be outdoors sometimes and especially with increased extreme weather events. Contingency planning across a number of scenarios is critical.

Project Timeframe

- Throughout the project as we presented the work to the world, we received increasing invitations to collaborate, emails looking for advice and questions around best practice. The response has shown a need for projects like this one in Ireland. Although a two-year project, which is going to continue into a third year with additional funding from Research Ireland, the timeframe is quite a tight one. Building trust across partners, assessing knowledge gaps and interests, responding to these and adapting the project design, delivering the project and presenting it, all require time.

Recommendations

Throughout the project we have learned a huge amount. With that in mind we challenged ourselves to pick just **three core recommendations** from this project:

1. Include access to nature in the accessibility you provide. Create a Know Before You Go that outlines where natural sensory points can be found.
2. Touch nature, stim with nature. Bring natural materials into sensory rooms, quiet spaces, breakout areas, to provide both increased accessibility to nature, provide regulation and to reduce reliance on materials such as plastics.
3. The main recommendation is to not let this project have an end but rather, be a contribution to the beginning of a shift in practice, in mindset and in policy, one that leads to a more just future for all of us, human and more than human.

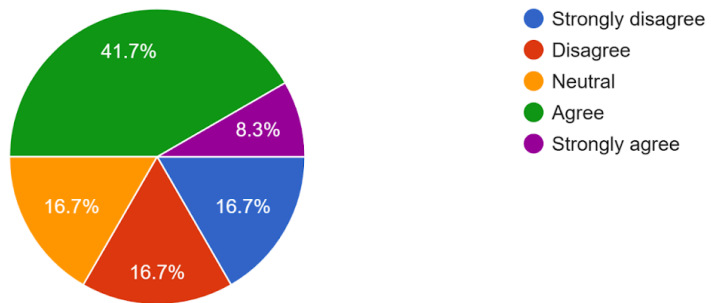


Appendices

Appendix 1.

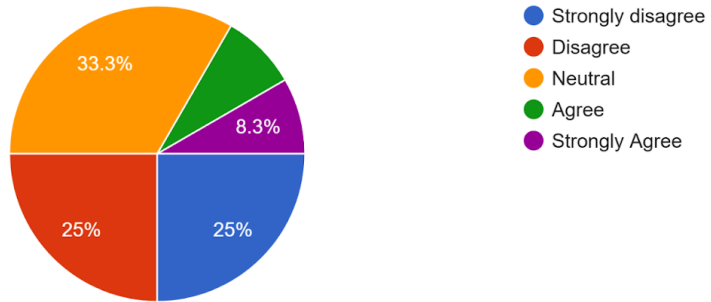
Survey Results from anonymous surveys sent to Local Climate Action teams across the Island of Ireland.
Responses 12, Sent to 40 = 30% response rate.

I feel well informed about neurodivergence and disability
12 responses



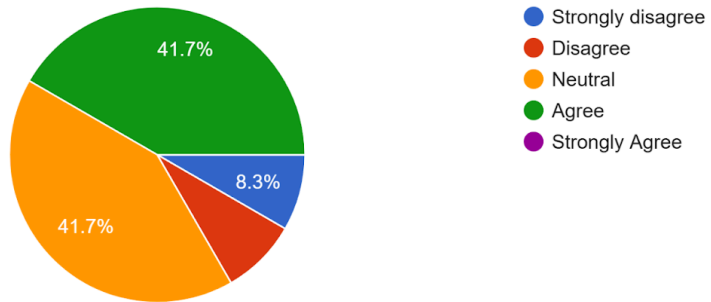
I have excellent knowledge of how neurodivergence and disability relates to climate change

12 responses



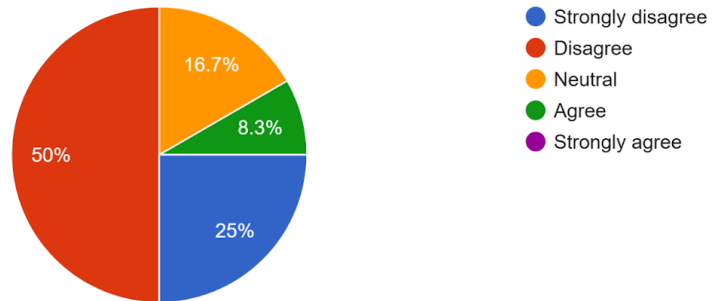
I am supported in my workplace to understand barriers faced by the disability community

12 responses



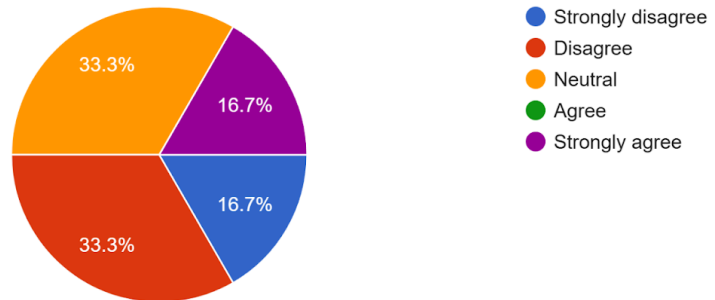
I have received training about how climate change and disability relate to each other

12 responses



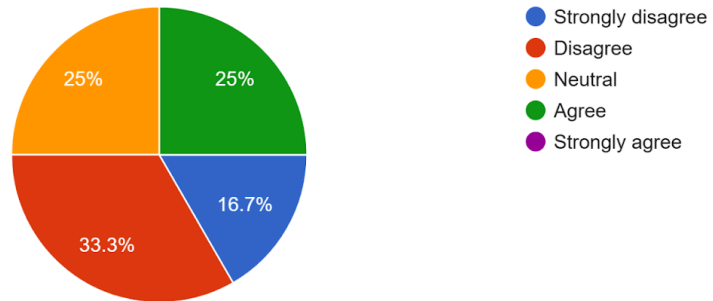
I understand the meaning of eco-ablism

12 responses



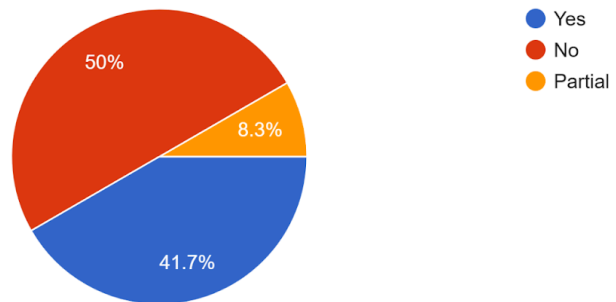
I have had opportunities to work with disability communities in creating climate policies and actions

12 responses



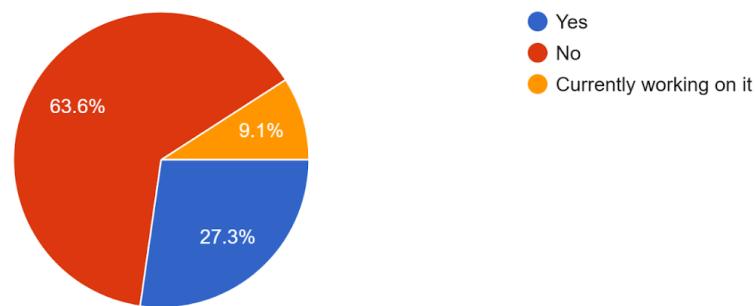
I understand how I can communicate climate action in policies through accessible language.

12 responses



We have an Easy Read version of our Climate Action Plan published.

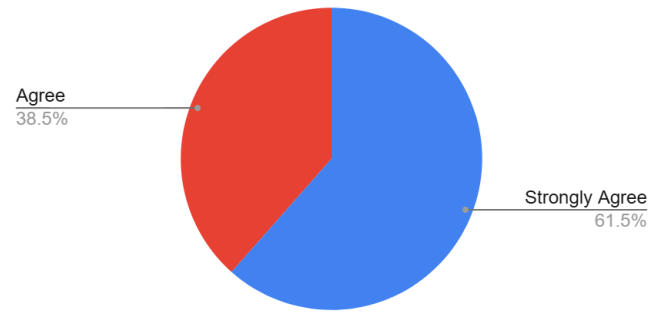
11 responses



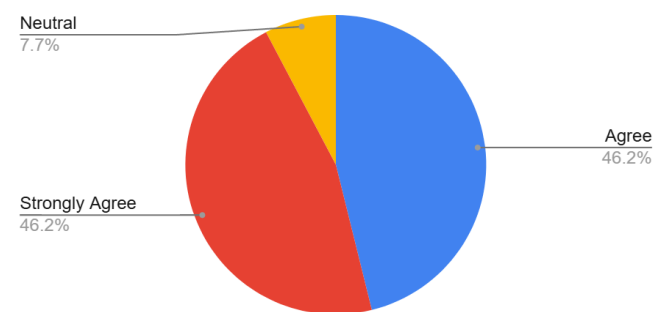
Appendix 2.

Survey Results from Neurodiversity Training at DCU

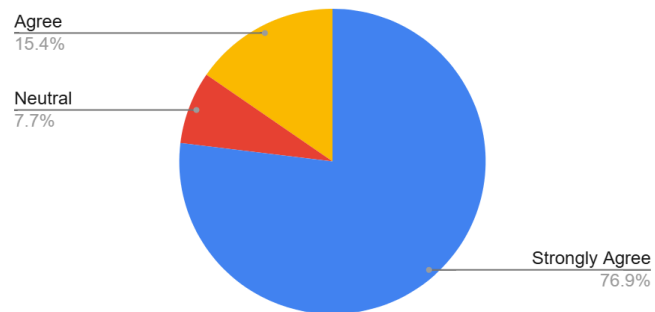
Count of I will use the information from the workshop in my role and future projects



Count of I will share my learnings from today with others



Count of I feel more informed about neurodiversity after todays workshop



Appendix 3.

Running Order for Accessibility and Creativity in Climate Policy - Oct 1st 2025

9:30 - 10:00 - Tea & Coffee in H306
10:00-10:45 - Welcome & Introductions
10:45 -11:00 - Talk: Accessibility as a Right: Legal contexts from National Disability Authority
11:00 - 11:15 - Talk: Neurodiversity, Climate Change and Language Writer, performer and cultural consultant Chandrika Narayanan Mohan will discuss the expansive language of neurodiversity and its relationship to the more-than-human.
11.15 - 11:30 Activity 1 - Active listening exercise in pairs, receptive skills
11:30 - 11.45 Break
11:45 - 12:15 - Talk: Sensing Climate Dr. Sarah Bell (University of Exeter) will introduce Sensing Climate, a five-year research project placing disabled people at the forefront of the climate crisis, and discuss how to create inclusive and accessible opportunities for disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent people to shape climate resilient futures.
12:15 -13:15: Activity 2 - Pooling our experience, communicating group ideas

13:15 - 14:15: Lunch (H206)

14:15 - 15:15: Alt Text & Sensory Language

In this exercise, led by singer, composer and lyricist Emilie Conway, we will explore theories of sensory language, cognitive bias, and their application in the creation of alt text.

15:15 - Break. Tea & Coffee

15:35 - 16:00: Creative Reflections

Appendix. 4

Dissemination of project: List of engagements

Role in event	Event name and location	Date	Pax.
Invited Speaker	Weel Festival of Arts & Wellbeing, Waterford	Feb 2024	20
Invited Speaker	Creative Brain Week	March 2024	90
Workshop	Kilkenny Arts Office	April 2024	10
Panel Discussion	Neurodiversity in the Arts, Cavan Arts	May 2024	40
Invited Speaker	Arts & Disability Connect Scheme, Project Arts Centre	June 2024	80
Invited Speaker	BASIC TALKS, Hugh Lane Gallery	Oct 2024	35
Invited Speaker	Safe to Create, Amplify: A Call for Transformative Action, Launch	July 2024	100
Invited Speaker	Business to Arts Awards, Accenture Pre-Reception Presentation, Dublin	Sept 2024	80
Online Interview	Business to Arts Awards, Accenture Digital Innovation in Art, Dublin	Sept 2024	800

Presentation and talk	Foram Science Week	Nov 2024	40
Invited Speaker	Basic Space, Artist Talk at Hugh Lane Gallery	Oct 2024	40
Symposium	^TEND, Art & Care, Manorhamilton	Jan 2025	50
Public Event	Nature Makes Sense, Grange Park, Omagh	March 2025	50
Presentation at GeoPark	Enniskillen, Fermanagh	March 2025	20
Invited Speaker	IMMA Webinar with Neurodivergent Artists	March 2025	80
Participant	DDFI40: How F**ked Are We? Climate Crisis Long Table	15th March 2025	30
Invited Speaker	Institute for Climate and Society Annual Conference	April 2025	120
Participant	The Green Just Transition with SCiO, Dublin	8th of May 2025	25

Invited speaker	Cairde Sligo Arts Festival - Community Resilience in a Changing Climate	9th July 2025	70
Invited speaker	DCU Summer Autism School, Dublin	July 2025	30
Invited Speaker	Not Just BS Panel, Bounce Festival, Derry	45931	40
Invited Participant	Arts & Accessibility, Dublin City Council Arts Office, Zoom	16th Oct, 2025	10
Touring 'Unmasking Nature' Sensory Space	Codema Decarbonising Summit, Avia Stadium	21st Oct, 2025	280
Invited Speaker	Codema Decarbonising Summit	21st Oct 2025	280
Invited Speaker	Evolving Access, Westport Town Hall Theatre	29th Oct 2025	40
Speaker and sharing info	LSAD	Oct 2025	70
Invited Speaker	Insight Centre EDI Seminar, DCU	11th Nov 2025	12
Touring 'Unmasking Nature' Sensory	Creative Ireland Shared Island Conference	13th Nov 2025	200

Space			
TOTAL			2742

Appendix 5.

Methods and Approach to Evaluation

Aims

To evaluate the Divergently Together Creative Ireland project and assess the impact of the project.

At the outset the project set out a number of potential desired outcomes which included:

- Improved awareness of climate and disability.
- Development of creative expression and literacy.
- Opportunity for participants to begin stepping into leadership and advocacy roles.
- Participants feel confident they can make change in their community.
- Recognition of participants' efforts and validation of the role they have to play in Climate Action.
- Influence policy in the regions engaged.
- Develop Easy Read Climate Action Policy examples.

- Create linkages across regions and across arts and climate departments.
- Influence policy in the regions engaged.
- Give voice to underheard groups in Climate Action in Ireland.
- Greater public awareness of the intersection of disability and climate.

This was not a prescriptive list and there was room for unintended outcomes for the project, as well as change in response to stakeholder inputs.

Approach

- The Divergently Together Phase 2 research focuses on the experiences of the people involved. It values what they have lived through and how they see the world.
- The goal of our processes and evaluations is not to find answers that apply to everyone. Rather, we look closely at situations to help us understand them better. This method helps us to see patterns in particular experiences, rather than creating rules.
- We will gather most of our research by having conversations and making observations. This helps us understand complicated ideas that numbers alone cannot communicate. However, for age, gender and location, we will gather quantitative data (numbers).
- Interviews with participants will be designed as open conversations, where participants can share their thoughts freely. Their experiences are the focus and they will be seen as "co-researchers".

- The researcher will also think about how they could be biased.
- Evaluation is a big part of the project. It will help both the participants and the project team learn and grow. It will be used to reflect on what is working well and areas to improve.
- Evaluation will happen not just at the end of the process, but during the project. This involves reflecting on what we do, how we do it and what we learned.
- The evaluation working document was open to the whole team and sections were designed to be updated and interacted with on an ongoing basis.

How we gathered information

The research design was flexible, so that we were open to learning new ways to do things. This meant listening to the project team and the people who took part.

The plan we made for evaluation included the following methods:

- Reading what other people have done to understand the world around the project. We looked at other Creative Ireland projects, climate policies, disability arts projects, and more.

- As the project developed we decided that observation and note taking were the best methods for evaluating our work with the co-designers. Reflective time was built into the delivery of workshops.
- Surveys were used but we tried not to use them too much as people don't like them and often don't fill them in.
- We selected a number of co-designers to do 'in-depth interviews'. This meant people describing what the project meant to them, in their own words.
- We took images and videos of what we did to show people's reactions.
- We tracked engagement online, such as views, likes, comments and shares.
- We created an 'Interaction Tracker' document. This shows who we talked to about the project, people who helped us and people we helped.
- We created a 'Key Learnings' document. This recorded things we have learned, e.g. things that worked well or things that did not work well.
- We also had a final chat as a project team. We looked back on the project and asked questions about the things we did.
- We know that not everyone can take part in the same ways. We were open to all feedback in any form from people who engaged with the project.

Logic Model

Input - across all outputs are Creative Ireland funding and human resources.	Output	Outcome	Indirect or long term impacts	How we will evidence this
Participant time Research on disability inclusion Research on current Climate Policies in regional areas Access requirements assessed and provided for	5 guided conversations with key communities covering a breadth of perspectives from regional to demographic. Workshop focused on literacy building (climate focused), upskilling, knowledge sharing, creative making.	Improved awareness of climate and disability. Development of creative expression and literacy in participants.	Contribute to a fair and just transition by empowering 5 disability communities across the breadth of Ireland.	Note taker in space for launch to gauge public response to ABAM Delivery of 5 engagements Images documenting engagement

Relationship building Time from persons working in the County Councils Buy in at managerial level	Work with climate action departments across 5 county councils	Develop Easy Read Climate Action Policy examples. Influence policy in the 5 regions engaged. Create linkages across regions and across arts and climate departments.	Greater awareness of how to include the disability community in an authentic way in local policy. Greater cross departmental and cross regional cooperation.	Easy Read examples produced and shared with County Council partners Survey (feedback) - Coco workers on how this activity has influenced their thinking on climate policy and disability. Two interviews with Coco workers who also took part in workshops.
Data gathered from across projects Evaluator time	Produce a detailed evaluation report	Influence policy in the 5 regions engaged.		Evaluation report delivered to Creative Ireland.

Time from those whom exit interviews are requested		Give voice to underheard groups in Climate Action in Ireland.		Easy Read version of report completed.
Artists creations Venue/s Materials Time Access requirements assessed and provided for	Public walk to share the experience of the project and project outputs	Greater public awareness of intersection of disability and climate Building confidence of participants Recognition of participants efforts and validation of the role they have to play in Climate Action Opportunity for		Walk delivered. Attendance figures. Engagement report documenting social media, press and other comms Images from event showing audience engagement Audience survey Note taker at event.

		participants to begin stepping into leadership and advocacy roles Participants feel confident they can make change in their community.		In-dept interview with 2 co-designers
Time Development of resources Research and consultation to contextualise research	Attend relevant national conferences	Influence policy in the 5 regions engaged. Creation of examples of practice for demonstrating the benefits of greater inclusion in Climate Action.	Influence local and national policy.	Evidence of delivery at conferences: dates, times, attendance figures