# Evaluation Report

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## 1. Executive Summary

*The Air We Share* was a collaborative climate action initiative that combined citizen science, art, and community engagement to address air quality issues in Westside, Galway. Guided by the theme "Making the Invisible Visible", the project highlighted the impact of air pollution and sought to explore the causes, impacts, and potential solutions through a creative, community-centered approach.

*The Air We Share* brought together a consortium of local partners, led by Galway City Council and included Galway Arts Centre, the University of Galway's Centre for Creative Technologies, SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics, and Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies, Westside Resource Centre, and Galway Culture Company.

An integral part of the project was the Artist-in-Residence Program, which fostered artistic interventions that engaged the community in exploring the connections between air quality, climate, and health. The three commissioned artworks were:

- *Phosphene* – **Leon Butler**: A digital light sculpture transforming live PM2.5 air-quality data into evolving patterns of colour, light, and form.
- *Where Does the Body End* – **Christopher Steenson**: A sound installation and series of public soundwalks exploring the atmosphere as part of the human body.
- *The Nine Freedoms for the Air* – ***a place of their own*** **collective**: A large-scale co-created textile produced through long-term collaboration with Westside participants, imagining future "rights of the air."

Alongside the commissioned artworks, *The Air We Share* delivered a rich programme of workshops, festivals, school activities, talks, screenings, and an exhibition at Galway Arts Centre. The project intertwined art, science, folklore, environmental data, and community knowledge to deepen public understanding of what air is, what shapes it, and how it affects everyday life. By inviting people to hear, touch, stitch, and visualise air, the project made an invisible environmental issue personally meaningful, culturally resonant, and socially actionable.

## 1.1. Key Events and Activities

Across 2023–2025, more than 30 public-facing engagements took place, ranging from intimate workshops to high-attendance festivals and a major city-centre exhibition. The focus was on creative, sensory, and participatory learning. Summary of events shown in the table below.

### 1.1.1. Table of Community Engagement Overview (2023–2025)

| **Category** | **Total Events** | **Attendance** |
|---|---|---|
| Public Community Events | 10 | ~275 |
| Artist-Led Workshops (WRC) | 20+ | ~200 |
| Westside Arts Festival | — | 120 |
| Galway Arts Centre Exhibition Events | 7 | ~310 |
| Science & Education Events | 10 | ~206 |
| **Total A*ctive* Participants** | **~47 events** | **~1,250+ people** |

**Note: This number reflects *active* participants. The estimated *exhibition footfall* during August–September was 2050 visitors whilst people engaged through digital and media channels is estimated at 200,000+**

## 1.2. Key Findings and Insights

Drawing on interviews, workshops, soundwalks, postcards, and partner reflections, six main themes describe how communities engaged with the work and what changed as a result:

1. **Sensory and Embodied Engagement:** People repeatedly described how the artworks made air *felt* rather than simply understood. The soundwalks slowed people down, enabling them to tune into their surroundings. The interactive lighting in *Phosphene* and the tactile stitching of the textile made an abstract concept tangible.

2. **Air as Commons / Shared Resource:** Participants strongly connected with the idea of air as a shared, collective space. This theme proved powerful across ages, from children drawing pictures of "what's in the air?" to adults debating rights-based frameworks.
3. **Emotional Response and Reflection:** Audience postcards revealed emotional complexity: awe, calm, anxiety, curiosity, and hope. This emotional literacy is itself a form of environmental capability, helping people process the climate crisis in human terms.
4. **Collaboration and Co-Creation:** The textile process illustrated the power and difficulty of genuine collaboration. The process created a social space where artistic standards, personal meanings, rights of the air, and community stories were negotiated over time.
5. **Tensions Between Art, Policy, and Measurement:** Artists reflected openly on the pressures of funded climate-related work. These tensions reveal the need for evaluation frameworks that value experimentation, process, and creative autonomy.
6. **Awareness, Action & Legacy:** Small behaviours began to shift, described by participants as *"seeds planted"*, noting that deeper change may emerge over time. This aligns with research showing that creative projects often cultivate slow, relational, cumulative change, not instant transformation.

## 1.3. What Kind of Change Did the Project Inspire?

In evaluating the project, we looked for patterns in what participants, artists, partners, and audiences said across interviews, workshops, soundwalks, and postcards. The analysis combined

what participants actually said and experienced, the aims of the project and established research on environmental engagement; emotions are strong drivers of climate action and the best outcome for change when communication covers facts and emotional engagement (Van der Linden et al, 2015); facts can change understanding but rarely lead to changes in behaviour (Kahan, 2015). The central research question devised from this asked:

***"How can creative practice engage communities in ways that make environmental issues personally meaningful, culturally resonant, and socially actionable?"***

Across all data sources, three clear forms of change emerged:

1. **Personal Meaning Through Sensory Experience:** People learned through their bodies: listening, touching, noticing. Air became something intimate, not abstract.
2. **Cultural Resonance  Through Shared Stories and Making:** Community knowledge, folklore, collective stitching, and public dialogue embedded air quality inside cultural and social relationships.
3. **Social Action Through Attention and Small Shifts:** The project sparked:
    - conversations at home,
    - changes in language ("air dwellers," "commons"),
    - micro-behaviours (checking air-quality apps, using fewer cars),
    - and long-term community relationships.

This layered combination - attunement, understanding, and agency - is the core of the project's impact.

## 1.4. Practical Implications and Future Potential

**For Artists**

- Sensory approaches work. People connect best through feeling, not instruction.
- Creative autonomy matters, artists need space for risk and experimentation.

**For Funders**

- Value the process, not just the outputs. Actual behaviour change is near impossible to measure.
- Creative climate work needs time and space for trust to grow and things to happen
- The multimodal delivery of the project was a major strength and should be encouraged in future projects.
- Funders should engage high level decision makers at the beginning of the project, ensuring their attention and co-operation, ensuring meaningful engagement from the top down, as well as the bottom up. It is unrealistic to expect grassroots level projects to drive the type of transformational shift that is required for significant decarbonisation without meaningful, committed engagement from those with power to make institutional and infrastructural change across scales. However, these projects create the space to create shared understanding, motivation and dialogue to stimulate conversations – the reach of this project shows potential for wide reach, but without commitment to change from high-level officials, policy makers, there is no clear path to action.

**For Communities**

- Long-term creative engagement leads to deeper relationships and shared understanding.

- Co-creation empowers participants and strengthens community cohesion.

**For Policymakers**

- Art can open up conversations about the environment that are difficult to achieve through communication of scientific facts alone.
- Concepts like the *Nine Freedoms for the Air* could inform future public consultations or local policy discussions.
- For projects like this, a full-time manager is needed for the duration to maintain the vision and structure of the project and ensure it obtains its goals.

**Legacy & Opportunities for Future Work**

- Longer-term follow-up to track lasting change
- School-based programmes, including microbit sensor workshops
- A project exploring how community-created "air freedoms" could inform local air-quality policy
- There is value in technical applications of things like sound in these types of projects. For example, soundwalks helped people view air pollution data differently, but they also incited them in asking specific technical and scientific questions. In this instance, the soundwalks worked as a form of science communication.

*The Air We Share* shows how creative practice can reshape environmental understanding, not through facts alone, but through *experience, relationships, and imagination*. By hearing air, stitching air, visualising air, and sensing air together, communities formed new connections with

their environment and with one another. The project's legacy lives in these shifts of perception - quiet but profound - and in the networks of people who are now more attentive to the air they share.

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway


Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme

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## 2. Introduction

*The Air We Share,* led by Galway city council, run in partnership with Galway Arts Centre, Westside Resource Centre and the University of Galway was a collaborative climate action initiative that combined citizen science, art, and community engagement to address air quality issues in Westside, Galway; a vibrant, diverse community with a strong culture of creativity and civic engagement, and one of Galway's designated decarbonization zones. Guided by the theme "*Making the Invisible Visible*", the project highlighted the impact of air pollution – a critical environmental health risk identified by the World Health Organisation and the driver of climate change. As such, air quality research and data collection conducted by University of Galway climate scientists and local citizens formed the scientific backbone of the project, educating and empowering local communities to understand and act on climate-related challenges. *The Air We Share* sought to explore the causes, impacts, and potential solutions to air pollution through a creative, community-centered approach, leveraging momentum from atmospheric research from the University of Galway and previous community engagement projects and public interest generated due to the EPA Clean Air Together campaign.

Working alongside the European Union's Net Zero Cities Pilot Cities programme, *The Air We Share* aimed to inform Galway City Council's climate policies. By fostering inclusive communication and community involvement, the project sought to inspire cultural and behavioural shifts towards climate action, grounded in values of fairness, collaboration, and positive change. To do this, the project brought together a consortium of local partners, led by Galway City Council and included Galway Arts Centre, the University of Galway's Centre for Creative Technologies, SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics, and Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies, Westside Resource Centre, and Galway Culture Company.

The core of the project was the Artist-in-Residence Programme, which drove the artistic work on the project. The programme fostered artistic interventions that engage the community in exploring the connections between air quality, climate, and health. Over a ten-month period, three artists - Leon Butler, Christopher Steenson, and the collective *a place of their own* - worked closely with community groups, scientists from the University of Galway, and staff at the Westside Resource Centre. Through workshops, residencies, and public exhibitions, they co-created artworks that translated air-quality data into sound, light, and material form. Each artist brought a distinctive sensory lens: data visualization, sound and breath, and tactile collaboration. Together, these approaches invited residents to re-imagine air as a *commons*, a shared resource carrying mutual rights and responsibilities.

*The Air We Share* recognized that whilst air pollution and climate change are global challenges, they are also deeply personal; people often connect with environmental issues most strongly through experience, what they can sense, feel, and discuss together. Air was chosen as

the project's central focus and metaphor: an invisible yet vital element that links every person, species, and ecosystem. By working with air as a shared medium, we all breathe and shape, the project aimed to make the invisible visible and to situate climate action in everyday life. The project approached art not only as a means of communication but as a way of learning through making and sensing. By exploring air through creative methods - sound, movement, texture, and light - participants were invited to reflect, experiment, and learn collectively. This approach recognized that understanding environmental issues is not purely intellectual; it also depends on emotional, sensory, and imaginative engagement. Activities across the project sought to move beyond awareness toward a sense of care, inviting people to feel, as well as think about, their connection to the air they share. Through these encounters, environmental understanding became something personal and affective, rooted in empathy, conversation, and shared responsibility.

*The Air We Share* was a recipient of the Creative Climate Action Fund, an initiative from the Creative Ireland Program that is funded by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport in collaboration with the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment. The fund supports creative, cultural and artistic projects that build awareness around climate change and empower citizens to make meaningful behavioral transformations.

## 3. Outline of team and key participants

*The Air We Share* was realized through a collaboration between artists, community organisations, scientists, and local partners. The project relied on shared learning, mutual trust,

and a commitment to creative experimentation. Each contributor played a vital role in connecting the sensory, scientific, and social dimensions of the project.

## 3.1 Galway City Council (Lead Partner)

Galway City Council is the local authority for the City of Galway, Ireland's third-largest city and a vibrant, culturally diverse urban centre of approximately 83,000 people. As lead partner for *The Air We Share*, the Council provided strategic oversight, administrative governance, and the formal project framework through which the programme was funded and delivered. Within the council, the project involved three directorates and four service areas:

- Creative Ireland and the Arts Office in the Economic Development and Culture section.
- The Environment section, which supported the installation and monitoring of the air quality sensors.
- The Climate Change section, which contributed to the larger climate goals.

This collaboration between directorates and services was ambitious and unusual in terms of local authority operations, but showed potential in terms of cross-disciplinary collaboration to implement projects to design and articulate workable, sustainable solutions for city/council jurisdictions.

## 3.2 Galway Arts Centre (Creative Production & Management)

Established in 1982, Galway Arts Centre provides year-round access to the arts in an inclusive, welcoming hub in the heart of Galway City. Programmes feature visual art exhibitions, events, films, music, literature, workshops, residencies, festivals, theatre and performance. It

works with artists to create, challenge and connect audiences to exceptional local, national and international art that inspires new ideas and ways of thinking about the world. Galway Arts Centre operates two venues: the Gallery at 47 Dominick Street and Nun's Island Theatre. For more than 40 years, Galway Arts Centre has provided a year-round gallery for the city, showcasing renowned Irish and international contemporary visual arts. It has also been the nurturing seed bed for some of Galway's leading cultural events and resources, including Cúirt International Festival of Literature, Galway Youth Theatre, Red Bird Youth Collective, TULCA Festival of Visual Art and Galway Theatre Festival. Given this, the Arts Centre provided curatorial support, public visibility, and exhibition space for *The Air We Share*. Its team worked closely with the artists to translate complex ideas into accessible displays, ensuring that the final exhibition invited broad public participation and reflection. By situating the artworks within a civic cultural space, the Arts Centre extended the project's reach and anchored it within Galway's wider arts ecology.

## 3.3 University of Galway (Scientific Lead & Evaluation)

Researchers from the University of Galway's Centre for Creative Technologies, Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies (C-CAPS) as well as the Insight SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics collaborated on data collection, air-sensor deployment, and public engagement. Their expertise provided the knowledge and local data to underpin the project's creative processes while inviting artists and participants to explore what this data "feels like" in lived experience. This partnership exemplified how science and art can work side by side, not merely

to communicate findings, but to translate them into forms that engage perception, imagination, and empathy.

### 3.3.1 Centre for Creative Technologies.

The Centre for Creative Technologies supports research and teaching activities that explore, analyse, and develop new links between creative practice and technology, including in such areas as Extended Reality, Artificial Intelligence, and Augmented Creativity. The Centre situates creative practice within an interdisciplinary approach to intersecting cultural, technological and societal questions. It seeks to build partnerships across academic institutions, industry and society to develop socially engaged research projects that explore the intersection of creativity and technology.

### 3.3.2 Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies

The Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies (C-CAPS) is a thematic research centre within the University of Galway's Ryan Institute, the University hub for inter-disciplinary research and innovation that is necessary to address the many sustainable development challenges facing society today, from both national to global scales. Research at C-CAPS investigates the effect of changing atmospheric composition on pollution from local to global scales, impacting human and planetary health. C-CAPS has a vision of developing the tools and resources to have the leading edge observational and predictive capability to understand atmospheric composition changes and aims to be the informative voice nationally on the

promotion of knowledge transfer and the underpinning of policy development and education in the areas of atmospheric, climate, and air pollution sciences.

### 3.3.3 Insight SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics

The Insight SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics played a key role in *The Air We Share* by supporting the project's citizen-science strand and helping residents understand how air-quality data is generated, interpreted, and used in decision-making. Insight is one of Europe's largest data analytics centres, with a mission to empower citizens and build smarter societies, and this ethos aligned closely with the project's goals of enabling communities to make sense of their environment through accessible tools and shared learning.

Insight researchers led a series of DIY air-sensor workshops in the Westside Resource Centre, where participants learned how sensors work, built simple monitoring devices, and discussed what air-quality numbers mean in everyday life. These workshops demystified data collection, showing residents how raw measurements become knowledge, and how community-generated data can support better decisions at local level. For many participants, this was their first experience of working directly with environmental sensors, and several noted that the hands-on approach made climate and air-quality science feel real and personally relevant.

The collaboration with Insight connected the project to broader national expertise in sensing, data engineering, and citizen science. It demonstrated how environmental data, often seen as abstract or technical, can become an accessible tool for public awareness when paired with creative practice. This integration helped participants not only understand *how* air is

measured but also imagine how communities might use similar tools to advocate for healthier, more sustainable neighbourhoods.

## 3.4 Westside Resource Centre (Community Coordination)

Westside Resource Centre CLG is a community-based organisation with charitable status. It provides offices and meeting rooms to a variety of community and voluntary organizations and agencies and supports community development work in the local area. It is centrally involved in initiatives such as Westside Arts Festival and Westside Christmas Market and Family Day. More than sixty different local and national organizations use the Centre's facilities throughout the year. Westside Resource Centre also serves as a base for local community groups, such as the Westside Patchwork & Craft Groups, the Westside Men's Club and the thriving Westside Community Organic Garden. The Centre is also involved in environmental projects, for example, the Net Zero Cities '*Warm Home Hub*', the '*Climate Connected*' project and the '*Upcycling of Bikes Scheme*' as well as artistic and creative initiatives on themes of climate action and decarbonisation.

With this capacity, Westside Resource Centre served as the primary community hub for *The Air We Share*. Its staff and volunteers acted as connectors between residents, artists, and partner organisations, ensuring that activities were accessible, inclusive, and responsive to local needs. Community members from a range of backgrounds, including schools, youth groups, the community groups mentioned above and residents' associations, contributed to workshops, discussions, and creative collaborations. This allowed participants to explore their relationship

with air and climate in new ways; through listening, making, conversation, and reflection. Their contributions demonstrated that meaningful environmental engagement begins not with instruction, but with experience, dialogue, and shared imagination.

This emphasis on participation embodied the project's ethos of care, co-creation, and local ownership. Strong emphasis was placed on inclusion, ensuring that activities were free, accessible, and welcoming across age, gender, and cultural backgrounds. Accessibility needs were considered in event design, and intergenerational participation was actively encouraged

## 3.5 Galway Culture Company (Cultural Partnership Advisory Partner)

Galway Culture Company was established to create opportunities to engage with EU and International partners and local place-based programming which honors the relationships and builds on the learnings, outcomes and legacies of Galway's many European and Global designations including Galway's designation as European Capital of Culture, UNESCO City of Film, European Green Leaf, European Region of Gastronomy. Galway Culture Company brings together key agencies and stakeholders to drive forward a collective creative vision for Galway through meaningful partnership and collaboration to better support cultural placemaking, artists, and those working in Culture and Creative Industries. It delivers all work in partnership and collaboration, and through careful facilitation of cross-sectoral and interagency approaches to work and development.

## 3.6 Artists in Residence

The Artist in Residence program was at the creative heart of *The Air We Share.* Three artists were commissioned to develop innovative and collaborative arts projects that interpreted and responded to scientific concepts and data related to the atmosphere, air quality, and climate. The projects sought to raise public awareness and understanding of the sources of air pollution and its effects on health, environment, and the climate whilst also exploring innovative and interdisciplinary ways to engage the public, ensuring that the creative outcomes were impactful, accessible, and had the potential to affect behavioral change.

- **Leon Butler** developed *Phosphene*, a digital installation that transformed live air-quality data into sculptural and digital forms. His practice emphasized visual translation, turning numerical readings into movement, light, and shape to help audiences "see the invisible."
- **Christopher Steenson** created *Where Does the Body End,* a sound installation that explored breath, atmosphere, and presence. By using ambient tones and responsive sound, Steenson invited participants to listen to the air as both environment and body, a continual act of exchange between self and world.
- ***a place of their own*** **collective (Paula McCloskey and Sam Vardy)** produced *The 9 Freedoms for the Air* a collective textile artwork co-created with Westside residents. Their participatory approach focused on dialogue, touch, and time, transforming shared making into a practice of care and imagining future "air rights."

Together, the artists' diverse approaches formed a sensory ecology of engagement - visual, sonic, and tactile - that reflected the project's ambition to explore air as both material and metaphor.

## 3.7 Project Timeline

| Date | Milestone | Notes / Impact |
|---|---|---|
| March 2023 | Proposal Developed | The proposal established the project's central aim: using creative practice to help Galway residents engage with local air quality in meaningful, accessible ways. This early stage positioned Westside as the core community site and established a vision for integrating art, science, and public participation. |
| Sept 2023 | Funding Awarded | Creative Ireland funding secured, enabling recruitment of artists, researchers, and coordinators. Funding also formalised the project's interdisciplinary structure and set expectations for public engagement, outputs, and evaluation. |
| Oct-Nov 2023 | Low-cost air monitoring units installed across | Seven low-cost air monitoring units were installed across Westside and Shantalla producing live air quality data accessible online via the Purple Air website. |

| Date | Milestone | Notes / Impact |
|---|---|---|
| | Westside and Shantalla | |
| Nov 2023 | Early Community Event (Energy Awareness Stall) | First informal presence in Westside. Though the project had not yet begun fully, this event seeded visibility, introduced themes of air and sustainability, and began building recognition within the community. |
| Dec 2023 – May 2024 | **Staffing Disruptions** | The project lead transferred roles within the Council shortly after funding was confirmed. the initial creative producer also departed. These departures significantly stalled momentum, delayed planning, and created uncertainty around governance. Much of the intended early development could not occur, resulting in a compressed delivery timeline later in the project. |
| **April – Sept 2024** | **Delayed Project Formation** | Recruitment gaps and loss of initial leadership slowed progress. Key structures—artist selection, residency planning, community relationships, scheduling—were formed several months later than expected. This delay shifted the bulk of creative and community activity into a shorter, more intense period in 2025. |

| Date | Milestone | Notes / Impact |
|---|---|---|
| **July 2024** | **Project Launch** | Project was launched by the Mayor on 19 July as part of the Westside Arts Festival. This received coverage on the RTÉ website and local media. This was documented with a short video to promote the project. |
| Sept 2024 | Open Call for Artists | A formal open call was launched, inviting multidisciplinary artists to propose works responding to air quality and environment. Despite earlier delays, the call attracted high-quality applications and confirmed the project's ambition and scope. |
| Oct 2024 | Artists Begin Residency | Artists began embedded residencies. This period involved site visits, research with scientists, community meetings, and early prototyping. The late start required rapid integration into Westside's existing networks. |
| Jan – Mar 2025 | Early Workshops & Development | First wave of workshops began: clay sessions, early soundwalk testing, and initial textile sessions. University research teams deployed sensors and supported citizen-science elements. Despite time pressures, community response was strong and attendance exceeded expectations. |

| Date | Milestone | Notes / Impact |
|---|---|---|
| **Apr – July 2025** | **Intensive Co-Creation Period (Compressed)** | Due to earlier delays, the majority of hands-on making, co-creation sessions, soundwalk events, school engagements, and public programming occurred in a three-month window. Artists delivered multiple workshops weekly, building momentum and strong community pride. This compressed phase ultimately deepened group cohesion but added workload stress for artists and coordinators. |
| **July 2025** | Exhibition Preparation Begins | Installation, editing of film/sound works, textile finishing, and integration of scientific data into artworks. This phase required close collaboration between artists, researchers, and GAC staff. Community participants expressed excitement and pride knowing their work would be exhibited publicly. |
| **16 Aug – 30 Sept 2025** | Exhibition Run (Galway Arts Centre) | Over 2,000 visitors attended the exhibition *The Air We Share*. The show included *Phosphene*, *Where Does the Body End?*, and *The Nine Freedoms for the Air*, presented together for the first time. Public tours, school groups, film screenings, modular synthesiser workshops, and panel discussions extended the project's reach. Strong emotional, reflective, and |

| Date | Milestone | Notes / Impact |
|---|---|---|
| | | sensory engagement was documented through postcards and direct feedback. |
| **Aug – Sept 2025** | Public Programming (Talks, Panels, Film Screenings, Workshops) | Events across GAC, WRC, Culture Night, and the Climate Festival created spaces for conversation between artists, scientists, policymakers, and residents. |
| **Oct 2025** | Evaluation & Reporting | Mixed-method evaluation gathered insights from participants, artists, partners, and audiences. |

## 4. Outputs and outcomes

*The Air We Share* generated a wide range of creative outputs, community activities, and educational experiences that together deepened public understanding of air quality and climate action. While the project delivered strong quantitative outcomes, its most significant achievements lay in how these activities fostered sensory awareness, collective reflection, and emotional connection to the environment. Collectively, these outcomes demonstrate that creative engagement can generate both measurable participation and deeper, less tangible forms of change, awareness, empathy, and attentiveness, that lay the groundwork for sustained climate action.

Engagement activities in *The Air We Share* were organized into four domains - Artistic Installations, Community Co-Creation, Education & Citizen Science, and Public Cultural Programming - to reflect the project's distinctive multi-layered design. Each domain represents a different mode of participation, ranging from deep, hands-on collaboration to broad public encounters, allowing us to capture the varied ways people engaged with air, place, and climate issues. Categorizing the data in this way ensures that we evaluate not only the reach of the project, but the *different types* of impact it generated; emotional, sensory, educational, social, and civic. This structure also aligns with the project's theory of change, making it clear how artistic practice operated across personal, community, and public spheres.

## 4.1 Artistic Installations

Three major artworks formed the core creative outputs of *The Air We Share*, each helping people sense and understand the air in new ways. Leon Butler's *Phosphene* transformed live air-quality data into shifting fields of color and light, turning something normally invisible into something that could be stood inside and experienced. Christopher Steenson's *Where Does the Body End* used sound to explore the idea that the atmosphere is part of our bodies, making people more aware of their breath, surroundings, and the shared air between us. *a place of their own* created *The 9 Freedoms for the Air*, a large, embroidered textile made with Westside residents over six sessions, an artwork that now stands as a long-lasting cultural object and a record of collective thinking, discussion, and care.

Together, these works formed the main exhibition at Galway Arts Centre, which welcomed more than 2,000 visitors. Guided tours, film screenings, workshops, and talks made the exhibition accessible to people of all ages, from school groups to older residents. Feedback from visitors showed that the artworks helped people feel and understand air quality in a more personal way. People wrote that the exhibition "*made the invisible visible*," helped them "*appreciate clean air a lot more*," and reminded them that "*just because something is invisible doesn't mean it's not happening."* Others described the experience as *"deeply impactful and beautiful,*" noting that it helped them *"feel more connected"* and *"think differently about the air around us."*

These kinds of responses show that the artworks did more than share information, they changed how people paid attention to the air and their environment. The artworks created emotional and sensory entry points into complex climate issues, making them easier to relate to and discuss. Importantly, the legacy of the project lives on beyond the exhibition. The embroidered textile will remain a long-lasting civic artwork representing community voices and values. The digital and sound-based works continue to inform workshops, and conversations about air quality in Galway. Together, they have laid the foundation for ongoing community engagement and creative climate action in the years ahead.

### 4.1.1. Table of Artistic Installations and Exhibition Events

| Date | Event | Location | Attendance | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 Aug 25 | Exhibition Launch & Reception | Galway Arts Centre | 170 | Public opening of *The Air We Share* exhibition featuring three major artworks: Phosphene (Leon Butler), Where Does the Body End (Christopher Steenson), and The 9 Freedoms for the Air (*a place of their own*). |
| 16 Aug – 30 Sep 25 | Exhibition Run | Galway Arts Centre | 2,039 | Duration of the full exhibition. Visitors engaged with long-form digital, sound, and textile artworks. |
| 21 Aug 25 | Family - Friendly Guided Tour | Galway Arts Centre | 14 | Accessible tour introducing children and families to the artworks and air-quality ideas. |
| 25 Sep 25 | Late Opening Exhibition Tour | Galway Arts Centre | 14 | Evening public tour offering extended conversation with curators. |
| 29 Aug 25 | TAWS Panel Discussion | Nun's Island Theatre | 50 | A public dialogue bringing together artists, scientists, and partners to discuss how creativity shapes environmental understanding. |
| | | **TOTAL** | **2,287** | |

This very high number demonstrates broad public reach and confirms that the final artworks served as the project's *central public interface*, engaging thousands who may not have attended workshops or events.

## 4.2 Community Co-Creation and Local Pride

Community involvement was at the heart of *The Air We Share*. Rather than treating residents as audiences, the project invited them to become co-creators, shaping the artworks that would later be exhibited at the Galway Arts Centre. The Westside Resource Centre became a busy creative hub throughout the project, hosting repeated workshops, conversations, and sessions that allowed trust, familiarity, and genuine collaboration to grow over time.

Across the programme, more than 100 local residents took part directly in hands-on activities. Families joined the *High Flyers* kite-making workshop, playfully exploring the movement of wind and air together. Meanwhile, *a place of their own* led a series of collective textile sessions in which community members stitched their ideas, worries, and hopes into a large, embroidered artwork imagining "freedoms for the air." Over weeks of making, participants negotiated colours, shapes, and meanings, building both the artwork and a sense of shared ownership. Many expressed pride in contributing to a piece that would be exhibited publicly.

These co-creation processes did more than produce artworks, they built confidence, pride, and a sense of belonging. People spoke of feeling part of something "*bigger than ourselves,*" and several residents continued attending sessions long beyond what they initially planned. This

demonstrates how creative practice can strengthen community bonds and invite people to see themselves not just as recipients of art or climate information, but as active contributors with valuable perspectives.

### 4.2.1. Table of Community Co-Creation Events

| Date | Event | Location | Attendance | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Apr–Jun 25 | Textile Co-Creation Workshops - *a place of their own* | Westside Resource Centre | 8 | Eight intensive workshops co-creating the *Nine Freedoms for the Air* textile. Participants negotiated ideas, stitched collaboratively, and contributed to a major artwork exhibited publicly. |
| Apr/May 25 | Clay Workshops (Air Chimes) | Westside Resource Centre | 12 | Participants created ceramic PM2.5-inspired objects to be included in the exhibition's wind-activated sound installation. |
| 12 July 25 | 9 Freedoms for the Air - Workshop Event | Westside Resource Centre | 30 | Drop-in workshop inviting the public to explore "air rights," examine the textile, and try guided stitching on demonstration hoops. |

| Date | Event | Location | Attendance | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 July 25 | High Flyers Kite-Making Workshop | Westside Resource Centre | 42 | Playful family-friendly workshop using wind, air flow, and movement to think about the atmosphere through making. |
| 11 July 25 | The Seeing Machine - Leon Butler | Westside Resource Centre | 8 | Interactive digital-art demonstration allowing visitors to experiment with Butler's data-driven sculpture translating air-quality into movement/light. |
| | | **TOTAL** | **100** | |

These numbers reflect *deep, repeated engagement* rather than one-off attendance. Participants contributed directly to the artworks, generating strong community ownership and pride in the final exhibition.

## 4.3 Education, Outreach, and Citizen Science

*The Air We Share*'s partnership with the University of Galway created meaningful opportunities for residents to explore air quality through hands-on learning. In a series of workshops at the Westside Resource Centre, participants were introduced to atmospheric monitoring devices used to collect real-time data from their own neighborhood. These sessions

introduced people to the topic of air pollution, environmental and health implications, atmospheric measurements and representation of environmental data using visual and creative tools. 39 residents took part, many of whom had never used scientific equipment before.

The project also reached wider audiences through major public-education events. At the Galway Science and Technology Festival, over 100 children and parents engaged with interactive demonstrations that translated air-quality data into sound, colour, and movement. Through the GLOBE Schools Network, creative resources developed for *The Air We Share* were shared nationally, reaching more than 600 students.

Across all these engagements, the message was simple: environmental data is not just numbers on a chart. Through creative methods, drawing, mapping, sound, sculpture, participants experienced how clean or polluted air might look, sound, or feel. This approach helped demystify scientific concepts while empowering people to understand their own environment more deeply. These engagements demonstrated to attendees how raw air quality and environmental data can be reimagined to show participants not only what the numbers mean, but what clean or polluted air might feel and sound like.

### 4.3.1. Table of Education, Outreach, and Citizen Science Events

| Date | Event | Location | Attendance | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 July 24 | Project Launch & Citizen Science Workshop | Westside Resource Centre | 40 | Creative session in which residents were asked “what’s in our air?”. |
| 10 Nov 24 | Creative Workshop – Galway Science & Technology Festival | University of Galway | 100 | Hands-on workshop for children and parents. |
| 16 Nov 24 | Air Sensor Workshop – Galway Science & Technology Festival | Westside Resource Centre | 25 | Hands-on workshop using low-cost sensors to understand air-quality data and pollution sources. |
| 2024 – 2025 | Insight Air Sensor Workshops | Scoil an Chroí Íosa, Castlegar National School | 50 | Citizen-science sessions led by the Insight SFI Centre teaching participants how to gather and interpret local air-quality data. |
| 7 Apr 25 | Spéirscéalta Launch | University of Galway | 40 | Book launch and public event connecting stories of air and climate through art–science talks and demonstrations. |

| Date | Event | Location | Attendance | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25 Apr 25 | Presentation & Update on Air Quality Monitoring | Westside Resource Centre | 20 | Community briefing on Galway's air-sensing network and local environmental trends. |
| Apr – Jul 25 | Soundwalk Series -Christopher Steenson | Westside Resource Centre & Westside | 13 | Participants wore headphones translating PM2.5 shifts into sound, learning to "listen" to invisible pollution patterns. |
| Nov 25 | GLOBE Schools Network | Online | 600 | Joint webinar with Globe & EPA for Clean Air Week for secondary students |
| | | **TOTAL** | **888** | |

These activities focused on environmental literacy. The numbers show *strong engagement with air-quality science*, especially among families and local residents.

### 4.3.2. The Galway Dashboard: Air Monitoring Units Across Westside and Shantalla Producing Live Air Quality Data Accessible Online via The Purple Air website.

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

THE AIR WE SHARE

Clár Éire Ildánach
*Creative Ireland Programme*

## 4.4 Public Events and Cultural Programming

Public events were a major part of *The Air We Share*, helping the project reach wide audiences across Galway and making conversations about air quality feel open, welcoming, and relevant to everyday life. The programme ran for more than a year and included creative workshops, film screenings and community discussions that invited people of all ages to explore the air around them in new ways.

The project launched at the Westside Resource Centre in July 2024 with a hands-on creative session in which residents were asked "what's in our air?". These early workshops set the tone for the project: friendly, curious, and grounded in the lived experience of the Westside community. As the year progressed, *The Air We Share* became a regular presence at major cultural events, including Culture Night 2024 and 2025, the Galway Science and Technology Festival, and the Galway Climate Festival 2025. Highlights included *It's All Up in the Air!*, a film screening and public discussion exploring how air connects memory, place, and belonging, and the project's closing symposium at Nun's Island Theatre, where artists, scientists, and residents reflected together on how creativity can shape environmental understanding.

Across these events, audiences were encouraged not just to observe but to participate. These gatherings created shared cultural moments where climate issues became more approachable, social, and emotionally resonant Audience feedback showed that the public events played a key role in building what participants described as a new *"emotional awareness*" towards the air. Many said they left events feeling calmer, more curious, or more connected to

the environment. These responses demonstrate how cultural programming can help people move from abstract concern about climate issues toward a shared, felt understanding, one rooted in community, conversation, and creative experience.

### 4.4.1. Table of Public Events & Cultural Programming

| Date | Event | Location | Attendance | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28 Nov 23 | Community Energy Awareness Event (stall) | WRC | 15 | Early outreach introducing residents to themes later developed in the project. |
| 20 Sep 24 | It's All Up in the Air! – Culture Night Film Screening | WRC | 15 | Screening + discussion on air, memory, and place as part of national Culture Night. |
| 7 May 24 | Open Door Presentation | WRC | 12 | Informal presentation to local community groups. |
| 24 Apr 24 | Westside Gardening Group Talk | WRC | 12 | Discussion connecting air, plants, and environmental health. |
| 27 Feb 25 | TAWS Network Event | WRC | 16 | Gathering of stakeholders, partners, and local groups. |

| Date | Event | Location | Attendance | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 Sep 25 | TAWS Documentary Screening & Modular Synth Workshop | GAC | 22 | Screening and sound-based workshop on atmosphere and climate themes. |
| 13 Sep 25 | TAWS Workshop – Galway Climate Festival | Fr. Burke Park | 100 | Drop-in public activity as part of Galway's major annual climate festival. |
| 18 Sep 25 | Imagined Islands – Documentary Screening | GAC | 16 | Screening exploring climate, land, and cultural memory. |
| 19 Sep 25 | TAWS Documentary Screening & Discussion | WRC | 10 | Screening of the TAWS documentary followed by community discussion. |
| | | **TOTAL** | **218** | |

While smaller in size, these events created *high-value dialogue spaces* where residents, artists, and researchers exchanged ideas, strengthening the civic dimension of the project**.**

## 4.5 Digital and Media Reach

While much of *The Air We Share* focused on in-person creative engagement, digital and media channels played an essential role in amplifying the project's visibility and extending its

reach beyond Galway. Social platforms, online storytelling, and regional/national media ensured that the project's themes, air quality, care for place, and creative environmental engagement, circulated widely across diverse audiences. This allowed people who could not attend workshops or exhibitions to still encounter the artworks, ideas, and voices of the program.

The project's digital footprint was significantly boosted by a dedicated photo series, short-form videos, and a documentary film produced throughout the year. These assets were shared across institutional accounts and by partner organisations, dramatically increasing overall visibility. Media coverage in outlets such as RTÉ News, The Irish Times, Galway Advertiser, Connacht Tribune, This Is Galway, and Galway Bay FM created additional opportunities for public engagement, helping position the project as a leading example of creative climate action in Ireland.

### 4.5.1. Table of Digital and Media Engagement Overview (2023–2025)

| Category | Description | Estimated Reach / Output | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social Media and Digital Campaigns | Photo stories, short videos, project updates, behind-the-scenes documentation shared across Galway City Council, University of Galway, | ~200,000 users reached | Includes boosted visibility from partner reposts and event-specific campaigns. |

| Category | Description | Estimated Reach / Output | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Arts Centre, and partner channels, including promotional video shot by John Conway in 2024. | | |
| Promotional Video 2024. | *The Air We Share* promotional video (John Conway) filmed across workshops and interviews. | Online circulation | Accessible to audiences unable to attend in person |
| Documentary Film 2025 | *The Air We Share* documentary (Tom Flanagan) filmed across workshops, interviews, and final exhibition. | Public screening + online circulation | Accessible to audiences unable to attend in person. |
| Photography & Visual Archive | Professional photo series capturing workshops, artworks, soundwalks, and exhibitions. | Widely shared across platforms | Forms part of long-term digital legacy for partners. |

| Category | Description | Estimated Reach / Output | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| National & Regional Media Coverage | Coverage across major Irish outlets including The Irish Times, Galway Advertiser, Connacht Tribune, This Is Galway, Galway Bay FM. | Readership/listenership estimated 30,000–60,000+ (cumulative) | Features highlighted artistic innovation and community engagement. |

These figures show that *The Air We Share* had a significant public footprint, far exceeding the number of people who engaged through onsite events. The digital reach of over 200,000 users indicates strong public interest in the project's themes and demonstrates the value of high-quality visual storytelling in climate-engagement work. Media coverage further validated the project's importance regionally and nationally, positioning it as a model for how art, science, and community engagement can intersect.

Importantly, this level of online visibility helps ensure that the project's impact continues beyond the exhibition period. The documentary, photo archive, and press features now serve as long-lasting, shareable resources, enabling sustained dialogue about air quality and creative climate action, locally and further afield

## 4.6 Legacy and Continuing Engagement

*The Air We Share* generated a set of artistic, scientific, and civic-engagement outputs that continue to have impact beyond the project's formal end. These outputs include three major artworks, an active network of community air sensors, a growing archive of public reflections, and strengthened partnerships between cultural, scientific, and civic organisations.

### 4.6.1 Artistic Outputs.

The three exhibited artworks - *Phosphene*, *Where Does the Body End*, and *The 9 Freedoms for the Air* - now function as long-lasting cultural artefacts. The textile, in particular, has become a community legacy piece, created through months of co-stitching and now held as a public record of Westside's collective imagination. Audience feedback shows that these artworks *made the invisible visible* and sparked continuing curiosity. The exhibition's high footfall and repeated public tours demonstrate that the artistic outputs have a strong and ongoing cultural presence.

### 4.6.2 Scientific Outputs.

The project also produced practical scientific tools and datasets.

- Air-quality sensors installed in Westside continue to collect PM2.5 data, supporting resident awareness and ongoing research and partnership between the Environment officers in Galway City Council and researchers in the Centre for Climate and Air Pollution Studies in the University of Galway.

- The online digital dashboard serves as a prototype to visualise live-streamed data from various sensors, empowering citizens with access to real-time local environmental data.
- Workshops at the University of Galway and Galway Science and Technology Festival introduced hundreds of participants to citizen science methods. These projects participants and residents to understand environmental data and link it to daily life, creating lasting educational value, which will be reproduced in schools and at festivals into the future.

### 4.6.3 Civic-Engagement Outputs.

Finally, the project helped build civic capacity around environmental awareness. Public events, film screenings, and community discussions created forums where residents, artists, and scientists could meet as equals. Attendees spoke of "*seeds planted*" and a desire to stay involved, while local partners expressed interest in using the artworks and air-sensor tools in future neighbourhood programs. Media coverage and digital content extended these civic outputs to audiences beyond Galway, strengthening the project's public profile and reinforcing its legacy.

Taken together, these artistic, scientific, and civic-engagement outputs demonstrate that *The Air We Share* has produced a long-lasting ecosystem of creative and environmental engagement, one that continues to evolve through community use, public interest, and institutional partnerships.

# 5. Project evaluation

## 5.1 Evaluation Approach

The evaluation of *The Air We Share* aimed to understand how creative and artistic practices can help people connect with environmental issues in ways that feel personal, meaningful, and manageable. Rather than focusing only on numbers or outputs, the evaluation centred on people's experiences: what they noticed, how they felt, and what kinds of reflections or small changes the project prompted. A single guiding question shaped the evaluation:

***How did The Air We Share use creative practice to help communities understand, feel, and act on the issue of air quality?***

To answer this, the evaluation used a qualitative, participatory approach, including interviews, conversations during workshops, reflective group discussions, and audience feedback from public events. These methods were chosen because creative-climate engagement often produces emotional, sensory, and relational forms of change, outcomes that cannot be captured through statistics alone. Quantitative information, such as attendance numbers and digital-reach figures, was included to provide context, but the core of the analysis focused on the quality of engagement rather than scale.

The analysis followed a hybrid inductive–deductive method (Proudfoot, 2022) allowing. This means that the evaluation used pre-agreed themes linked to the project's aims as well as allowing new ideas and patterns to emerge naturally from the data. This approach ensured the

findings were grounded in people's real experiences while also connecting back to the wider aims of Creative Climate Action: building environmental capability, motivation, and opportunity through creative practice.

Ethical practice was central to the process. All participants gave informed consent, contributions were anonymised where appropriate, and workshops and discussions were designed to be welcoming and accessible to people of different ages, abilities, and familiarity with climate issues. The evaluation also included a reflexive element. Artists, partners, and community representatives were invited to help sense-check emerging interpretations, ensuring that the findings reflected shared understanding rather than external judgement.

A brief note on limitations is important. The project ran over a short timeframe, and many effects observed were subtle or emerging. While participants described moments of reflection, calm, or new awareness, longer-term behavioural or policy impacts could not be fully measured within the project window. However, these early signs align with how creative engagement is understood to support long-term cultural change.

Overall, the evaluation was designed not as an audit but as an inquiry, a way to explore how art can mediate between scientific knowledge and lived experience, and how creative participation can plant the seeds of longer-term climate awareness and action. The findings that follow build directly from this approach.

## 5.2 Data Sources

The evaluation drew on a wide range of creative, reflective, and participatory materials that captured the experiences of artists, residents, partners, and audiences. Using multiple sources allowed us to understand not only how many people engaged, but also how they felt, what they learned, and how their thinking changed over the course of the project. Data was gathered continuously from November 2023 to September 2025 so that the evaluation could follow the full journey of *The Air We Share*, from early planning to co-creation, exhibition, and final reflections.

### 5.2.1 Data Sources

| Data Type | Description | Participants / Volume | Purpose in Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Artist Interviews** | Semi-structured conversations with Leon Butler, Christopher Steenson, and *a place of their own*. | 3 interviews | Understand artistic intentions, creative processes, and reflections on collaboration, community work, and policy. |
| **Partner Debriefs** | Reflective discussions with Galway City Council, University of Galway, | 2 sessions | Identify institutional learning, challenges, and opportunities for future collaboration. |

| Data Type | Description | Participants / Volume | Purpose in Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Galway Arts Centre and Westside Resource Centre | | |
| **Audience Feedback Postcards** | Open-ended reflections collected at the Galway Arts Centre exhibition and Westside Arts Festival. | 100+ responses | Capture emotional responses, personal insights, and shifts in understanding. |
| **Soundwalk Reflections** | Notes and group discussions from *Air Walk: Sensing with Sound*. | ~8 participants | Assess sensory and embodied learning. |
| **Panel Symposium (Nun's Island Theatre)** | Public discussion involving artists, scientists, and residents. | ~50 attendees | Gather insights across disciplines; evaluate the project's role in civic dialogue. |
| **Partner Evaluation Questionnaires** | Written reflections from partner organisations. | 5 partners | Examine partnership dynamics, communication, and project delivery. |

Overall, the evaluation engaged with feedback from hundreds of people across workshops, exhibitions, and community events. Participants included Westside residents, festival

audiences, artists, university researchers, and local organisations, reflecting the broad social and geographic reach of The Air We Share

### 5.2.2 Data Collection Principles

The evaluation followed a set of principles designed to make the process fair, inclusive, and trustworthy. Activities were created to be welcoming and accessible so that people of all ages and backgrounds could take part, and all feedback was anonymised to support honest reflection. Quantitative information, such as attendance numbers and digital reach, was interpreted alongside qualitative insights from workshops, interviews, and postcards, allowing the evaluation to capture both scale and depth. Throughout the project, emerging learning was shared with partners so that insights could shape ongoing delivery rather than being applied only at the end. We also cross-checked themes across multiple data sources to ensure consistency, and all materials were handled securely in line with GDPR. Importantly, community voices, artist perspectives, and partner reflections were treated as equally valuable in shaping the findings

## 5.3 Thematic Analysis

### 5.3.1 Purpose of the Analysis

The thematic analysis explored how people experienced *The Air We Share* and what kinds of learning, reflection, and change emerged through participation. Rather than measuring impact through numbers alone, the analysis focused on what participants *noticed, felt, and understood*.

This approach was chosen because it aligns with the project's aim: to explore how creative practice makes environmental issues meaningful at personal, social, and emotional levels.

### 5.3.2 Analytical Approach

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step reflexive thematic analysis framework, adapted for an accessible, community-centred evaluation:

1. **Familiarisation** – All transcripts, postcards, notes, and workshop materials were read multiple times to gain a deep sense of the data.
2. **Generating codes** – Meaningful moments were coded line-by-line (e.g., "noticing the air differently," "feeling calm," "confusion about data," "collective pride in the textile").
3. **Searching for themes** – Codes were grouped into early "clusters" that seemed to reflect shared ideas across groups.
4. **Reviewing themes** – These clusters were refined by checking them across datasets to ensure they were grounded in the evidence.
5. **Defining and naming themes** – The final themes were shaped into clear, accessible concepts that reflected recurring patterns.
6. **Producing the narrative** – Themes were written up with direct quotations, keeping participant voices central to the analysis.

Reflexive practices, such as memo writing and discussion with partners, helped ensure the analysis was transparent and grounded in lived experience.

### 5.3.3 Development of Themes

Themes were developed across all data sources: artist interviews, workshops, soundwalks, community postcards, partner debriefs, and public events. Throughout the analysis, both convergence (shared patterns) and divergence (differences across groups) were considered. Six overarching themes emerged consistently across the datasets and aligned strongly with the project's goals.

### 5.3.4 Overview of the Six Themes

Thematic analysis identified six interconnected learning areas:

1. **Sensory and Embodied Engagement**: How people used listening, touch, breath, sound, and movement to understand the environment.
2. **Air as Commons / Shared Resource**: Realising that "we all breathe the same air" and that air connects bodies, households, and communities.
3. **Reflection and Emotional Response**: Feelings of awe, calm, curiosity, responsibility, and sometimes fear as participants engaged with the artworks.
4. **Collaboration and Co-Creation**: Shared making (such as stitching the textile or building sensors) generated pride, care, and collective ownership.
5. **Tensions Between Art, Policy, and Measurement**: Artists and partners navigating expectations, evaluation pressures, and the balance between creativity and deliverables.
6. **Awareness, Action, and Legacy**: Small behavioural shifts, ongoing curiosity, intention to share learning with family, and continued engagement after the project.

These themes reflect not just what people learned, but *how* they learned, through bodies, relationships, creativity, and shared reflection.

### 5.3.5 How the Themes Fit Together

Across all data, the themes formed a clear pattern:

- Sensory engagement acted as the entry point.
- This opened up awareness of air as shared, which led to
- Emotional reflection, often deep and personal.
- Through co-creation, these reflections became social and collaborative.
- Artists and partners navigated the tensions that arise in cross-sector work.
- Finally, these experiences contributed to small but meaningful actions and a sense of ongoing legacy.

Together, the themes show that *The Air We Share* supported a form of climate engagement that is relational, embodied, and emotionally grounded, not driven by persuasion, but by experience.

## 5.4 Thematic Interpretation

### 5.4.1 Theme 1: Sensory and Embodied Engagement.

A key finding of *The Air We Share* is that people connected to environmental issues most strongly through their bodies and senses, rather than through information alone. Across soundwalks, workshops, and exhibitions, participants repeatedly described *"feeling," "noticing," "slowing down,"* and becoming newly aware of the air around them. Creative

activities helped transform something normally invisible - air - into an experience that could be heard, touched, and felt.

During a soundwalk, participants noticed that walking and listening together shifted how they paid attention to their surroundings. One person shared, *"It slowed me down a bit, which I enjoyed."* Many described becoming more aware of their breath, the movement of air, and the presence of other people walking beside them. Instead of feeling overwhelmed or instructed, participants responded with curiosity, calmness, and reflection. The act of listening collectively made air feel shared, not individual.

The artworks themselves were deliberately designed to make air perceptible.

- *Phosphene* translated real-time air-quality data into changing light and digital forms.
- *Where Does the Body End* used sound and sculpture to explore the idea of the atmosphere as an extension of the human body with soundwalk's encouraging people to experience their immediate environment as something they constantly breathe, move through, and co-create.

Moreover, hands-on workshops, such as clay work, stitching, and air sensor-building, added a tactile dimension, linking the movement of air to touch, materiality, and the body, further reinforcing that air is something lived and felt, not just measured.

Feedback from community workshops and exhibition postcards showed that sensory engagement often produced "micro-moments" of attentiveness: noticing changes in light or temperature, hearing background noises differently, or becoming more mindful of their breath.

Comments such as *"being more mindful of the air"* or *"feeling connected"* illustrate how small perceptual shifts can support early forms of environmental awareness.

From an evaluation perspective, this theme shows that embodied experience is a powerful entry point into climate engagement. While such experiences may not immediately lead to large behavioural changes, they help build the emotional and perceptual foundations for longer-term environmental care. Artworks that activate the senses make environmental issues personal and relatable, helping people understand air not as abstract data but as something they live within.

Overall, *The Air We Share* demonstrates that environmental engagement begins with experience. By foregrounding sensation and embodiment, the project helped participants see air as a shared, living presence, an essential shift that makes future climate engagement feel meaningful, grounded, and possible

### 5.4.2 Theme 2: Air as Commons / Shared Resource

A second major insight across all datasets was a shift in how people understood air, not as an invisible backdrop to daily life, but as something shared, live, and collectively held. Participants repeatedly described air as a commons, something "*we all breathe*," "*all depend on*," and "*are collectively responsible for*." For several attendees, this was the first time they had considered air in these terms, with one person writing that it was "*the first time I reflected upon our air as a commons*."

Workshops and artworks helped make this shift tangible. Through stitched conversations in *The Nine Freedoms for the Air*, residents, artists, and partners imagined what "air rights"

might look like: rights to breathe clean air, rights to shared responsibility, and rights rooted in fairness and care. The collaborative sewing process made this idea real with participants describing the making as "*intricate,*" "*involved*," and "*something we built together*." The artwork became a form of commons-making, where thinking about governance and responsibility was woven directly into a shared object.

Audience feedback from the exhibition echoed these ideas. People wrote that the work helped them see air as "*a living thing*," that "*we all breathe the same air*," and that this shared atmosphere connects people across homes, streets, and communities. Others noted that understanding air as something that "*moves between us*" made them more aware of its vulnerability, how pollution, weather, heat, and human activity affect everyone, not just individuals. Artists also played a key role in shaping this reframing. Metaphors such as the atmosphere as a "*shared body*" helped people understand air not only as chemistry or data, but as something relational; something that holds us in connection with each other and with the wider environment.

From an evaluative perspective, this theme shows how creative practice can make environmental issues social and ethical, not just scientific. When people see air as a commons, responsibility becomes shared rather than individual. Environmental care becomes a matter of belonging, reciprocity, and fairness. This shift aligns strongly with the project's aims: it demonstrates how imagination, collaboration, and artistic dialogue can nurture civic empathy and deepen people's sense of connection to their environment.

Ultimately, participants left with a clearer sense that clean air is not an abstract ideal but a shared right; something that belongs to everyone, requires collective stewardship, and binds communities together through a common atmosphere.

### 5.4.3 Theme 3: Reflection and Emotional Response

A third recurring theme across workshops, interviews, and audience postcards was the depth of emotional reflection the project encouraged. Rather than simply presenting information about air quality, *The Air We Share* created space for people to feel, pause, and make sense of their relationship with the environment on an emotional level. Participants described a wide mix of reactions; calm, curiosity, worry, gratitude, and moments of quiet insight. These emotional experiences were not incidental; they were central to how people connected climate and air quality issues to their own lives.

Audience feedback frequently used language of calm and attentiveness. Visitors wrote that they felt "*at peace*," that the sensory elements helped them "*feel more connected*," or that the artworks made them "*appreciate clean air a lot more*." Others expressed unease - "*It is very scary*" - or noted how the work prompted personal worries, such as air quality in their own homes. Rather than simplifying these reactions, the project allowed space for them to coexist. This emotional complexity helped people recognise air and climate not just as scientific challenges but as personal, bodily, and sometimes vulnerable experiences.

Sound-based works played a key role in this emotional engagement. During Christopher Steenson's soundwalks, participants spoke about noticing their breath, slowing down, and

becoming aware of sounds they would normally ignore. One person remarked that the experience "*slowed me down a bit, which I enjoyed*," while another said the walk made them more aware of the "*feelings in my own body*." These moments show how sound and rhythm created a meditative quality that encouraged reflection, rather than information overload.

Across the project, emotional responses helped people translate abstract climate issues into everyday meaning. Some participants described gratitude while others held discomfort - "*so much in the air… it's scary but makes me want to know more*." This blend of emotions often acted as a motivator for deeper engagement, lowering the sense of distance that people often feel when dealing with environmental topics.

Partners also recognised the importance of emotional engagement. As one partner reflected, "*Facts don't always move people, but emotions and stories do*." This was evident throughout the evaluation: emotional responses often preceded cognitive understanding or behavioural intentions (e.g., checking air quality, reducing car use, telling others about the exhibition).

From an evaluative perspective, this theme demonstrates that emotional reflection is a legitimate and powerful form of environmental learning. By allowing people to feel awe, concern, connection, or calm, creative engagement supports emotional literacy, helping people articulate feelings that are rarely expressed in scientific or policy settings. These emotional shifts are subtle but meaningful foundations for long-term environmental awareness.

In this way, *The Air We Share* showed that climate engagement begins not with pressure or persuasion, but with experiences that help people feel connected to the world around them. By

opening space for emotion, the project encouraged participants to understand air as precious, shared, and worth protecting, turning awareness into empathy and laying the groundwork for future action

### 5.4.4 Theme 4: Collaboration and Co-Creation

Collaboration and co-creation were central to *The Air We Share*, shaping both the creative process and the community experience. Rather than presenting finished artworks to the public, artists and participants built them together over many months. This approach transformed environmental themes, such as air quality, responsibility, and shared atmosphere, into something people could explore socially, not just individually.

Across workshops, participants described the process as "*intimate," "intense," "intricate*," and "*messy*," reflecting the reality of working together across different skills, personalities, and expectations. In the creation of *The Nine Freedoms for the Air*, residents stitched ideas, images, and concerns directly into the large textile artwork. One artist reflected that "*everyone has become really invested in the artistic quality of the textile*," while another noted that stitching became "*a real negotiation, between participants, the fabric, and the limits of time and skills*." This slow, collective work turned climate issues into shared conversation, care, and decision-making.

The project also highlighted the vulnerability involved in co-creation. Artists spoke openly about "*group dynamics," "power dynamics*," and "*the challenges of collective creation*." These tensions were not seen as barriers, rather they became part of the learning.

Decision-making unfolded collaboratively: what belonged on the textile, how to interpret air-dwellers, and how to balance artistic intention with participants' contributions. This process encouraged honesty, patience, and mutual respect.

Collaboration also extended across sectors. Scientists noted that working with artists helped translate data into felt experience, while artists gained insight into the realities of air measurement. Partners described the experience as "*generative*," recognising that shared creative endeavour built trust between institutions and the community. Importantly, these relationships did not end with the workshops, the project created new connections that partners expressed interest in continuing.

From an evaluation perspective, this theme shows that co-creation is itself a form of environmental learning. Participants did not only learn about air; they learned with each other. Through shared making, people developed a sense of belonging, pride, and responsibility; qualities essential for long-term climate engagement. The collaborative process stood in contrast to one-off engagement models, demonstrating that meaningful participation requires time, continuity, and openness.

*The Air We Share* ultimately showed that when people make something together, they also build relationships, confidence, and shared purpose. In this way, co-creation became both the method and the impact, strengthening community ties while deepening collective awareness of air as something held in common and cared for together.

### 5.4.5 Theme 5: Tensions Between Art, Policy, and Measurement

Throughout the project, both artists and partners reflected on the challenges of working at the intersection of creativity, climate policy, and public accountability. *The Air We Share* was funded through the Creative Climate Action program, which aims to spark environmental awareness through cultural work. This ambition created exciting possibilities, but it also revealed tensions between the open-ended nature of artistic practice and the structure of policy-led funding.

Artists noted that they sometimes felt pulled between creative experimentation and the expectation to produce measurable outcomes; "*you do become a mercenary, there's competing wants in everything*." Another added, "*Outputs are a way of hedging against risk but working with an artist should be risky*." These reflections highlight the difficulty of fitting artistic processes, often slow, uncertain, and exploratory, into frameworks that prioritise deliverables, KPIs, and reporting.

Partners from Galway City Council and the University of Galway recognised this challenge. One noted that traditional evaluation tools struggle to capture the true value of creative engagement: "*We have to learn to measure resonance, not just numbers*." This shift, from counting participants to understanding how people feel, reflect, and connect, was a recurring theme across interviews. The project demonstrated that climate-focused art often works through subtle changes in awareness, perception, and conversation rather than easily quantifiable behaviour shifts.

These tensions were not experienced as failure but as part of the learning. Artists continued to centre care, participation, and dialogue, even when navigating institutional pressures. Partners acknowledged that working across disciplines requires new forms of trust and communication, especially when definitions of "impact" differ. As several collaborators observed, the most meaningful outcomes, such as emotional attunement, reflection, and relationship building, can be difficult to capture using standard metrics.

From an evaluative perspective, this theme points to an important structural insight: creative climate action needs flexible evaluation frameworks that value both tangible outputs and intangible forms of learning. This includes recognising that emotional resonance, curiosity, and community relationships are legitimate, and often powerful, indicators of impact. *The Air We Share* demonstrated that art is not simply a tool for communicating policy messages; it is a form of inquiry that can deepen public understanding in ways science alone cannot.

By naming and engaging with these tensions, the project helped expand what "success" can look like in cultural climate work. It showed that creative risk, reflection, and experimentation are essential to meaningful climate engagement, and that policy structures must adapt to support them.

### 5.4.6 Theme 6: Awareness, Action, and Legacy

A key finding of the evaluation is that *The Air We Share* generated a slow building but meaningful form of environmental awareness. Rather than triggering dramatic behavioural change, the project encouraged subtle, everyday shifts in how people notice, think about, and talk

about the air around them. Participants frequently described becoming "*more aware," "more curious,"* or *"more conscious of the air*," suggesting that awareness grew through experience rather than instruction.

Audience postcards from the Galway Arts Centre captured these micro-actions. Some people described practical changes: "*Maybe less of the car,"* or *"I'll check the air quality when out walking.*" Others spoke about new habits of attention: looking up more often, noticing light and movement, or recognising that "*just because something is invisible doesn't mean it's not happening."* These responses show that the artworks helped translate scientific ideas into everyday ways of seeing and sensing the world.

Artists and partners also reflected on the longer-term ripple effects of this work. This was reflected by an exhibition viewer: "*seeds planted,"* and demonstrates how the project encouraged people to reflect not only on individual choices but also on systems, governance, and community responsibility. Partners suggested that the project opened the door to future initiatives, such as extended citizen-science programmes, or follow-on community art projects.

The project's legacy is also tangible. New relationships formed between residents, artists, scientists, and local organisations; community air sensors continue to collect data; and many participants expressed a desire to stay involved or explore other environmental topics such as water, biodiversity, or climate resilience. In this sense, *The Air We Share* has become part of the cultural fabric of Westside, leaving behind skills, networks, artworks, and a strengthened sense of community pride.

From an evaluative perspective, this theme demonstrates that meaningful climate engagement often begins with perception rather than persuasion. When people start noticing their environment differently, conversations shift, curiosity deepens, and new forms of care begin to emerge. These are modest changes, but they matter. They represent the early stages of sustained, community-led climate consciousness; slow, cumulative, and rooted in lived experience.

## 5.5 Synthesis of Findings

Taken together, the six thematic findings show that *The Air We Share* created meaningful environmental engagement by shifting how people sense, understand, and relate to the air around them. Across workshops, exhibitions, soundwalks, and public events, participants consistently described new forms of attentiveness, connection, and care, revealing a pattern of change that was embodied, relational, and emotionally grounded.

**Sensory and Embodied Engagement (Theme 1)** demonstrated that people connect most strongly to climate issues when they can *feel* them through the body. Activities such as the soundwalk and interactive installations helped participants slow down, notice their breath, tune into background sounds, and experience air as something shared and alive. These sensory encounters turned scientific information into lived experience, establishing the foundation for deeper reflection.

Building on this, **Air as Commons / Shared Resource (Theme 2)** showed that participants began to see air not as an abstract substance but as a shared space and collective responsibility. Through artworks such as *The Nine Freedoms for the Air*, people explored the

idea of being “air dwellers” and co-owners of the atmosphere. This reframing supported a sense of environmental belonging, illustrating how cultural imagination can support civic awareness.

**Reflection and Emotional Response (Theme 3)** highlighted that the project enabled people to process emotions; calmness, awe, anxiety, gratitude, that are often difficult to express in technical climate discussions. The artworks held these emotions without forcing resolution, helping participants articulate what air quality and climate change feel like in everyday life. Emotional literacy became an important bridge between information and meaning.

Through **Collaboration and Co-Creation (Theme 4)**, residents, artists, and partners developed trust, shared ownership, and deeper relationships. Co-created artworks, especially the large textile piece, became spaces for negotiation, storytelling, and learning. Participants described the experience as “*invested,” “intricate,”* and *“something we built together,”* demonstrating that making together is itself a form of civic engagement.

**Tensions Between Art, Policy, and Measurement (Theme 5)** revealed structural learning. Artists and partners acknowledged the pressure to demonstrate quantifiable impact while maintaining creative freedom. Rather than hindering the project, these tensions opened important conversations about how policy frameworks can better support experimentation, risk, and resonance, the kinds of impact that creative climate work uniquely produces.

Finally, **Awareness, Action, and Legacy (Theme 6)** demonstrated that the project generated slow but meaningful shifts in behaviour and perception. Participants described noticing air differently, checking air-quality readings, reducing car use, or sharing project ideas with friends and family. Equally significant were the long-term relationships, active community

sensors, and continued interest in future creative environmental projects; evidence that the project seeded ongoing cultural and civic engagement.

**Across all themes, a clear synthesis emerges:** Creative practice does not simply communicate environmental facts, it transforms how people *sense*, *feel*, and *imagine* their relationship with the environment. The changes observed were subtle but powerful: heightened awareness, emotional attunement, shared responsibility, and emerging community action. These foundations are essential for sustained climate engagement, demonstrating that art can cultivate forms of environmental understanding that are deeply personal, socially connected, and long-lasting.

## 5.6 Limitations of the Analysis and Future Directions

While the evaluation produced rich insights into how *The Air We Share* engaged communities, several limitations shaped what the analysis could and could not capture.

### 5.6.1 Limited ability to measure long-term change

Because the evaluation took place within a relatively short delivery window, it was not possible to assess whether the shifts in awareness, language, or behaviour described by participants were sustained over time. Many impacts appeared as early "signals of change," such as noticing air more often or sharing information with others, but longitudinal follow-up would be needed to understand their durability.

### 5.6.2 Uneven participation across datasets

Engagement varied significantly between different events and formats. Large public events (e.g., Galway Arts Centre exhibition, Westside Arts Festival) generated a high volume of audience feedback, while smaller workshops generated deeper but more limited qualitative data. This imbalance means some themes (e.g., sensory engagement, emotional response) appear more frequently than others simply because more data were available for those contexts.

### 5.6.3 Self-selection bias

Participants who chose to attend workshops or leave written reflections were often already curious, artistically inclined, or environmentally engaged. As a result, the analysis may over-represent perspectives of individuals predisposed to interest or participation and under-represent those who did not take part in the project or felt less confident engaging with climate-related topics.

### 5.6.4 Constraints created by project timeline and staffing changes

Project delays and changes in project leadership meant that data collection, delivery, and evaluation were compressed into the latter half of the project. This restricted opportunities for iterative analysis, co-reflection with partners, and systematic follow-up. A longer and more evenly paced project timeline would have supported more robust comparative analysis across the full project cycle.

### 5.6.5 Analytic interpretation shaped by evaluator involvement

As with all qualitative work, the analysis is interpretive. Although steps were taken to increase rigour - triangulation across datasets, reflexive notetaking, and discussion with partners - the thematic framework reflects the evaluators' reading of the material. A parallel or external analysis might foreground different nuances, especially around policy or community dynamics.

### 5.6.6 Limited representation of underrepresented or marginalised groups

While the project reached diverse audiences overall, some groups (e.g., people with limited arts access, migrant communities, disabled audiences) were not extensively represented in the evaluation datasets. This limits the ability to generalise findings or claim a complete community-wide perspective.

### 5.6.7 Mixed-format data made synthesis complex

The evaluation drew from interviews, workshops, postcards, soundwalk reflections, and public discussions. These formats differ in depth, spontaneity, and context. While this diversity strengthened triangulation, it also introduced variation in detail and tone, which may shape how strongly certain themes appear in the final synthesis.

### 5.6.8 Future Directions for Evaluation

To strengthen future analysis, the following steps are recommended:

- **Adopt a longitudinal evaluation model** with follow-ups at 6 and 12 months to track behavioural change, civic engagement, and ongoing emotional or perceptual shifts.

- **Expand outreach to underrepresented communities** and incorporate targeted engagement strategies to diversify the evaluation sample.
- **Use mixed-method evaluation frameworks** that integrate artistic, scientific, and social measures of change from the outset of the project.
- **Embed evaluation earlier** in the project timeline so that researchers can observe the development of relationships, ideas, and practices over time.
- **Co-analyse findings with community members and partners**, ensuring that multiple perspectives shape interpretation and that knowledge is shared rather than extracted.
- **Document informal interactions more systematically**, including conversations during workshops and exhibitions, to better capture subtle forms of learning and connection.

Overall, while the analysis is rich, reflective, and grounded in participant experience, it represents only the first layer of understanding. With more time, continuity, and longitudinal follow-up, future evaluations could more fully trace how early indicators of emotional attunement can develop into longer-term cultural and environmental change.

## 6.Findings

Evaluation findings from *The Air We Share* reveal several overarching insights about how creative practice can foster public engagement with climate and environmental issues.

## 6.1 Understanding Begins with Experience

Across activities, participants engaged most deeply when environmental ideas were *felt* rather than explained. Sensory encounters - seeing light respond to air quality, hearing pollution translated into sound, touching textile interpretations of air - helped transform abstract data into personal, immediate meaning. This stands in contrast to more traditional directive forms of climate communication, where people are told to "trust the scientist" or absorb expert information. Participants' reflections repeatedly showed that such top-down messaging can feel alienating or overwhelming and often fails to create genuine connection. By comparison, embodied, creative experiences invited people into environmental understanding on their own terms. This suggests that curiosity, empathy, and reflection emerge more readily through experience than instruction, and that meaningful climate engagement begins with attention and perception rather than data alone.

## 6.2 Collaboration as Shared Meaning-Making

*The Air We Share* demonstrated that collaboration is not just a way of delivering creative–climate projects, but one of their most powerful outcomes. When artists, scientists, community workers, and civic bodies worked side by side, each group learned to see the environmental issue differently. Artists became more confident engaging with data; scientists discovered the value of metaphor, narrative, and sensory communication; and Galway City Council were able to observe how creative approaches can sit alongside policy goals while still making space for experimentation and risk. The project demonstrated that creative practice can

deepen public engagement, support cross-departmental collaboration, and reveal how policy conversations benefit from the lived experiences, emotions, and insights of the community.

However, the project also revealed how hard cross-sector collaboration can be in contemporary working cultures. The pace of modern institutional life - tight schedules, competing priorities, and limited availability - made it difficult for partners to slow down enough to build shared understanding. Creative collaboration requires precisely the opposite conditions: time, attention, and space for deep listening. When these were available, dialogue flourished; when they weren't, connections were slower to form.

Even with these challenges, the project showed that collaboration itself becomes a form of learning. Working together across disciplines helped participants and partners recognise the limits of their own languages, assumptions, and habits. It also highlighted the need for structures that support ongoing relationship-building, not just one-off meetings, to ensure that creativity and policy can inform one another meaningfully. In this way, collaboration acted as both a method of producing the work and a message about how climate responses must be formed: not in isolation, but through shared effort, shared knowledge, and shared imagination.

## 6.3 Shared Emotional Experience Builds Community

A clear pattern across the evaluation is that emotional experience did more than shape individual responses, it actively helped build community connection and belonging. Participants frequently described feeling calm, curious, reflective, or even unsettled, and these emotions became shared points of connection. Rather than isolating people, the artworks and workshops

created environments where people could feel alongside others, opening space for collective reflection.

Soundwalks, textile sessions, and exhibition visits encouraged people to slow down together, to breathe, listen, and pay attention to their surroundings in the company of others. Participants spoke about "*feeling connected*" and becoming "*more mindful of the air*," highlighting how sensory experiences supported not just environmental awareness but also social closeness. This kind of shared attentiveness helped transform climate concerns from abstract anxieties into collective experiences, making it easier for people to discuss, question, and explore environmental issues in a supportive setting.

The project also demonstrated that emotional resonance can sustain engagement over time. People continued talking about their experiences long after events ended, reflecting on what they had felt and learned with neighbours, family, and community groups. These exchanges supported a broader sense of environmental identity within Westside; a feeling that the topic of air quality is not just important, but genuinely *theirs* to explore, protect, and act on. For instance, the success of *The Air We Share* project has encouraged local organisations to take steps towards greater environmental awareness with the newly emerging Climate Action Westside community group being a very positive example of this progression.

In this way, *The Air We Share* shows that emotional responses are not peripheral to climate engagement: they are a social glue that binds participants together, fosters community confidence, and encourages ongoing grassroots participation. Emotional connection helped

transform environmental awareness into a shared cultural concern and became a key driver of the community-building momentum observed throughout the project.

## 6.4. Enduring Local Pride as a Driver for Climate Action

One of the most powerful and lasting outcomes of *The Air We Share* was the strong sense of local pride cultivated through community co-creation, especially around *The Nine Freedoms for the Air* textile. When this collaboratively stitched artwork was publicly exhibited at the Galway Arts Centre, participants described feeling "*proud*," "*represented*," and "*part of something in Galway.*" Seeing their contributions displayed in a major cultural venue validated their effort and deepened their connection to the project, transforming the artwork into a shared civic achievement rather than a temporary creative output.

This echoes a pattern seen in another successful Galway City Council (2021) initiative; *Greening the Laneways*, where young people and residents worked with Galway City Council Parks staff and professional artists to plant edible landscapes, install pollinator-friendly greenery, and paint vibrant murals. The project, widely regarded as a local success, demonstrated how hands-on creative work can transform unloved public spaces into areas the community actively cares for and feels proud of. Importantly, the enduring pride generated through the laneway transformations did not end when the action days concluded; residents continued maintaining the plantings themselves. This shows how pride can translate into stewardship.

*The Air We Share* produced a similar effect. By placing community-created artworks at the heart of the final exhibition, the project fostered a long-lasting emotional investment that

extends far beyond the timeline of the residency. This pride is not just a positive emotional outcome; it is a major asset for future climate action. Evidence from the postcards, workshop reflections, and partner discussions shows that when people feel ownership over creative environmental work, they are more likely to stay engaged, share what they've learned, and participate in new initiatives.

This trajectory is already visible in Westside. Inspired in part by the connections and conversations generated through *The Air We Share*, and as mentioned above, local partners have supported the emergence of Climate Action Westside, a community-led group exploring ongoing environmental activities. The textile, the soundwalks, and the public events have become reference points locals recognise and speak about, shared cultural anchors that make climate conversations easier, more accessible, and more personal.

In this way, community pride becomes a catalyst: from making to belonging to caring to acting. By nurturing pride in shared creative achievements, *The Air We Share* lays essential groundwork for long-term, community-driven environmental stewardship.

Figure 1. The Pride Pathway Model: How Creative Participation Leads to Climate Engagement.

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

THE AIR WE SHARE

Clár Éire Ildánach
*Creative Ireland Programme*

**CREATIVE INVITATION**
- Workshops, co-creation,shared storytelling

**MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION**
- Hands-on making, dialogue, shared authorship

**SENSE OF OWNERSHIP**
- "This is ours." "I'm part of it."

**COMMUNITY PRIDE**
- Public display, recognition, visibility

**EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT**
- Care, connection, willingness to stay involved in environmental issues

**SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT**
- Joining groups, continued learning, interest in future climate initiatives

**CIVIC & ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION**
- Stewardship, advocacy, behaviour change, participation in policy conversations

## 6.5 Multimodal Creativity Expands Access to Climate Learning

One of the clearest learnings from *The Air We Share* is that different forms of creative engagement open different doors for participation. The project's multimodal design, combining sound, textiles, workshops, digital installations, and public events, created multiple entry points for people with different interests, abilities, and learning styles. This diversity of formats proved crucial in making a complex topic like air quality accessible, relatable, and emotionally engaging.

For some, technology was the spark. Building DIY sensors or listening to real-time air data through Christopher Steenson's soundwalk allowed participants to relate to environmental information in ways that felt concrete and immediate. For others, artmaking was the bridge: stitching in the textile workshops created a calm, reflective space where people could talk, share stories, and explore ideas about air without the pressure of "understanding the science." Public events, including film screenings, talks, and the exhibition, drew in audiences who might not normally attend scientific or community meetings, opening opportunities for new conversations and shared learning.

This multimodal approach also benefitted scientists and partners, who described gaining new insights from working alongside artists and community groups. Sound, for example, became a surprising but effective method for communicating cause and effect in air pollution, revealing changes that are normally invisible. These exchanges showed that climate communication is not only about conveying facts but about finding forms that help people feel and interpret those facts.

At the same time, the evaluation identified one limitation: although the overall engagement was multimodal, the final exhibition leaned heavily toward visual art, which may have limited how some audiences experienced the themes. Future iterations could continue expanding the sensory palette; integrating more sound, movement, interactive elements, and tactile experiences to deepen accessibility and sustain the strengths demonstrated throughout the workshops and sound-based activities.

Overall, the project showed that climate engagement is most powerful when there are multiple pathways into the topic, *The Air We Share* enabled people to approach environmental issues in ways that felt natural, meaningful, and rooted in their own interests. This inclusive, layered approach stands out as one of the project's strongest achievements and a valuable model for future creative-climate initiatives.

## 6.6 Rethinking the Open Call Model for Creative–Community Projects

A further learning that emerged during reflection was the need to reconsider whether the open call model is always the most effective way to commission socially engaged, community-based art. While open calls can promote fairness and transparency, they are increasingly recognised as an overused mechanism, one that may not always serve projects requiring deep community trust, specific skill sets, or sustained interdisciplinary collaboration.

The experience of *The Air We Share* suggests that not all creative-climate projects benefit from starting with an open call, especially when the work requires artists who are already experienced in participatory practice, environmental themes, or community partnership. Projects

that rely heavily on long-term relationship-building often depend on artists with proven strengths in facilitation, care-focused practice, and local engagement. In such cases, commissioning based on past record, demonstrated expertise, and relational fit may produce stronger outcomes and smoother delivery.

Open calls also place considerable demands on artists, who must invest unpaid time in speculative applications. This can unintentionally disadvantage those with less capacity, often the very artists most skilled in community-based work. Conversely, a more targeted commissioning approach can support artists more sustainably while still maintaining transparency through clear criteria, open reporting, and community oversight.

For future programmes, a hybrid model may be more effective:

- Targeted commissioning for roles requiring specialised skills or deep community engagement, and
- Open calls where wide experimentation or new voices are genuinely desired.

This approach would recognise that socially engaged climate work is not only about generating new artistic ideas, but about cultivating relationships, trust, and continuity, aspects that often grow strongest when rooted in the experience and track record of the practitioners involved.

## 6.7. Measuring Resonance, Not Only Behavior

Traditional evaluation tools, attendance numbers, carbon savings, or counts of "actions taken", capture only a narrow slice of the impact created by creative climate projects. *The Air We Share* demonstrated that meaningful engagement rarely begins with behaviour change. Instead, it

begins with resonance: small shifts in perception, language, emotion, and awareness that accumulate over time.

Participants described noticing the air differently, paying attention to breath, discussing pollution at home, or feeling a new sense of shared responsibility. These early changes do not fit neatly into short-term behavioural metrics, yet they are the foundation on which lasting environmental action is built. Expecting immediate behaviour change is not only unrealistic, it can be tokenistic, overlooking the deeper cultural work required for people to care, connect, and act meaningfully.

Because of this, evaluation frameworks for creative climate action need to move beyond simple outputs and adopt richer qualitative indicators. Measures of attentiveness, emotional connection, empathy, and collective imagination reveal how people internalise environmental issues and how ideas ripple through a community. These relational and perceptual shifts are often the strongest predictors of sustained engagement.

By valuing resonance alongside quantitative outcomes, funders and policymakers can better recognise the long-term cultural groundwork laid by creative projects, groundwork that enables future behavioural change, rather than demanding it prematurely.

## 6.8 Leadership-Level Buy-In and Institutional Alignment

A key learning from *The Air We Share* is that the success of creative climate initiatives depends not only on the quality of artistic engagement or the enthusiasm of communities, but on early and sustained involvement from senior decision-makers. While artists and residents were

deeply engaged throughout the project, the evaluation highlighted that opportunities to embed learning into policy and strategic planning were limited when leadership-level engagement was inconsistent.

Project partners observed that responsibility for translating creative and community insight into institutional action often fell to project leads operating without the authority to influence senior-level decision-making. In practice, this meant that learning generated through workshops, exhibitions, and dialogue did not always reach the levels of governance where resources, priorities, and follow-on initiatives are shaped. For example, engagement from Galway County Council was less embedded than originally anticipated, tending to be episodic rather than fully integrated. This occasionally resulted in communication gaps, slower decision-making, and reduced visibility of the project within internal Council structures, limiting opportunities for deeper cross-departmental collaboration across arts, science, and climate action.

This experience reflects a broader challenge within creative–policy collaborations. Without leadership-level participation, creative climate projects risk being warmly supported but structurally sidelined; recognised as good practice, yet disconnected from the systems that determine long-term environmental outcomes. By contrast, when senior leaders actively participate, attending events, engaging with artists and communities, and endorsing learning, creative projects can move beyond pilot activity to become catalysts for institutional and cultural change.

In this sense, the “audience” for future Creative Climate Action initiatives must include not only residents and cultural participants, but also elected representatives, directors of service,

and senior managers. Their involvement should be meaningful rather than symbolic: experiencing creative work first-hand, engaging with community insight, and supporting pathways from reflection to implementation.

Looking ahead, future interdisciplinary programmes would benefit from:

- **A dedicated, full-time Project Coordinator** with responsibility for coordination, relationship-building, and day-to-day decision-making;
- **A cross-departmental steering group within the local authority**, meeting regularly and ensuring shared ownership of aims, progress, and outcomes; and
- **Clearly defined leadership roles and responsibilities**, agreed at project outset and sustained throughout delivery.

Embedding these structures would strengthen internal alignment, reduce administrative delays, and maximise the ability of local authorities to translate creative and scientific insight into long-term planning, public engagement strategies, and policy development. Ultimately, sustained leadership-level buy-in is essential if projects like *The Air We Share* are to realise their full potential as drivers of cultural, environmental, and community transformation.

## 6.9. Comparative Insight: How Similar Creative–Climate Projects Achieved Transformational Change

International examples show that creative practice can influence environmental policy when senior decision-makers are embedded directly into the artistic and collaborative process. *The Cape Farewell programme* (2024) is a well-documented case: artists, climate scientists, and

cross-party MPs undertook joint field expeditions and creative labs, using art to translate scientific data into sensory and emotional experience. Policymakers later credited these encounters with shifting how they understood and communicated climate issues, contributing to broader cultural and political momentum for climate action. Crucially, the programme worked not because artists "delivered messages," but because policymakers participated as co-learners, sharing the same reflective, affective, and exploratory space as artists and communities.

Additionally, experiences from a similar creative–climate project, *Culture Declares Emergency* (2024), show that meaningful, long-term impact only emerges when senior policymakers are engaged from the outset, not brought in at the end. With *Culture Declares Emergency*, councillors, city planners, and institutional leaders participated directly in workshops, exhibitions, or co-design processes, which allowed creative outputs to influence planning strategies, environmental policy, and organisational governance. By comparison, *The Air We Share* faced challenges because Galway City Council's involvement, though supportive, was not consistently embedded within day-to-day delivery. This limited opportunities to translate the project's innovative outputs, such as the community air-sensor network, into formal policy conversations or long-term planning frameworks.

This comparison highlights a key learning for *The Air We Share*: while the project succeeded in building strong relationships between artists, scientists, and residents, high-level policy actors were not consistently part of the creative process. This limited the project's ability to translate its insights into institutional or policy change. *The Cape Farewell* model illustrates

that genuine transformation requires structured engagement from senior leaders, those with authority to influence planning, climate strategy, and resource allocation.

As such, future iterations of *The Air We Share* would benefit from involving decision-makers from the outset in workshops, creative labs, and reflective dialogues. Embedding leadership in the artistic process ensures that the emotional, sensory, and communal knowledge generated at community level can meaningfully inform policy thinking, rather than remaining siloed within project teams.

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