



Future Island-Island Green Transition Ecosystem

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1
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Future Island-Island Green Transition Ecosystem

About

Green Transition Ecosystems (GTEs) are major initiatives funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in collaboration with the Design Museum's Future Observatory. These projects focus on translating design-led research into practical, real-world applications. GTEs integrate arts, humanities, and material innovation across multidisciplinary fields related to net zero and the green transition. Four national projects have been funded, including Future Island-Island, which aims to develop an eco-friendly approach for Northern Ireland. This project focuses on using circular economies to add value to waste, preserving heritage through digital technologies, and driving innovation in materials to support sustainable futures.

Approach

Future Island-Island explores community-informed approaches to the green transition through co-design and place-based engagement. Working closely with the Rathlin Island community, as both lens and teacher, we explore a diversity of community ideas and approaches to shaping a just green transition. The work is structured in two phases: (1) 2023–2025 and (2) 2025–2028.

Impact

As of August 2025, a diverse range of discrete demonstrators presents impact and pathways to impact. These are illustrated through Impact Cards, adapted from Design Research for Change by AHRC-funded Design Priority Area Leadership Fellow (Rodgers et al, 2022, Rodgers, 2024).

Rodgers, P.A. and Waring, L., *What Design Research Does...*, Lancaster University, Lancaster, 2022, ISBN 978-1-86220-389-1. *62 Cards Highlighting the Power and Impact of UK-based Design Research in Addressing a Range of Complex Social, Economic, Cultural and Environmental Issues. Advance online publication.*

Rodgers, P. (2024). What does design research do? *Proceedings of DRS, DRS2024*, Article 105. <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers/drs2024/researchpapers/105/>



Future Island-Island Green Transition Ecosystem

Phase One
(01 Oct 2023 – 30 Sep 2025)

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



 FUTURE
OBSERVATORY

Future Island-Island GTE

Phase One (01 Oct 2023 – 30 Sep 2025)

About

Future Island-Island Phase One is a 24-month project led by Ulster University in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast, Glasgow School of Art, and University of the Arts London, alongside 12 local companies. The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and supported by the Design Museum's Future Observatory research programme.

Director: Professor Justin Magee (Ulster University)

Approach

Phase One comprises five work packages:

1. Product Waste Ecosystems exploring WEEE and waste plastics as commodities through R-strategies.
2. Digital Green Transition using cultural research, scanning, and immersive technologies to create accessible visitor experiences and bring oral histories to life.
3. Organic Waste Ecosystems examining relationships between people, food, land, natural fibres, and water.
4. Designing Sustainable Futures Education developing engaging learning materials and experiences that connect people of all ages with their environment and empower them to shape its future.
5. Green Policies applying emergent design methods to design, evaluate, and iterate policy.

Collaborators

Company co-investigators include Big Motive, BigSmall Design, The BIG Idea, Malcolm Beatie, CARD Group, National Museums NI, Plaswire, Rathlin Development and Community Association (RDCA), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), The Odyssey W5, Todd Architects and Yellow Design. In addition, there were more than 30 in-kind partners across the region.



Future Island-Island Green Transition Ecosystem

Phase Two
(01 Oct 2025 – 31 Mar 2028)

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



 FUTURE
OBSERVATORY

Future Island-Island GTE

Phase One (01 Oct 2023 – 30 Sep 2025)

About

Future Island-Island Phase Two is led by Ulster University in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast, Glasgow School of Art, and University of the Arts London, alongside nine local and international companies. The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and supported by the Design Museum's Future Observatory research programme.

Director: Professor Justin Magee (Ulster University)

Co-Director: Dr Clare Mulholland (Queen's University Belfast)

Approach

Phase Two builds on Phase One through three cross-cutting themes designed to scale and deepen impact across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Scotland:

1. DREAM (Developing Revolutionary Eco-friendly Alternatives with Materials) focuses on integrating circular waste materials, particularly ocean plastics and wool.
2. GREENLINK digitally connects communities across lighthouse locations in harder-to-reach areas through place-based immersive experiences.
3. The EAST LIGHT is a place-based demonstrator for a knowledge economy hub and island community imagination space centred on Net Zero and green discourse, enabling socio-economic sustainability.

Collaborators

Company co-investigators include BigSmall Design, CHARTS Argyll and Isles, Hub Games, Future Ready Lab, the Nordic Alliance of Artists' Residencies on Climate Action (NAARCA), Rathlin Development and Community Association (RDCA), Todd Architects, the Void Art Centre, and Yellow Design. In addition, there are many existing and new in-kind partners.



Beach Clean 2.0: Valorisation of Ocean Plastics through People Power

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Beach Clean 2.0: Valorisation of Ocean Plastics through People Power



BIGsmall



Challenge

Beach cleaning reduces litter and encourages ocean stewardship by increasing participants' environmental awareness. Plastics, especially, travel globally and persist in the oceans for prolonged periods. Current collection efforts typically focus on removing litter rather than exploring the journey of the materials found and their potential for circular valorisation.

Approach

This investigation was informed by 'enviro-leisure activism' (Power, 2021) and 'Positive Design' (Desmet & Pohlmeier, 2013) theories. Through iterative design and usability evaluation, the team devised a citizen beach plastic collection system using colour-coded bags to sort materials by family type. Usability of the process was assessed using the UMUX survey.

Outcomes

On International Coastal Clean-up Day 2024, Beach Clean 2.0 was tested at seven locations along Ireland's northern coastline – from the most southeastern part of Northern Ireland (Kilkeel) to the most northwestern in the Republic of Ireland (Moville). During a 1-hour period, ninety-six participants collected 172.3kg of waste, 36.0% being ocean plastics.

Learnings

The post-event UMUX score averaged 74.7, slightly below the 80 target. However, trust (85.4) and value (86.5) scored 'excellent', demonstrating the process has significant merit. Feedback highlighted the need for easier equipment carrying and better bag sizes. Service design and circular infrastructure logistics remain essential to improve the system.

Impact

This new citizen collection method gained strong support from national groups, showing its potential to transform beach cleaning behaviours. It demonstrates how waste can be valorised into a plastic retrieval commodity, has potential for circular materials supply chains, and can advance 'enviro-leisure activism' through public knowledge, activism and material awareness.



Beach Plastics Material Processing

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Beach Plastics Material Processing

Challenge

Beach plastics collected during clean-ups often comprise mixed materials contaminated with sand and organic matter, complicating recycling efforts. Implementing the Beach Clean 2.0 methodology, which emphasises sorting at the source, streamlines material flow and polymer purity, critical factors for effective mechanical recycling and the development of circular plastic systems.

Approach

Rathlin Island beach clean plastics were sampled and analysed using infrared spectroscopy, revealing substantial quantities of polypropylene twine, polyethylene rope, and mixed rigid plastics. Polypropylene twine was cleaned, dried, and processed into filament through a twin-screw extruder, successfully 3D printing a test object.

Outcomes

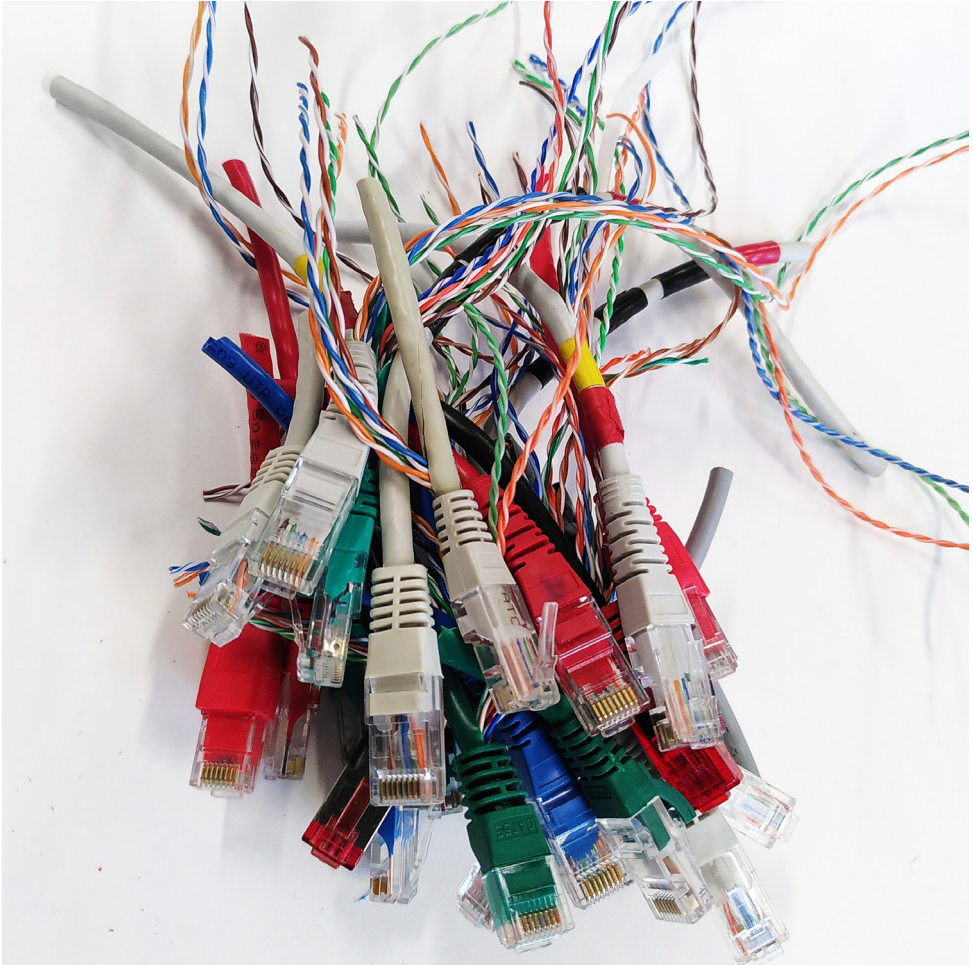
International students reprocessed cleaned, dried polypropylene twine by hand-feeding it into a twin-screw extruder during a summer school. The initial extrudate was chipped and re-fed, achieving a uniform filament diameter crucial for 3D printing. Despite limited production, the filament successfully printed a test object on an entry-level 3D printer.

Learnings

This exercise provided students with hands-on experience in polymer processing, material characterisation, and circular design principles. Despite residual sand and organic contamination, the final filament typically achieved a diameter of 1.75 mm — indicating the technical viability of the concept for producing 3D printing filament from recovered beach plastics.

Impact

By applying the Beach Clean 2.0 methodology and identifying valuable 3D printing feedstock, the project showed that beach plastic can become functional material. A printed test object demonstrated potential for repair and reuse on Rathlin Island, highlighting how citizen science and education can advance circular solutions for coastal communities.



**Circular Resource Recovery from
E-Waste (Cables)**

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Circular Resource Recovery from E-Waste (Cables)



Challenge

To enable a circular economy, exemplars of community level practice are needed, especially for complex waste like electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE). As a demonstrator project, obsolete WEEE electrical cables within Ulster University were diverted from disposal with options for reuse and resource recovery explored.

Approach

An awareness campaign and general WEEE cables collection was organised for International E-Waste Day 2024. The resulting cables were sorted and catalogued to identify value through reuse and materials recycling. Partnership with McKENZIES NI recovered copper and plastic materials for sustainable reuse/remanufacturing. WEEE items were repurposed into education resource projects.

Outcomes

2.5 tonnes of WEEE were diverted from waste with recovered copper sold to primary manufacturing. Recovered plastic insulation was remanufactured into infrastructure products (traffic cones) showcasing value creation from WEEE. Internal discussions prompted procurement policy update to prevent on-site WEEE generation of both unused and end of life items.

Learnings

Education and convenience encourage participation in this responsible, sustainable WEEE disposal. Analysis of the collection revealed systemic inefficiencies with supply of unnecessary or regionally mismatched power cables, adapters etc which were diverted from disposal to reuse partners. Cost barriers to WEEE disposal can be addressed through procurement to enable manufacture take-back.

Impact

WEEE cables 12 times the height of the Empire State building were diverted from waste, with all items reused or materials recovered to enable circular manufacturing. The project motivated institutional procurement update and ignited partnerships between academics, industry, community and policy stakeholders. Craft-based WEEE education activities were developed to inspire change.



Circular Resource Repair Culture

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Circular Resource Repair Culture



NIRN
National Institute for Research in Repair and Reuse



Belfast
City Council



Challenge

In a circular economy, reuse, repair, and re-manufacturing are prioritised over recycling. To inform urban approaches, this project explored Rathlin Island's living history of sustainable practice, where a resilient community relies on resourceful design and local knowledge to maintain a strong culture of repair, reuse, and long-term material stewardship.

Approach

In collaboration with NIRN, the project combined archival review, informal interviews, and photography to explore Rathlin's resilience through innovation, repair, reuse, and skills development. A co-designed Repair Café further supported this by enabling skill-sharing between island residents and visiting repair enthusiasts, highlighting community knowledge and sustainable practices.

Outcomes

Reports, presentations, vignettes, and photographs captured examples of resilience and repair culture across generations. Interviews highlighted polymath repairers whose skills came from family, observation, formal education, and online resources. A podcast and graphic recording documented the successful Repair Café, showcasing community knowledge-sharing and the value of hands-on sustainable practices.

Learnings

Case studies from Rathlin's long standing culture of self-sufficiency and repair can inspire urban communities. Whilst tools can be sourced, the skills development and confidence to enable repair are essential and should be highly valued. Repair Cafés harness community spirit and cooperation to enact circular economic thinking through skills sharing.

Impact

The project documented Rathlin's rich but sometimes undervalued culture of repair. Case studies showcased the value of local design thinking and repair skills. The Repair Café diverted 30 items from landfill (139kg ~1,554kg CO₂ savings) and inspired the community to continue the initiative, encouraging knowledge-sharing and supporting sustainable, circular practices.



Oral Histories:
Learning from Rathlin

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Oral Histories: Learning from Rathlin

YellowDesign

BOATHOUSE
VISITOR
CENTRE &
MUSEUM

NATIONAL
MUSEUMS NI

Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council



Challenge

How can stories and oral histories from Rathlin Island's past shape future environmental action? This project explores how local knowledge of sustainable living and resource use can support climate resilience and guide design thinking within a green transition ecosystem, helping to address climate change and contribute to net-zero goals.

Approach

This project focused on gathering and reviewing oral histories and folklore about life on Rathlin Island. It used material collected in recent years by the Rathlin Oral History Group, as well as older records from other archived collections. The stories highlight sustainability, self-reliance, and resourcefulness in the island's past.

Outcomes

A printed booklet and prototype website shared themes from Rathlin's sustainable past through stories, audio and images. A full thematic book will be published in Autumn 2025. The island narratives and stories of resilience and sustainability have been shared at civic events and festivals to engage audiences in reflecting on Rathlin's past, drawing lessons from traditional practices to inspire greener, community-rooted behaviours. These stories are also embedded across the wider Future Island-Island project, connecting design thinking to the island's rich heritage and grounding innovation in place-based knowledge and lived experience.

Learnings

Past innovations and practices from Rathlin Island can guide the Future-Island project and support design in a green transition ecosystem. Oral histories offer insights into sustainability and resilience, encouraging local participation. Combining traditional knowledge with modern science helps create innovative, sustainable solutions with global relevance for climate and community challenges.

Impact

This project strengthens the Future Island-Island initiative by linking Rathlin's heritage to sustainability goals. Insights linked to the fisherman's gansey jersey support wool projects, while repair culture stories encourage reuse. Online platforms, publications, and events raise awareness, reinforcing green transition sustainable habits and community-led environmental change.



Digitally Crafting the Brockley Axe

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Digitally Crafting the Brockley Axe

YellowDesign



Challenge

Rathlin Island possesses historically and culturally significant unique artefacts. However, challenges relating to ownership and preservation can limit public access. This project investigates the potential of digital twins to enhance the accessibility of these precious artefacts for educational purposes.

Approach

This project developed an authentic virtual experience of crafting and manipulating the Brockley Axe within its hypothesised historical context, collaborating with the Green family who own this artefact. The methodology integrated historical documentation on porcellanite axe production, VR, and digital twins to facilitate an immersive and authentic educational experience.

Outcomes

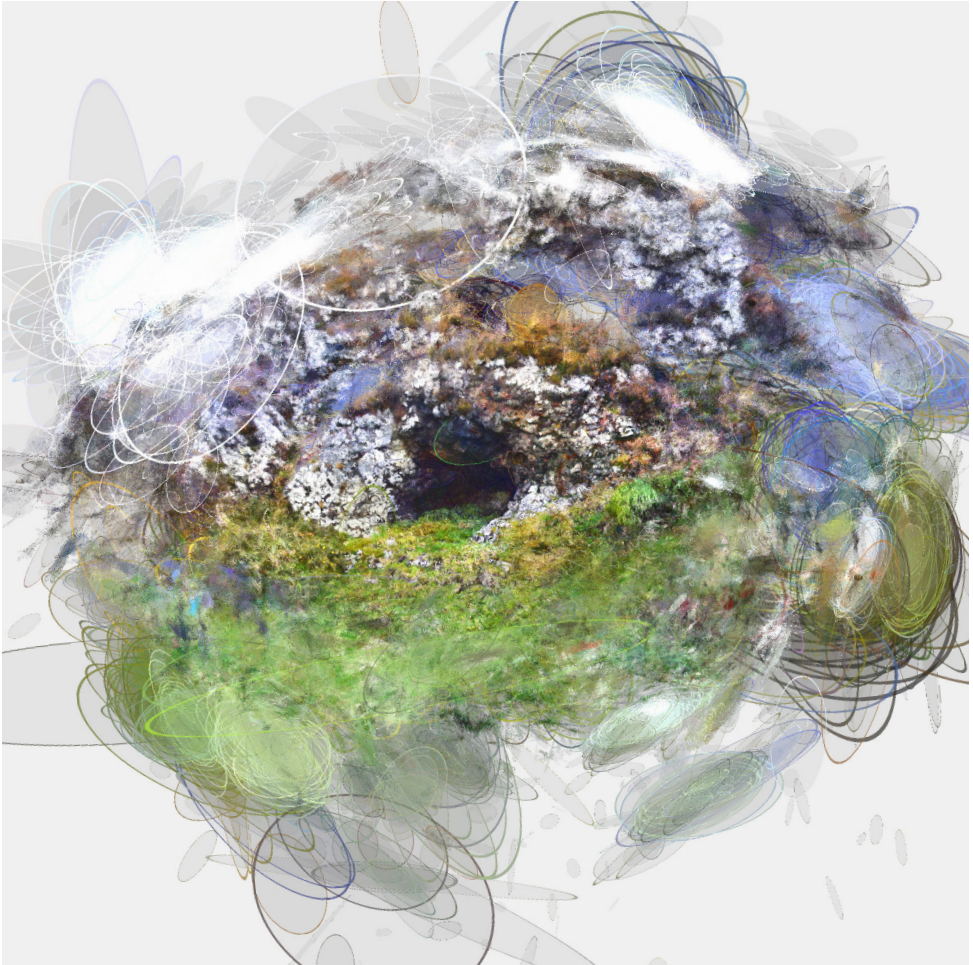
The project delivered an immersive VR experience instructing users on the creation of a porcellanite Neolithic axe. Centred on a digital twin of the Brockley Axe, the experience is available in two formats: one using hand tracking for natural interaction, the other using VR controllers to provide haptic feedback. An accurate 3D printed replica was produced with weighted infills (Length 310mm: Weight 2.962kg).

Learnings

This research facilitated essential learning regarding diverse creative pipelines and the significance of integrating authentically produced digital twins. Furthermore, it involved obtaining user experience feedback from stakeholders, including Rathlin Island residents, academics, and museum representatives, alongside the development of relationships with prospective museum and island stakeholders.

Impact

This project culminated in an immersive experience recreating a Neolithic axe, offering a model for designing educational engagements with rare artefacts. It demonstrates how virtual production can solve preservation challenges and support the integration of historically significant objects into museum, community, and educational settings through accessible, interactive digital experiences.



Northern Ireland High Performance
Computing (NI-HPC) Case Study

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Northern Ireland High Performance Computing (NI-HPC) Case Study



Challenge

This project explores the use of 3D Gaussian Splatting (3DGS) to digitally reconstruct complex assets and environments that are difficult to capture with traditional methods. Leveraging AI and the sustainably optimised NI-HPC system, it generates high-resolution digital twins, supporting innovation in heritage preservation, virtual access, and green digital transformation.

Approach

As a novel approach to 3D scanning, 3DGS is achieved by processing footage into image sequences, which are stitched together to form datasets used by AI to build digital twins. The computationally intensive process was mitigated by NI-HPC's optimised tools, enabling time- and energy-efficient 3DGS production and pipeline integration.

Outcomes

3DGS models that once took days were produced in hours. The resulting high-accuracy 3D scans ran smoothly in game engines. Access to 3DGS files enabled testing within creative pipelines and exploration of more efficient methods. Key scans included the Brockley Axe Factory, with permission from the Green family and sections of the West Lighthouse.

Learnings

The NI-HPC facilitated the integration of 3DGS into our creative pipeline, enabling the definition of democratised and sustainable production methodologies for future projects. These methods incorporate a hybrid approach, combining traditional scanning with 3DGS techniques, thereby increasing accessibility for creatives seeking to adopt 3DGS.

Impact

The democratisation of 3DGS enables communities with limited resources to sustainably produce high-fidelity digital replicas, improving access to heritage sites and artefacts. Learning outcomes revealed the broad applicability of 3DGS across creative pipelines, extending its potential beyond tourism into sectors such as education, gaming, film, and digital storytelling.



Library of Prints & Poo

EU Horizon Grant: LIFE20 NAT/UK/000349
AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Challenge

Successful eradication projects rely on accurate animal identification. The Library of Prints and Poo is a documented collection of tracks, chew marks, scat, and prints to train field teams on Rathlin Island and around the world. This resource is essential for training staff and volunteers who may be new to wildlife identification.

Approach

We partnered with Future Island-Island to digitise the Library of Prints and Poo, creating a pedagogical tool to share lessons learned to support other eradication projects. Since rodenticide handling requires certification, digital access allows real-time sharing across projects worldwide. We began by photographing the collected specimens.

Outcomes

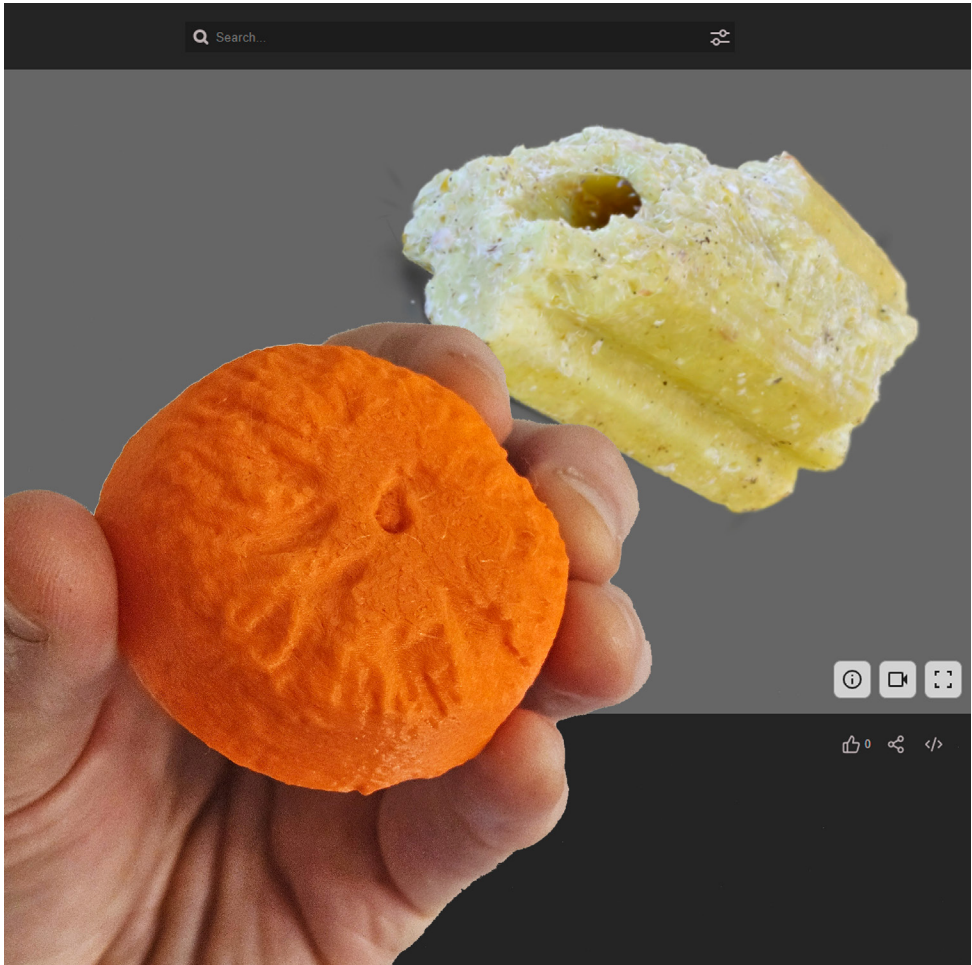
The specimens were photographed digitally and 3D printed. Initial prints were tested against originals, leading to a refined second print run with additional measurements applied. The images also created optimised photorealistic 3D models for training and knowledge sharing purposes.

Learnings

The extensive dataset requires dedicated research and development time. Creative approaches are needed to identify project scope and explore innovative solutions on how this valuable resource could expand. There is significant need and strong interest in the results from the global conservation community.

Impact

The Library of Prints and Poo enhances the LIFE Raft project's environmental legacy. It shares learning across conservation and eradication projects while promoting creative approaches within culture and society, improving project performance while building valuable skills.



Digital Library of Bites:
Bait & Block Imprint Marks

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1
EU Horizon Grant: LIFE20 NAT/UK/000349

Digital Library of Bites: Bait & Block Imprint Marks



Challenge

The LIFE Raft project is to eradicate the two invasive species of feral ferrets and rats on Rathlin Island. During the eradication rodenticide baits and wax blocks are used to test for the continued presence of these animals. Training teams and the community to recognise bite imprints is key to effective monitoring, however strict safety protocols restrict who can handle rodenticide.

Approach

Samples of rodenticide bait and wax blocks were 3D scanned using photogrammetry and converted into digital polygon models and Gaussian Splats creating a digital library demonstrator. The polygon models were converted into 3D printable files and rescaled to match their real-life size. Gaussian Splats were converted into digitally interactive 3D object files.

Outcomes

Three bite imprints from rat, mouse, and rabbit were accurately 3D printed to scale using partially recycled PLA (cornstarch) filament. Gaussian Splats captured the visual textures of the original samples. Collectively, these models offer a safe, effective way to educate people about the distinguishing features of different bite marks.

Learnings

Currently, bite mark education resources rely on photographic images. This new approach provides two types of 3D information, improving understanding of marks and scale. This information has benefit beyond eradication projects to domestic, hospitality and agriculture settings.

Impact

These digital files offer potential for an open-source database of bite imprints that could be shareable with other conservation projects and place-based communities worldwide if made accessible via a digital platform or through local 3D printing where needed.



Submersible Experience

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Submersible Experience

YellowDesign



Rathlin
Stickybeak



Committee of
IRISH LIGHTS

Navigation
and Marine
Services

Challenge

Rathlin Island receives 20,000 visitors yearly, creating challenges for preserving its natural and cultural heritage while meeting accessibility needs. This project explores how immersive and virtual technologies can improve access to remote areas, raise awareness of sustainability and plastic pollution, and inspire positive environmental behaviours through engaging, game-based experiences.

Approach

This project uses photogrammetry, LIDAR, and Gaussian Splatting to 3D scan Rathlin's key sites, creating digital twins for the Green Digital Transition. It includes co-design with stakeholders to ensure authentic representation of the island's ecosystem and community, culminating in a VR submersible experience of the Rathlin seabed.

Outcomes

Plastic debris collected by Rathlin Stickybeak has been digitised, archived with provenance data, and integrated into a VR submersible experience. The current prototype phase incorporates island scans, potential shipwrecks, and seabed topography. Future development will include endemic marine wildlife and refined seabed representation.

Learnings

The project delivered insights into sustainable digital twin production, defining efficient 3D scanning methods using photogrammetry, LIDAR, and Gaussian Splatting which was tested on the NI-HPC system for ethical AI training. Narrative, animation, and gamification helped researchers understand plastic pollution's impact on Rathlin's ecosystems and its broader global significance.

Impact

The VR submersible experience is expected to deliver impactful R&D outcomes, guiding sustainable digital content creation. It addresses ethical AI and 3D digital twin use for education, media production, and museums. It supports the Green Digital Transition by enabling access to remote areas and promoting sustainable plastic use via in-game narratives.



Colours of Rathlin

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Colours of Rathlin



IRISH GROWN
WOOL COUNCIL



Challenge

The Colours of Rathlin project explores natural dyeing using wool from the island, creatively repurposing non-indigenous plants and organic waste from local cafés and bars. This sustainable approach highlights Rathlin's unique ecology and culture while reducing waste and celebrating natural colour palettes through environmentally conscious textile practices.

Approach

The project uses practice-based research, combining ethnographic observation with experimental dye techniques. It engages local stakeholders through participatory methods, collecting plant materials and waste streams. The approach emphasises sustainability, material innovation, and place-based knowledge, with iterative testing and documentation informing both the creative process and environmental impact assessment.

Outcomes

Outputs include naturally dyed wool samples, a colour archive, and public exhibitions. Outcomes involve increased awareness of sustainable practices, strengthened community engagement, and reduced waste through creative reuse. The project fosters local pride, informs future eco-textile regenerative initiatives, and contributes to broader dialogues on sustainability, craft, and place-based innovation.

Learnings

The project reveals how Rathlin's colours can regenerate value from waste, transforming discarded materials into meaningful, place-specific textiles. It highlights the potential of local, non-indigenous plants and food waste as sustainable dye sources, encouraging circular practices, enhancing environmental awareness, and fostering a deeper connection between community, landscape, and craft.

Impact

This project enhances sustainability by repurposing local waste for natural dyeing, reducing landfill use. It promotes cultural and ecological awareness through community innovation, influencing sustainable practices regionally and nationally. Through workshops, exhibitions, and publications, it builds regenerative textile collaborations that embed circular economy principles in craft, education, and rural development.



Rathlin Wool Rope

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Rathlin Wool Rope



Challenge

Polypropylene ropes contribute significantly to marine contamination, shedding microplastics through wear and degradation. These particles persist in ocean ecosystems, harming marine life and entering the food chain. As synthetic materials, they do not biodegrade, leading to long-term pollution and raising urgent concerns about sustainability in maritime industries and practices.

Approach

The research employs a practice-led methodology, combining material testing, environmental analysis, and design innovation. It includes lab-based textile strength and durability trials, field testing in marine environments, and iterative prototyping. Collaborative engagement with fishers and maritime users ensures contextual relevance, while lifecycle assessment evaluates environmental impact and biodegradability.

Outcomes

Outputs include prototypes of 6–16 mm wool ropes made from home-grown Rathlin Blackface wool, performance data, and field trial reports. Outcomes demonstrate wool's potential as a sustainable alternative to synthetic ropes, supporting local wool economies, reducing marine microplastic pollution, and informing policy and industry on biodegradable rope innovation.

Learnings

Key learnings include the potential of Rathlin wool as a biodegradable alternative that eliminates microplastic release in kelp farming. Insights reveal the need for improved treatments to enhance water resistance and durability, while highlighting the value of local, renewable resources in supporting circular design, ecosystem health, and sustainable aquaculture practices.

Impact

The project promotes sustainable aquaculture practices by showcasing wool as an eco-friendly alternative to plastic ropes in kelp farming, reducing microplastic pollution. Collaborating with farmers, agencies, and industry, it shares findings through workshops and publications, encouraging biodegradable material use, informing policy, and supporting a shift toward circular, regenerative marine practices.



Regenerative Rathlin - Field Operations

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Regenerative Rathlin - Field Operations

MMAS

TODD



Challenge

Rural communities like Rathlin Island are often excluded from design-led regeneration processes. Simultaneously, early-career designers lack direct experience with remote, place-based sustainability challenges. This initiative addressed both by embedding co-design into a real-world context of ecological, cultural, and infrastructural importance.

Approach

A practice-led, immersive co-design methodology was used, combining workshops, lectures, walking interviews, speculative prototyping, and peer-led knowledge exchange. The week-long residency enabled iterative learning through real-time engagement between design fellows and Rathlin residents, guided by regenerative design frameworks.

Outcomes

Outputs included co-created design concepts, public engagement events, and visual documentation. Outcomes included stronger links between design and rural community resilience, new models for co-designing with island communities, and enhanced local understanding of design's role in sustainability and regeneration.

Learnings

Participants deepened their understanding of regenerative practice through place-based knowledge exchange. Design fellows developed empathetic, context-aware strategies; residents shared invaluable lived expertise. The residential highlighted the importance of embedding iterative, relational design within communities rather than designing in abstraction.

Impact

Field Operations has catalysed a regenerative design ecosystem in Northern Ireland, linking communities and designers through co-created knowledge. The model demonstrates a scalable method of rural engagement, embedding design within community resilience efforts, and positioning design as a transformative driver in resilient futures.



DesignLink: A Model for Co-design

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

DesignLink: A Model for Co-design

MMAS



FERRANAGH
COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

Climate
Northern Ireland

SPORTS
FORUM

MUD
IRELAND



BELFAST
DESIGN
WEEK

NNN
NATIONAL
MUSEUMS NI

Marianne
Green

Holylands
Regenerative
Association

Challenge

Emerging designers often lack structured opportunities to engage with industry during early-stage education. Simultaneously, local businesses face challenges accessing design-led innovation. DesignLink addresses this disconnect by facilitating co-design collaborations between early-stage creatives and Northern Ireland-based organisations.

Approach

DesignLink employed a practice-based, co-design methodology incorporating design sprints, client briefs, peer feedback, and live presentations. This iterative process supported real-time knowledge exchange between students, early-stage professionals, academics, organisations, and businesses, and foregrounded reflective pedagogical strategies in architectural and design education.

Outcomes

Outputs included 11 design briefs, 11 innovative design strategies, and a final showcase event. Outcomes include strengthened academic-industry collaboration, enhanced early-stage creatives portfolios, business-led strategic concepts, and opportunities for further funding applications or commercial development.

Learnings

Participants gained insights into client communication, sustainable design practice, and collaborative innovation. Academic staff identified strategies to better scaffold industry interaction in pedagogy. Businesses reported value in engaging with design thinking, identifying fresh design perspectives and potential talent pipelines.

Impact

DesignLink demonstrably improves design education by embedding live industry engagement, thus enhancing graduate employability and relevance. It creates a replicable model for university-SME collaboration, enabling design-led innovation with economic and social value. The project lays groundwork for future interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral co-design initiatives. A paper is currently in progress on how we can rethink co-design in these contexts.



Architects of Change Programme

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Architects of Change Programme



Challenge

Architects of Change (AOC) introduces environmental awareness to primary school children (KS1/KS2). The programme addresses the tension between short-term actions and long-term green ecosystem goals by supporting change-makers of the future, encouraging them to become active environmental thinkers and influential voices within their communities.

Approach

A mixed methods approach combining post-workshop surveys, children's art and poetry, and researcher reflections created a rich data set. Design-thinking methodology was used in workshops to explore sustainability challenges affecting children from marginalised communities, both on and off the island, ensuring their voices and experiences shaped the research process.

Outcomes

A paper has been submitted to the *Journal of Environmental Education Research*. The project delivered 55 workshops, engaging 299 children from 11 schools. Two "Design a Marine Beach Clean Board Game" workshops reached 35 children at the NI Science Festival. An educational game design activity pack is currently in development.

Learnings

Children's insights, artwork, and poetry show that using art and creative writing to teach environmental issues can lead to strong engagement and positive responses. Hands-on activities and creative freedom helped children connect more deeply with the topics. They responded best to learning by doing and valued the independence the workshops offered.

Impact

The programme reached 299 pupils from marginalised and under-engaged communities, inspiring new forms of artistic, social and literary expression. Teacher testimonials confirm enhanced environmental understanding through artistic and poetic methods. Children reported parents adopting sustainable practices at home following a recycling workshop, demonstrating effective knowledge transfer beyond the classroom.



Youth Engagement and Imaginarium

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Challenge

Young people today face many global environmental crises, but their experiences vary widely based on context. Young people in contexts of 'islandness' feel both more removed from and more connected to these challenges, shaped by their unique relationship with nature, isolation, and dependence on local ecosystems.

Approach

To explore sustainability challenges and solutions in this context, the programme involves young people experiencing different forms of geographical 'islandness'. Place-based educational approaches not only deepen learning by connecting it to lived experience but also help shape meaningful pathways toward a more sustainable and locally grounded future.

Outcomes

Developed through transdisciplinary collaboration with Youth Leaders in the Causeway Coast and Glens area, the programme supported four Youth Groups and six school classes in exploring local impacts of global challenges. They developed hopeful perspectives and designed potential responses, culminating in an interactive digital exhibition at Belfast's W5 museum.

Learnings

A diverse, transdisciplinary team of researchers, designers, educators and young people enabled the creation of a rich, multifaceted programme. Design thinking proved extremely valuable for educators, fostering creativity and helping young people develop hopeful, practical approaches to sustainability.

Impact

Over 200 young people in remote areas of Northern Ireland participated in reflecting and responding to sustainability issues. Youth leaders gained skills in creative design thinking, and participants developed meaningful, community-rooted responses. The Imaginarium brings all of these components together and further elevates hopeful imaginings of a future shaped by islandness.



Rathlin's Visual Minutes

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Rathlin's Visual Minutes

MORE THAN MINUTES



Challenge

From 2014 to 2023, ten visual minute boards captured Rathlin's oral histories, community goals, and environmental efforts. Commissioned by RDCA and partners, these reflect evolving island narratives. How can past co-design practices and sustainable approaches inform future design thinking in the context of climate change, green transition, and net-zero goals?

Approach

The research used a qualitative, arts-based approach, analysing visual minutes as community-generated data. Semi-structured interviews with those involved provided further insight. Visual and thematic analysis revealed key patterns, values, and aspirations. Grounded in co-design and participation, the method acknowledges these recordings as a rich form of place-based knowledge and insight.

Outcomes

A regular presence on Rathlin built trust and strengthened local relationships. Thematic analysis informed a printed booklet timeline of the island's evolving story. Supporting materials contributed to other wider project activities, including a workshop at St. Mary's school and presentations at DRS 2024 and NIG 2025 conferences.

Learnings

Rathlin's co-design processes, seen in the visual minutes, provided valuable insights for the Future Island–Island project. These visuals revealed resilience, sustainability, and empowered local participation, showing how creative methods help communities express their history and aspirations in ways that connect locally and beyond.

Impact

The project revealed Rathlin's history of co-design, resilience, and sustainable practices. Insights and analysis informed policy-focused work across the wider project by grounding it in community experience. It demonstrated how stories of public engagement through creative methods promote participatory practice and inspires place-based approaches to sustainability and long-term strategic planning.



Democratic Mini Public
(Rathlin Citizens Panel)

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Democratic Mini Public (Rathlin Citizens Panel)



Challenge

Rathlin Island, like many organisations, relies on a committee for decision-making, which can be challenging. A committee often struggles to reflect the full community's views, and much of the work is rarely truly collective. Engaging all island residents on specific issues takes time and effort, making meaningful participation difficult to achieve.

Approach

Participatory Action Research is a collaborative approach where those affected by the subject are active partners in all stages, aiming to create socially just change. Research through Design (RtD) places design at the core of the process, followed by a political/design ethnography to examine its impact within community and social contexts.

Outcomes

The Rathlin Citizens Panel has produced 16 recommendations for the Department of Infrastructure, reflecting the community's collective will. Dialogue with the Minister of Infrastructure has been enabled. This democratic infrastructure strengthens local agency and may reshape personal dynamics on the island, helping to build new relationships and repair existing ones.

Learnings

Ongoing learnings show early co-design is essential, and locally relevant, practical topics work best. Securing strong stakeholder support early is key. Budgeting challenges reveal insights on affordability. Context-specific methods build ownership. Clear public communication, relationship management, and engaging DMP 'substitutes' matter. Lack of anonymity also brings important learning opportunities.

Impact

The DMP has sparked policy debate in Northern Ireland, highlighting democratic innovation in the absence of similar models. Expert-led partnerships will support the community. Methodologies connect approaches to outcomes, particularly in facilitation design. Relationships built, though hard to quantify, matter deeply in small communities. Public engagement encourages wider community-led action.



Rathlin Creative Fellowship

Creative Fellow: Charlotte Bonsanquet
Co-Investigators: Dr Emma Campbell & Johnny Weir



Rathlin's Biodigester – Composter

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



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FUTURE
OBSERVATORY

Rathlin's Biodigester – Composter

Challenge

Rathlin Island's organic waste from homes and gardens goes into brown bins, collected by a lorry from Ballycastle. Soil, often peat-based and bought in plastic, raises sustainability, biosecurity, and rat control concerns. This fellowship explores links between waste handling, imported soil, and the aspiration for the island's rat-free status.

Approach

Charlotte has investigated how other communities process food and garden waste, particularly those that produce biogas from composting. She has examined models at Leeana (Galway) and Clandeboye Estate (County Down) and explored custom composting for local use. She has also collaborated with artist, Paddy Bloomer, who brings additional expertise to the design and fabrication of bespoke waste solutions.

Outcomes

The initiative investigates a custom composter to process food waste into nutrient-rich soil, reducing reliance on imports and bin lorry trips. This approach cuts the island's carbon footprint, strengthens food security, and boosts biosecurity by minimising the risk of rats arriving with external waste services.

Learnings

Biodigesters require substantial, consistent feedstock for effective gas production. Given Rathlin Island's waste profile, prioritising soil creation through composting emerges as both more important and achievable for local benefit.

Impact

The composter would give the island greater autonomy, delivering food security, significant waste reduction, and positive environmental effects. Enhanced biosecurity is a key outcome. The fellowship catalyses cultural and societal change through creative, locally led solutions and open, community-based learning.



Rathlin Creative Fellowship

Creative Fellow: **Stewart Geddes**
Co-Investigator: **Dr Edwar Calderón**



**Rhythms of Sustainability
& Cross-Cultural Collaboration**

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



Challenge

This fellowship addressed the challenge of working with unfamiliar materials collected on Rathlin Island, adapting an instrument-making workshop to their characteristics. The aim was to create a meaningful cultural exchange that used music, play, and creativity to foster environmental reflection, community pride, and cross-cultural connection despite linguistic and cultural differences.

Approach

Stewart collaborated with the Innovaser Collective from Colombia, known for repurposing waste into instruments, to lead a participatory workshop on Rathlin. The methodology blended reused materials, body percussion, songwriting, and analogue/digital sound exploration. This immersive, cross-cultural collaboration created a shared space to connect art, environment, and community.

Outcomes

The fellowship revealed how methodology evolves through community participation and storytelling. Local materials became both creative media and prompts for environmental dialogue, in this case producing a song. It demonstrated that place-based, collaborative arts practice, especially with international artists, can inspire shared reflection and context-rooted sustainable strategies.

Learnings

The fellowship demonstrated that methodologies often evolve with context, shaped by participants' stories, knowledge, and lived experience. Local resources became creative tools for artistic expression and environmental reflection. The process showed how collaboration, adaptability, and place-based materials can inspire collective strategies for community care and sustainable practice.

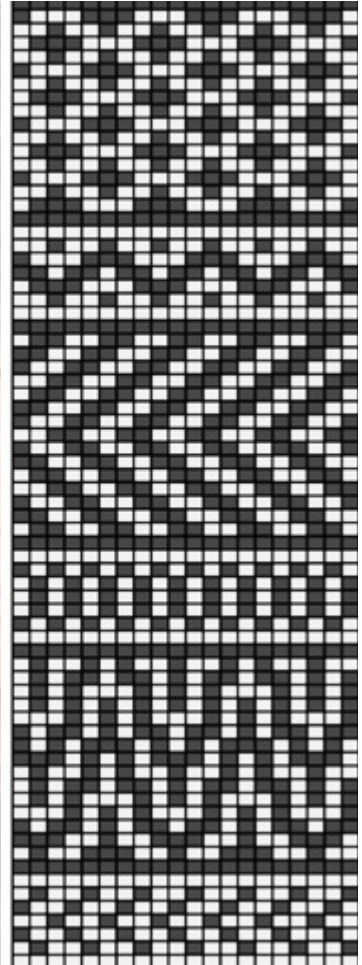
Impact

This project drives cultural, educational, and economic impact by embedding immersive climate futures into public life. Through speculative design and participatory storytelling, it equips communities with the tools to understand and shape responses to climate risk. By fostering creative retention and informing design policy, it strengthens local capacity for just and imaginative adaptation.



Rathlin Creative Fellowship

Creative Fellow: Patricia Harbinson
Co-Investigator: Prof Alison Gault



Hooked on Rathlin

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



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Hooked on Rathlin

Challenge

How can Rathlin-based micro knitwear business, *Hooked on Rathlin* evolve alongside the Future Island–Island waste wool project to support a green transition? This research develops Rathlin-inspired knitwear designs and colourways in 100% local wool, celebrating heritage while advancing sustainable production and contributing to circular, place-based economies.

Approach

Exploring Rathlin's heritage of utilitarian clothing to develop flat-bed knitting machine designs, a visit to Fair Isle examined crofters' production and sale of 100% Shetland wool knitwear, offering insights into heritage-based, sustainable, small-scale textile production applicable to Rathlin's context.

Outcomes

Outcomes include a unique knitwear design inspired by an ancient Rathlin pottery shard and colourways drawn from the island's history and wildlife. Patricia also developed skills to work with local wool, strengthening the link between heritage aesthetics and sustainable, traceable knitwear manufacturing.

Learnings

Heritage-informed design can translate effectively into modern production while retaining authenticity. Island-to-island knowledge exchange revealed how traditional skills, locally sourced wool, and small-scale production can underpin sustainable economic activity, strengthen cultural identity, and support place-based resilience in remote communities.

Impact

Progressing to the production of Rathlin-inspired garments in fully traceable Irish wool, this fellowship supports the island's creative economy, promotes environmentally responsible textile production, and aligns with the Future Island–Island waste wool initiative to advance a green transition rooted in heritage and local capacity building.



Rathlin Creative Fellowship

Creative Fellow: **Sarah Hardy**
Co-Investigators: **Dr Susann Power**



Connecting through Solastalgia

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



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OBSERVATORY

Connecting through Solastalgia

Challenge

This fellowship explored solastalgia, the grief caused by environmental loss and how such emotions can inspire positive action. Through activities like beach cleans and creative practices, the project supported health and wellbeing while helping participants reconnect with nature, fostering a renewed sense of ecological identity and care for the environment.

Approach

Informed by Albrecht's (2019) work on solastalgia and Power's (2021) concept of 'enviro-leisure activism,' this investigation applied behavioural and civic design approaches (Martin & Hanington, 2019) to encourage engagement. It fostered awareness and motivation, promoting activities that benefit individual wellbeing, community health, and the wider environmental ecosystem.

Outcomes

A diptych of short films was created and screened within the community, sparking dialogue on the causes and impacts of marine plastic pollution. Solastalgia events on Rathlin provided space for reflection on ecological identity, using meditation and creative engagement with natural elements to deepen connection with the environment.

Learnings

Despite ongoing corporate pollution, global communities continue efforts to protect shorelines, finding meaning and wellbeing in the process. Though often overwhelming, such actions support mental and physical health. Reconnecting with nature as part of our identity, rather than separate from us, through emotional and creative expression may be essential.

Impact

Community film screenings offered valuable feedback and moments of focus, while workshops created space to reconnect without distraction. The simple methodology encouraged creative play across all ages, reinforcing the vital message that healthy oceans mean healthy people; and that reflection and imagination are key to restoring that balance.

Under-the-Sofa-Orange,
14:33pm, 6th Feb 2025



Fungal Learning

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Fungal Learning

Challenge

The Fungal Learning project creatively explores the world of fungi and fungal potential to remediate pollution and break down waste, including plastic. Using collaborative, experimental practices to investigate this vast kingdom as well as the ethics of our interactions with fungi, this research approach highlights the complexity of waste solutions and fungal behaviours.

Approach

Fungal Learning is founded upon collaborative practice, fundamentally that of two artists, one naturalist and of course fungi. Innovative observational processes, mycology specialist input and oyster mushroom expertise is expanded upon by extensive discussion on ethics, knowledge, and language. This approach underscores the limited understanding of the fungal world and fungal capabilities, emphasising the necessity for thoughtful consideration and (un)learning when collaborating with fungi in the context of waste management.

Outcomes

Fungal Learning is fundamentally a creative research project the outcome of which is to increase awareness of fungal life. A limited edition broadsheet and potential future iterations of open studio and/or symposium, as well as artists' socially engaged works, both on Rathlin Island and beyond, ensure the fostering of continuing conversation on the topics of waste streams and ethics.

Learnings

The project highlights the need to integrate fungi into our thinking and talking, revealing how important this understanding is when considering the untapped and infinite potential of fungi. Fungal Learning also highlights the urgent necessity of communicating around this. Global and island ecologies are complex and fragile, and a considered and sensitive approach on our behalf is therefore crucial.

Impact

Fungal Learning sits at the edges of fungal knowledge, a delicate yet important place. This learning has the potential to stimulate ecological awareness through ongoing exploration, publications and engagement, not only within the immediate Rathlin Island community but far beyond - offering opportunity to shape our deeper understanding, not just of fungi, but ecological entanglement as a whole.



Rathlin Creative Fellowship

Creative Fellow: Johnny Mitchell
Co-Investigator: Dr Wes Forsythe



Sustainable Crossings

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



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Sustainable Crossings

Challenge

This Creative Fellowship addresses the challenge by using images to highlight the importance of marine traffic to an island. Rathlin Island relies on ferry transport for essential travel, tourism, and trade, yet current operations contribute significantly to local carbon emissions. There is limited awareness of alternative, sustainable ferry solutions and little accessible, visual documentation of the ferry's environmental impact or the community's relationship with maritime life.

Approach

The project employs photography and visual storytelling to capture the rhythms of daily ferry operations, maritime activity, and the island's fishing heritage. By visually exploring the current ferry vessels and the wider seascape, the work invites audiences to consider the role of ferry transport in island life and its environmental implications. Through image-making and narrative framing, the project prompts reflection on the need for greener alternatives and highlights the cultural and ecological importance of sustainable maritime connections.

Outcomes

Outcomes include:

- A curated photographic collection capturing ferry life, community activity, and environmental context
- Public exhibition and high-quality print materials
- Social media campaign to engage wider audiences
- Increased visibility of ferry-related sustainability issues across local and policy spheres

Learnings

The project fosters education on carbon reduction and island life, celebrating the island's maritime heritage. It highlights the lifeline that the ferry is, and the heritage associated with maritime travel. It also creates a lasting legacy through images, connecting travel, water and tradition.

Impact

This project explores the vital role of the ferry service in island life, illuminating its cultural, environmental, and social significance. By documenting maritime traditions, it contributes to the preservation of local heritage while also envisioning a low-carbon future for sea transport. These images are intended to spark dialogue, inform public understanding, and influence future policy and planning around sustainable vessel development.



Design Fellowship

Design Fellows: **Mitch Conlon & McAllister-Colacio**
Co-Investigator: **Dr Patrick Dunlop**



Keelrod

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



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**◎◎ FUTURE
OBSERVATORY**



Challenge

The Keelrod project explores alternative sustainable energy systems that are appropriately scaled for island contexts. Inspired by the DIY ethos of kite energy models, it aims to make climate-resilient practices visible and tangible through creative collaboration and locally grounded design.

Approach

Keelrod brings together collaborators across architecture, visual art, engineering, and sailing. Centring conviviality, horizontality, and place-based creativity, the project was rooted in mutual learning and relational methods that reflect the culture and character of island life.

Outcomes

Residents and visiting artists were invited to explore and research collaboratively through embodied practices such as stone wall building, fishing, and sailing. Together, they identified potential sites for a future energy system. A public kite-making workshop during the Rathlin Sound Festival drew further community interest. The project will culminate in the fabrication of a prototype design developed in collaboration with artist-engineer Paddy Bloomer.

Learnings

Implementing a small-scale, efficient, and nomadic energy system takes significant time and resources, while DIY approaches can offer more accessible, though less robust, alternatives. By working with resident artists, the project highlights how Rathlin can offer a successful model for thoughtful, socially engaged cultural practice, strengthening its role in Northern Ireland's creative landscape.

Impact

Through the cross-pollination of invited creative designers and resident artists, the project supports the emergence of alternative cultural practices that sit alongside Rathlin's distinctive existing creativity. Creative programming helps build the conditions for innovation to take root, while collaboration fosters the exchange of heritage, vital for embedding new ideas in place-based contexts.



Design Fellowship

Design Fellows: Cathal Crumley
Co-Investigator: Dr Rebecca McConnell



The Future Blueprint

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



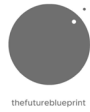
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FUTURE
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The Future Blueprint



Challenge

The island of Ireland faces a creative 'brain drain' and climate adaptation challenges. There is a critical need for public engagement frameworks that make future climate and cultural scenarios tangible, accessible, and inclusive to foster societal dialogue and decision-making.

Approach

This fellowship employed speculative design fiction and immersive storytelling, underpinned by design ecosystem frameworks and place-based research. Co-creation workshops and participatory visualisation translate complex environmental futures into public-facing media artefacts.

Outcomes

Outputs include a short film, a Q&A screening at QFT, a travelling pop-up exhibition (Void Gallery Derry, QUB, and others), and a climate visualisation toolkit. Outcomes include improved climate literacy, cultural dialogue, and increased creative engagement with policy futures.

Learnings

Accessible, immersive storytelling tools are effective in engaging diverse communities with complex topics like climate change. Collaboration across academic, creative, and civic sectors enables broader impact. The visualisation format supports emotional resonance, critical thinking, and inclusivity in future-oriented discourse.

Impact

This project drives cultural, educational, and economic impact by embedding immersive climate futures into public life. Through speculative design and participatory storytelling, it equips communities with the tools to understand and shape responses to climate risk. By fostering creative retention and informing design policy, it strengthens local capacity for just and imaginative adaptation.



Stone Strategies – An investigation into a local, sustainable product for a circular economy.

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Stone Strategies – An investigation into a local, sustainable product for a circular economy.



Challenge

Currently most building processes use energy intensive, single-use materials. Is there an alternative available? Locally sourced stone cut into standardised units would in theory offer a reduction in carbon emissions essentially because its production does not require the application of heat derived from fossil fuels.

Approach

Stone Strategies initiated an examination into a building product that has advantages on an island setting due to its potential recyclability. A practice-based research approach incorporated sampling and 1:1 prototyping in collaboration with a local industry partner to look at the design and technical challenges of manufacture and assembly.

Outcomes

Inspired by sustainable dry-stone walling of Rathlin Island, a prototype composed of standardised natural stone units was exhibited. Dissemination and discussion were facilitated through a public event with community, local and international industry participants. Outcomes included raising awareness of local geological resources, stone standardisation and the aesthetic qualities of local stone.

Learnings

Stone Strategies reveals how Northern Ireland is resourced in a material to decarbonise construction. While acknowledging limitations to the use of some stone types and the challenge of production costs, the project shows how to retrofit historic stone structures and demonstrates the potential to contribute to a local circular economy.

Impact

The project adapts a vernacular, low carbon technology to work towards an environmentally friendly future. A modular stone demountable system displays the sustainable, visually pleasing qualities of local stone. An event, exhibition and online platforms raise awareness of how use of this place-specific material can help support the rural economy.



The Story of Rathlin Wool

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

The Story of Rathlin Wool

Challenge

This Design Fellowship, *The Story of Rathlin Wool*, uses storytelling to highlight the regenerative potential of wool, rooted in Rathlin Island's unique cultural and ecological landscape. Through an illustrated book, it explores vital connections between people, land, and sustainability - inviting reflections on waste, identity, and the need for community-led ecological renewal.

Approach

The project features a partnership between a Rathlin islander and local artist and centres on deep collaboration with the island and its wool. The illustrations have a gentle, earthy style that create an illustrated book through iterative stages - sketching, pacing, final artwork, and print preparation - integrating feedback throughout to ensure authenticity, educational value, and emotional resonance.

Outcomes

The project has created a short, illustrated book telling the story of Rathlin wool, as it moves through the landscape from farmer, shearer, tractor, ferry driver, trailer, fleece grader, seaweed gatherer and dyer, knitter, and shopkeeper. Linked to the wider Rathlin Wool project, the book connects story, craft, farming, commerce and place. By weaving together heritage, craft, and environmental consciousness, the book inspires both local and global audiences to reimagine resilience and regeneration through the lens of place-based storytelling.

Learnings

The project fosters education on sustainability and island life, celebrates Rathlin's farming and wool heritage, and showcases the work of FII and local residents. It highlights the challenges and beauty of island livelihoods, honours often unseen contributions, and demonstrates how storytelling can preserve culture and practice, linking people, land, and tradition through low-carbon, regenerative, and circular approaches.

Impact

Through the co-creation of a new cultural artefact, *The Story of Rathlin Wool* fosters intergenerational understanding of sustainability, waste, and regeneration. It preserves Rathlin's heritage, amplifies local voices, and offers an accessible entry point into circular practice and ecological thinking, stimulating cultural tourism, community pride, and deeper environmental engagement.



Pocket Notes: Holistic Sustainability for Creative Micro-Businesses

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Pocket Notes: Holistic Sustainability for Creative Micro-Businesses

Challenge

Many micro-businesses in Northern Ireland are eager to adopt regenerative and sustainable practices but lack access to tailored knowledge, practical guidance, or peer-led examples. Traditional support models often miss the nuance, rhythm, and lived realities of these hyper-local, time-poor, smaller-scale creative enterprises.

Approach

Design Fellow, Karishma Kusrkar, conducted a series of 12 in-depth interviews with creative micro-businesses across Northern Ireland, including Rathlin Island capturing their challenges, values, working conditions, and sustainability aspirations. These conversations centred relational, situated storytelling over metrics prioritising spaces like coworking studios in bank buildings to converted farm sheds to active retail spaces providing insight through context, conversation, and mutual trust.

Outcomes

The interviews generated a nuanced qualitative dataset highlighting the lived experience of creative micro-businesses. They revealed common themes around time scarcity, emotional labour, values-led branding, and desire for realistic sustainability pathways. These insights will underpin the development of a co-designed sustainability toolkit tailored for small-scale, place-based practice and a space for microbusiness owners to connect and share knowledge.

Learnings

Informal, trust-based interviews highlighted richer insights than traditional surveys. Working with people in their space opened up reflections on identity, compromise, and creative resilience. The process revealed that sustainability support must acknowledge not only economic and environmental concerns, but also emotional, sensory, and relational dimensions of micro-business life.

Impact

The fellowship has laid the foundation for a new kind of sustainability support grounded in lived experience, cultural nuance, and design empathy. By documenting and amplifying the voices of creative micro-businesses, the fellowship is shifting narratives around what counts as knowledge, and who gets to shape regenerative futures whilst providing more realistic and achievable pathways to a more sustainable and regenerative future.



Design Fellowship

Design Fellows: **Domenica Landin & FutureEverything**
Co-Investigator: **Prof Brian Dixon**



**Rewilding the Board:
Co-Designing More-than-Human Governance**

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1



Rewilding the Board: Co-Designing More-than-Human Governance



Challenge

How might co-design support a cultural organisation in developing a governance model that brings nature onto the board? This project supports FutureEverything's ambition to grant nature a formal voice, and voting rights, within its governance. The aim is to align decision-making with principles of planetary stewardship and more-than-human justice, and to translate these into everyday practices.

Approach

This project engaged members of a working group to co-develop steps toward more-than-human governance and identify key considerations. It reviewed relevant literature and organisational documents to inform the approach. Multi-level perspective tools were developed and adapted to support online conversations and interactions, contextualised for governance restructuring that includes nature as an active participant.

Outcomes

A digital prototype of a database containing a repertoire of practices that reimagine civic participation in more-than-human worlds was developed. It includes tools and sequences used to guide engagement, refined through participant feedback. The repertoire aligns with the commitments of FutureEverything and Future Island-Island to open-source resources, supporting other organisations exploring more-than-human governance.

Learnings

To move beyond symbolic representation and toward meaningful change, the more-than-human needs to be integrated into governance through everyday organisational practices. This involves translating values and principles into practical actions that keep nature's presence active and tangible. Bringing nature onto the board becomes a way to reground human decision-making in relationships of care and shared responsibility.

Impact

Research has informed new governance frameworks detailing nature's legal participation on FutureEverything's board. This includes defining the organisation's rights and responsibilities, informing the role of a Nature Director, and outlining a supporting set of values, protocols and practices. The repertoire of practices will now be implemented, contributing to the ongoing embedding of nature into day-to-day decision-making.



Making it on Rathlin – Craft Tourism

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Making it on Rathlin – Craft Tourism



Challenge

In supporting the professional development of the craft and artist community on Rathlin Island, this fellowship sought to promote creative enterprise through design of a creative tourism package, web platform, and printed marketing materials. The fellowship is aimed at advancing sustainable tourism, local community stewardship and visitor engagement.

Approach

Creative tourism encourages active participation and immersive experiences between local people and visitors. The design approach nurtures respect for local culture, authenticity, learning and mutual exchange. Creative tourism also contributes to the local economy, promoting island enterprise, resiliency and initiative.

Outcomes

The first craft tourism package on Rathlin Island has been listed in Craft NI's August Craft Month 2025 directory. Local crafters received expert mentoring and training from the Director and Digital Development Officers at Craft NI. A dedicated webpage, marketing materials, and new signage were designed to promote artist profiles, monthly craft markets, and promote products from the island's creative community.

Learnings

The partnership with Craft NI has increased confidence among participating crafters and enhanced their knowledge and skills on marketing, pricing and package development. This has encouraged makers to consider their unique creative story and product. The newly established monthly craft market on Rathlin Island has further supported professional development, enterprise and tourism engagement.

Impact

This design fellowship project has generated:

- Development of a new craft tourism package
- A new marketing and e-commerce webpage and platform
- Capacity building for local crafters and artists
- Collaboration with relevant industry bodies such as Craft NI and Tourism NI



Design & Dialogue:
Social Media and Public Engagement

AHRC Grant: AH/Y003780/1

Design & Dialogue: Social Media and Public Engagement

Challenge

Design-led research offers valuable insights for green transition, but gaps between research and public understanding can limit impact. Future Island-Island bridges this gap through digital content and public engagement, turning complex ideas into accessible stories. This approach connects communities and sparks dialogue, encouraging shared action toward more sustainable futures.

Approach

A multi-channel strategy combined social media, digital content, media outreach, and community events to share the project's regenerative design journey with Rathlin. Data-driven content strengthened messaging, while collaboration with the island community, partners, researchers, and practitioners extended beyond research to engage wider audiences through compelling, interactive storytelling.

Outcomes

Social content gathered 1,700+ followers with 19% engagement, while the website attracted 2,700+ users and 2,300 sessions, generating £5,740 in combined value. Media coverage reached 2.32 million views across 11 outlets, with an equivalent value of £36,615. Over 50 festival, workshop and project-led events on Rathlin sparked dialogue on regenerative pathways.

Learnings

Data shows visual storytelling and narrative-based content best engage diverse audiences. Co-creating with community members, researchers, and partners keeps messaging authentic and relevant. Interactive channels help make complex research feel tangible and relatable, increasing accessibility and impact for the Rathlin community and across creative, academic, and professional networks.

Impact

Strategic engagement has positioned the project as a thought-leader in design-led sustainability, with Rathlin Island as a focal point for circular innovation in Northern Ireland. Organic, cross-channel visibility valued at approximately £42,355 has supported cross-sector knowledge exchange and community engagement – helping influence policy and shape green transition and design dialogue.