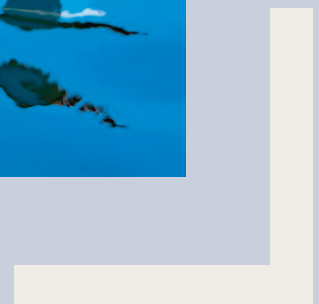


Towards a sustainable  
and ethical delivery of  
**Scotland  
+ Venice**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



Off the scale...  
a cruise liner  
demonstrates how  
the lagoon's views  
have been distorted.  
Photograph: Marco  
Secchi/Getty Images



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## Towards a Sustainable and Ethical Delivery of Scotland + Venice

Sculpture Placement Group (SPG) was appointed by the Scotland + Venice partnership in July 2022 to undertake a year-long research fellowship, looking into how the partnership could preside over sustainable and ethical presentations at the Art and Architecture Venice Biennales.

There was a commitment from the Partnership that if Scotland was not able to undertake its presentations at the Biennale ethically and sustainably then it would not continue to take part after 2025. SPG was chosen for this project in recognition of its research methodology that responds to creative practice, prioritising new sustainable ways of working, which it shares with the sector.

The purpose of this research was to provide a clear understanding of how to embed environmentally sustainable and ethical working practices across both the Art and Architecture projects, and adhere to the sectors' net zero target. The research took place in the context of several partners publishing their own sustainability plans and strategies including Creative Scotland's Climate Emergency and Sustainability Plan that set out an organisational target of net zero by 2030.

Halfway through the research fellowship the Scotland + Venice partnership took the decision to pause the development of the 2024 edition in order to reflect on the issues addressed within this research, as well as to consider the wider economic context and allow time for a rethink of the model. In response, the focus of SPG's research shifted to include an examination of potential new models for delivery of the project as well as suggestions for improvements of the existing model.

The initial stages of this research focused on establishing what the partner organisations were doing towards achieving their net zero targets and improving working practices. SPG then interviewed individuals serving on the partnership board, many of whom had long-standing involvement in the project and its evolution.

Key individuals who were involved in the delivery of current or previous editions were interviewed. This included producers, commissioners, curators, technicians among others. This enabled SPG to gain a good understanding of how the project has been delivered and the perceived challenges and opportunities from those working on the ground.

It should be noted that SPG were unable to consult with any artists representing Scotland at the Art Biennale, on account of their demanding schedules. However, the research afforded the opportunity to shadow the live process of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition, 2023. This shadowing spanned the time from shortly after the creative team were appointed, until the exhibition was opened in May 2023. In November 2022, SPG's Directors Kate V Robertson and Michelle Emery-Barker visited Venice (by rail) which allowed the opportunity to take in the creative team's initial site visit, and to see the Art exhibition in the last week of its run.

The SPG directors also represented Scotland at a cross-national workshop in Venice, Towards the Green Lion, which was designed to develop networks between participating nations, and develop best practice in relation to sustainability. The majority of the 60 participants were from national pavilions and commissioning bodies.

The findings within this report highlight a number of challenges inherent within the previous model of delivery that present significant barriers delivering the project ethically and sustainably. Overall these can be summarised to time, money and the logistical challenges of delivering international projects.

SPG acknowledges the significant challenges posed in reconciling Scotland's international cultural ambitions in the face of the Climate Emergency. It is inevitable that any physical presence within Venice will contribute to the impact on the fragile economic and environmental ecosystem of Venice.



Augmenting and improving the existing approach would make a positive contribution to the community and environment of Venice. However, this report acknowledges that this is perhaps not what is needed to take Scotland + Venice into the 21st century and more radical thinking is required. SPG's overall conclusions are as follows:

## Change needs to be swift and impactful

There are 4 editions of Scotland + Venice left before the 2030 target that Creative Scotland has given itself to reach net zero.<sup>1</sup> If Scotland + Venice is to resume and continue then change needs to be swift and impactful. We're now facing the very real impacts of Climate Change and Venice is a location where the impact is hugely apparent.

The Scotland + Venice partnership should use the current pause for reflection to determine what's best for:

- the Arts, Screen and Creative Industries in Scotland
- Venice and Venetians
- the individuals undertaking the opportunity

The opportunities available to the project are to:

- no longer take part
- take part and improve the current model
- design an entirely new approach which does not cause emissions

Without radical change, there are many aspects within the current model that would pose a significant challenge to reaching net zero.

## Changes that can be made

There are many changes to the existing format that could reduce the emissions caused through delivery of the Scotland + Venice project. The greatest reductions in emissions could be achieved immediately through:

- a significant reduction in flights taken by artists and staff working on the project
- discouraging people from travelling to Venice – OR –
- encouraging train travel amongst visitors
- providing other ways to mark the occasion without travel
- minimising build and shipping – rather than buying carbon offsets

It's also important to acknowledge the impact our presence has on Venice and its inhabitants. Within the existing model format this could be positively addressed by:

- issuing strong guidance on ethical and sustainable travel for visitors and those working on the project
- demonstrating best practice
- committing to maintaining and sustaining good relationships
- creating contractual agreements and meaningful employment opportunities in Venice

<sup>1</sup> 2 art and 2 architecture editions remain before 2030, not including 2024 where the project is paused

## La Biennale is unlikely to lead change

At the Towards the Green Lion workshop in Venice, SPG learned La Biennale has already achieved carbon neutral accreditation, much of which has been achieved through offsetting.<sup>2</sup>

This means La Biennale is unlikely to:

- lead the way in terms of a radical overhaul of how the Biennale is delivered
- help facilitate cross-nation collaboration in terms of sharing resources

It's therefore incumbent on nations to:

- self-organise
- make internal changes
- support collaborative best practice and sharing

This could also include nations collectively lobbying La Biennale to take more forthright action regarding sustainable and ethical participation.

The fact that Scotland + Venice has commissioned this report puts Scotland at the forefront of thinking about sustainable and ethical practices in relation to the Biennale. It should now convert that thinking into immediate positive action.

## Creative Scotland's role in driving change

It's recommended that Creative Scotland take responsibility for assuming carbon reporting responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> By aligning Scotland + Venice's carbon reduction ambitions and approaches with that of Creative Scotland's, the partnership can be an exemplar of best practice within the wider arts, screen and creative industries in Scotland.<sup>4</sup>

It's clear that it's not possible to participate in the Venice Biennale without having an impact – both in terms of carbon emissions and on the ground in Venice. However, short of not participating at all, there are a significant amount of changes that the Scotland + Venice partnership could make which would demonstrate a considerable commitment to ethical and sustainable delivery.

The Scotland + Venice partnership can realistically reconcile it aims to retain presence on this significant international stage with its sustainable and ethical ambitions, if:

- a significant number of these recommendations are implemented immediately
- carbon emissions are accounted for and budgeted in line with Creative Scotland's own Climate Emergency and Sustainability Plan<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This is not SPG's recommended way forward for Scotland + Venice. (Carbon Neutral certificate was analysed by Creative Scotland's Climate Emergency and Sustainability Lead on behalf of SPG) It also does not comply with the Scottish Government or Creative Scotland's position on offsetting. We are sceptical of the ethics and efficacy of buying carbon offsetting as a way of achieving carbon neutrality. (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/may/30/delta-air-lines-lawsuit-carbon-neutrality-aoe>)

<sup>3</sup> As discussed with Climate Emergency and Sustainability Lead

<sup>4</sup> Targets in line with Scottish Government and Creative Scotland: <https://www.eif.co.uk/about/sustainability>, and other international events such as Edinburgh International Festival

<sup>5</sup> With a plan for reaching net zero by 2030

## Scotland + Venice can lead the way

Alternatively a radical and innovative approach could be taken, a new project designed with the reality we're now experiencing in the face of Climate Change. Any new approach adopted by Scotland + Venice could become a model for international working more generally. In doing so, it can help Scotland lead the way in exemplary sustainable and ethical cultural production.

Scotland + Venice has been recognised as being one of the flagship moments when Art and Architecture can be showcased on an international stage. This opportunity to be part of an international conversation, and to represent Scotland in this context is highly valued by both the Art and Architecture sectors.

Establishing a sustainable and ethical Scotland + Venice will require significant behaviour change from both individuals and organisations in their approach to the Venice Biennale, whether that be as an audience member or as part of the delivery team.

All stakeholders and audiences will need to commit to this change and much of this will involve letting go of things that they enjoy and value.

Establishing a sustainable and ethical Scotland + Venice could represent a positive and radical new way of approaching international cultural events. If the partnership acts now, Scotland will be ahead of the curve in adopting new working practices early and effectively. Far from being a regressive move in retreating from international ambition, Scotland + Venice has the opportunity to be a leader of exemplary sustainable and ethical cultural production.

Given that participating in Venice is valued and considered as a pinnacle of Scotland's International cultural profile, it presents an opportunity for Scotland to be at the vanguard of sustainable and ethical exhibition making.

***“If we can’t address the Climate Emergency through a small, focussed global gathering of the greatest innovators in Architecture and Art, then humanity is doomed, as is the rest of the planet. The Biennale is a platform for bold progress, if we do that symbolically through what we commission and how we work, then that is a win. We can only do that by tackling it together.”***

Matt Payne, Senior Project Manager, Venice Biennale, British Council

*The Happenstance,*  
Evening Film Screening,  
Architecture  
Biennale 2018.  
Photo by Graham Ross



