

Bringing the arts into socio-ecological research: An analysis of the barriers and opportunities to collaboration across the divide

Freelance artist 1 Interview

Often works in collaboration with xxx artist, so uses 'we'

Undertaken various projects in different contexts with scientists and academics
For example: working with a sociology academic from xxx university to research, develop, and write a book chapter for (a new) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Looking at windfarm development and getting understanding how people feel about the impact on them and place. [A socially engaged approach].

Current EIA doesn't cover this, so created the missing chapter.

Initially as an idea, contacted an academic – did research and found her then cold contacted her - to see if they were interested in working on this together. They were.

Together they wrote a successful funding bid.

The academic could see how this would help her research too, which was exploring people's engagement to place and tranquillity.

A good match – but The interviewee did their research before making contact, so knew who she and Robbie wanted to work with and why.

The resulting publication has been cited in academic papers.

Working with researchers from xxx research Institute

Xxx organisation sent out an open call for artists to respond to a brief

4 artists on long-term (1 year) residencies alongside non-arts researcher

These non-art partners were in place from the organisation

They applied and were accepted

What followed were meetings with the researchers

They were given access to some of the research in progress exploring possibilities of future farming in Scotland

They built up relationships with the other researchers

This process informed the development of their artwork

All artists' work was exhibited at Scottish Parliament

The early meetings were very formal: researchers siloed into known and accepted ways of presenting "quite dry"

The artists suggested meeting outside the university in a non-formal setting

They rented a house for a weekend for everyone to have space to get to know one another beyond the just the research

They cooked together, ate together, chilled, talked,

At the end of that period, someone outside of the group said they could no longer tell who were the artists and who were the academics

This open space, social space made such a difference

Interpersonal relationships

Building trust

They discovered that scientists are creative
Many have a creative practice or outlet

The project was not a true collaboration
More of a knowledge exchange – especially through the time spent together,
learning from each other
Each doing their own research and presenting their own work
The artists developed creative ways of engaging wider audiences
However, this is problematic as artists do more than just engage – they research and
have findings. The potential for this way of collaborating was never realised.

Moving forward, as a result of past art/science collaborations, connections with
academics were in place – the organisation initiated these.
In addition, because The interviewee had experience of approaching an academic,
which was successful, that gave them the confidence that this could happen again

They feel there is a lack of a true understanding of what artists can bring and what a
true collaboration is or can be
Artists bringing an illustrative dimension and create an engaging outcome is only
scraping the surface.

Public engagement tagged onto research bids seems like a useful way for the
academics to say they have done the public engagement
However, this is not collaboration, and it is not an equal part of the research
Artists with a research-based practice have the skills to research as equals
More work needs to be done to shift perceptions of artist's contribution
Artists need to be in at the outset
Research teams have a salary
Everything connected to the research is paid for
Artists are not on this equal footing
They are commissioned as freelance and given a fee and the full time commitment is
never fully calculated and paid for.

In academia you can get siloed into a way of working and loose contact or
connection with the outside world – this is an observation of artists she knows who
have ended up in academia

All researchers they have worked with have been really good at communicating their
research even if their research is incredibly complex – she thinks sometimes better
than she is at explaining her work, or if she tried to explain in a public engagement
sense

Sometimes the language of the artist can be completely opaque when talking or
writing about their work.

Projects are not necessarily set up by any of the researcher, but outside organisations – such as ASCUS, Somerhall, who have done lots of art/science projects as an organisation that commissions artists to work with scientists; Creative Carbon Scotland also work in this way.

These organisations frame the projects and set up the project, invite the researchers, and commission the artists.

However, this doesn't always work – these outside organisations don't always benefit the collaboration, by inadvertently causing tensions. ASCUS set up 'labs' for collaboration – but is this still with a science focus – what about scientists digging into and looking for gaps in artists work, in the way that artists do read science papers and see gaps in their work for them to explore and fill.

They have found that the scientists they have worked with have been amazed about the amount of knowledge the artists have and how that knowledge differs from the science knowledge, which is exploring the same subject

They have worked with immunologists. This is a very specific research area. We were again the communicators of the science: the ones brought in to inspire others beyond the field.

If you're going for a creative bid, it needs to be a creative process with a creative outcome.

If you're going for an academic bid, it needs to be academic.
This is also problematic.

What should be in a brief?

Moreover, when should the brief go out?

Perhaps when the researcher/academic sees a call and decides they would like to work with an artist – or visa versa.

Could a call go out at this stage [and what might that look like].

There are so many different disciplines, it is not correct to say, just 'an artist' or just 'a scientist', or just 'an academic'

So many stereotypes of artists – how do we unpick that?

You can't talk generally about artists and research and academics. You need to be specific.

There could be really good and exciting collaborative fits

Collaboration is really important in their work. All their work is about collaboration [they are a collaborative team] and they want to creating through collaborating: with the public, with specialists. Not always scientists.

Working with scientists is amazing and there is so much potential there and new ways of thinking about our world.

But how can this be genuinely equitable

Including financial remuneration?

The potential is there

Now is both a ripe and crucial time [for interdisciplinarity] with all the environmental challenges we are facing

“Artists are nimble”

Artists are Weavers - Different threads brought together

Artists work alongside social movements and activists too – often they are the activists taking to the streets

Institutional responses are lagging behind