

in
situ

Climate Lab Pendle

How do we approach systemic crises at a local level?

Key terms

climate science | social art practice
community engagement | listening | social justice
intergenerational dialogue | climate psychology
transdisciplinary | collaboration | active hope
systems thinking | process-led practice
councils | climate action

by Tom Deacon
and Anna Taylor
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How can we enable collective local action that comes out of awareness of the systemic nature of the crises rather than a focus on individual action around isolated elements?

How can we work across disciplines to create space for learning and sharing about the multiple crises we are facing, bridging the global with the local community level?

How can we work to form stronger intergenerational and intersectional dialogue that is rooted in practices of listening rather than messaging and explaining?



Introduction

This is a case study of an exploratory transdisciplinary approach to community climate engagement at Borough scale. It outlines the approach developed and facilitated in a collaboration between In-Situ* (led by Anna Taylor) and Tom Deacon (freelance climate trainer) from May-December 2024 in Pendle, East Lancashire, England.

In early 2024 In-Situ was commissioned by Pendle Borough Council to undertake a programme of community climate engagement work.

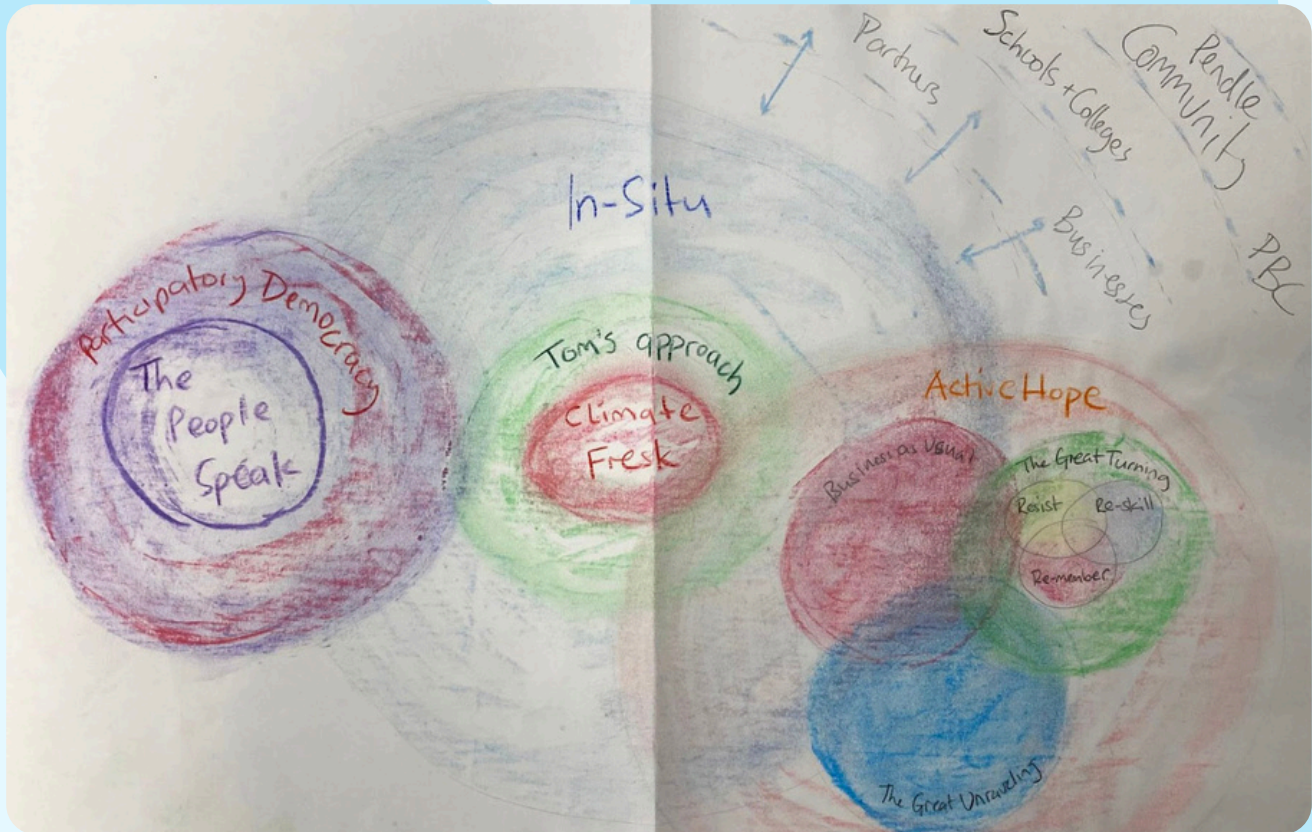
This began with a messaging-led focus on single issue campaigns (such as single use plastics and recycling) and individual behaviour change, and was with time, negotiated toward something that aligned with our collective experience, values and curiosity.

What developed was a listening approach; prioritising in-depth intergenerational and cross-cutting engagement for people living, learning and working locally, who would share the impact in their own lives and communities.

We devised an approach (using Climate Fresk** and Talkaoke*** as key tools) that would centre inequality and intergenerational justice, holding space not only for views, but to explore a range of feelings about climate change and attempting to understand more about what lay behind apparent apathy or lack of engagement within the community.

A collaborative approach

This collaboration evolved out of informal conversations between Anna and Tom who met over a market stall during Covid lockdown. Each week they talked about the growing issue of climate anxiety that each were encountering; as a climate educator working with young people and as a parent and team member at In-Situ.



Schematic showing the relationship between collaborators and frameworks that shaped Climate Lab Pendle

Anna later attended a Climate Fresk** event that Tom was running for a neighbouring Council and from there sought an opportunity to use this approach in In-Situ's programme. These conversations were the beginning of a values-aligned collaboration around community climate engagement that developed into Climate Lab Pendle.

In-Situ

is an art and community organisation based in Brierfield, Pendle. Established in 2012 by three artists working collaboratively in place with a long term commitment to the locale and people living there and 'embedding art into everyday life'. Since 2018, In-Situ has received core funding from Arts Council England and has a diverse small team made up of artists, community practitioners and local residents. Through art and artist-led processes, In-Situ's work aims to challenge and address inequality, enabling people who live here to ask better questions and become more involved in local decision making, connect with nature and creativity, and develop greater awareness of global issues.

We work with a cross-section of the community forming long term relationships to develop agency, confidence and ability to articulate thoughts and ideas over time, and provide opportunities for deeper involvement in the programme and local opportunities. In-Situ has built a track record of long-term, socially focused, deep-engagement to address local issues such as anti-racism, Covid awareness, youthwork, active lifestyles, wellbeing and the future of employment.

Tom Deacon

is a facilitator, activist and coach working around climate justice and transformational leadership (and seller of bread during the lockdowns). Stepping into this collaboration the Climate Fresk (1) tool was the core approach coming with him, this formed the framework through which many other aspects of the project could be brought forward. His approach to climate engagement work is highly informed by the Active Hope (2) framework (see below), and elements from Theory U (3), and Britain Talks Climate (4) research. Key threads that run through all these are the power of story in shaping human responses, listening as a core practice, and the importance of the felt response alongside the rational.

Experience from his years of climate and resilience work with councils, corporates and activists wove into this project. Strategies for science communication to raise climate literacy and galvanize action, strategies based in listening and empathy to be inclusive of those less engaged or sceptical, and skills for holding space for strong climate emotions.

Where we are

Pendle is a Borough in East Lancashire, England, taking in the towns of Colne, Nelson, Earby, Brierfield and Barnoldswick (population ~95,000). It is a culturally and socioeconomically highly diverse Borough, with pockets of affluence alongside some of the most deprived areas in England. This leads to significant inequalities around housing, food, employment, education, involvement in democratic process and activism.



“This is about placing emphasis on ways to contribute to systemic change over individual action. This approach is also about enabling people to see and explore their agency, through framing a collective response that recognises the intersectionality of the many issues we face.”

What emerged

Over 9 months, as a collaboration, we advocated for an alternative approach to that initially proposed by the Council, guided by our shared values. Combining Tom's climate facilitation knowledge and experience with In-Situ's embedded art practice and community context, we hosted numerous 'Climate Fresks' and street-based conversations in towns around Pendle.

We held an internal development session for In-Situ and partners, trained people from the community as Fresk facilitators, held Talkaoke conversations on local climate action and finally hosted Inside-Out Pendle, a mass interactive climate event bringing together schools, colleges, business leaders, Councillors and local residents.

At the end we wrote a report amplifying views and findings to the Council to feed into their climate strategy, and established Climate Lab Pendle, an ongoing shared intention to continue working collectively to advance understanding, agency and action around the climate crisis and inequality in Pendle.

This initial seed programme, layering on top of over a decade of dedicated work in place has formed part of a process that is ongoing and emergent. It is currently being woven into and across In-Situ's entire community embedded art programme and partner programmes, in continued critical dialogue with Tom and regular touchpoints with the council as its strategy and implementation develop.

Climate Lab Pendle

What are the features that worked?

What did we learn in the process?



On the following pages are a range of features that, on reflecting on this programme so far, we have identified as being the key enabling aspects of this work. We wanted to share our learning in response to various challenges that were either apparent from the outset or arose during the process which, on reflection form a set of prompts for others to consider if planning similar work. These features of our approach relate to content, engagement and values.

Building the programme

Hybrid Tools

Using the globally recognised Climate Fresk* tool, with its key strength in communicating the climate science, as the foundational framework for climate engagement and combining this with Talkaoke**, an artist-developed democratic conversation tool.



Bringing these two tried and tested tools together for the first time enabled us to enter an experimental interdisciplinary space combining climate science, art, community engagement and climate psychology.



This helps develop systemic thinking about this complex and intersectional issue, while keeping the ownership of the process with the participants through their collective dialogue and problem solving. There is inbuilt time for participants to share their emotional responses to what they find out, exploring the importance of attending to climate psychology, and looking at how this supports us to think about and step toward action. This not only rapidly develops understanding of the interconnection between human behaviours, emissions, and the catastrophic consequences for humans and nature, it also helps embed this through attending to the felt response, and the collective experience.

***Climate Fresk**

Is a collaborative training workshop designed to raise climate literacy. It works to unpack and understand the latest climate science in a fully participatory way.

Over 3 hours participants take a deep dive into the latest climate science, working collaboratively to use a set of 42 cards drawn directly from the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, seeking to understand the drivers, mechanisms and consequences of the climate crisis.



****Talkaoke**

(a methodology developed and practiced by longtime In-Situ collaborators The People Speak) was used to fuse the Climate Fresk, and other engagement events in the project, with a dimension of participative democracy. This 'pink, glowing donut of chat' is a circular talkshow style table with a trained, impartial facilitator in the centre. It creates a container for open dialogue that welcomes and engenders respectful connection across difference.



Climate psychology as a foundation

Informed by climate psychology, and drawing on thinking from Active Hope, we invited people to connect, identify and share how they feel, enabling deeper engagement with the issue, and linking it to wellbeing and mental health.

We placed an emphasis on climate emotions through our use of the 'Climate Emotions Wheel' which became a reflective touchstone in all of our engagement, enabling us to check-in and meet people where they are at different points in the process.

Climate Emotions Wheel



Climate Emotions Wheel © 2024



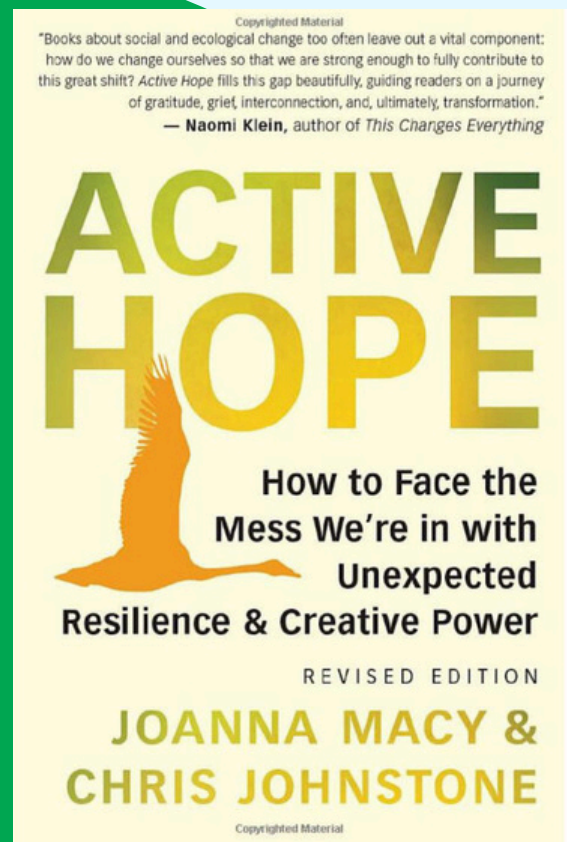
Climate
Mental Health
Network

ClimateMentalHealth.Net

Drawing on thinking from Active Hope (aka The Work that Reconnects), emotions often labelled 'negative' or 'difficult', such as anger, sadness and fear, were reframed as feelings that can be harnessed for positive action. Anger being rooted in a strong sense of justice, sadness showing how much we care, and in how speaking our fear also shows our trust and courage.

The Climate Emotions Wheel (5) from the Climate Mental Health Network was used to bring forward the dimension of climate emotions during the Climate Fresk workshops, and underpinned the wider approach of the Inside-Out Pendle event. Offering people the opportunity to reflect on and share feelings in a group space, and setting it up in a way that everyone feels heard, can offer a moment of shift where the issue lands from the rational to the felt, a place from which we are more likely to take proportionate, sustained and collective empowered action.

Active Hope is an adaptive and ever evolving body of work that supports groups and individuals to acknowledge the multiple crises of this time while also building resilience and resolve through healthily processing emotions and clarifying intention for action. It is acknowledged by climate psychologists as a key applied tool in mitigating eco-anxiety and supporting empowered action. Its narrative lens, recognising different dimensions of change-making, were of particular value to this work. This informed our approach that centred the inner dimension of change, at the level of cultivating the values and worldviews needed to motivate and sustain the outer work for change. This thinking also comes through as a strong theme in other frameworks that inspired and validates this approach, including Theory U, Common Cause Values and Frames (6), and the Inner Development Goals (7).

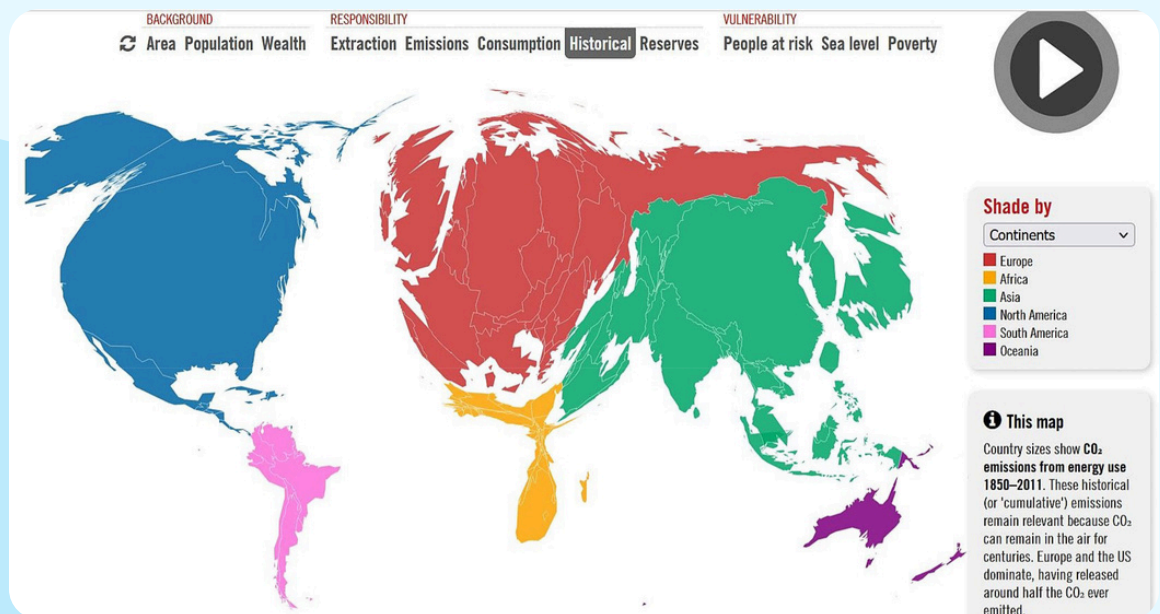


This climate psychology approach was met positively with an openness to share publicly what is often unvoiced, offering a pivot point in the engagement process from feelings toward collective action.

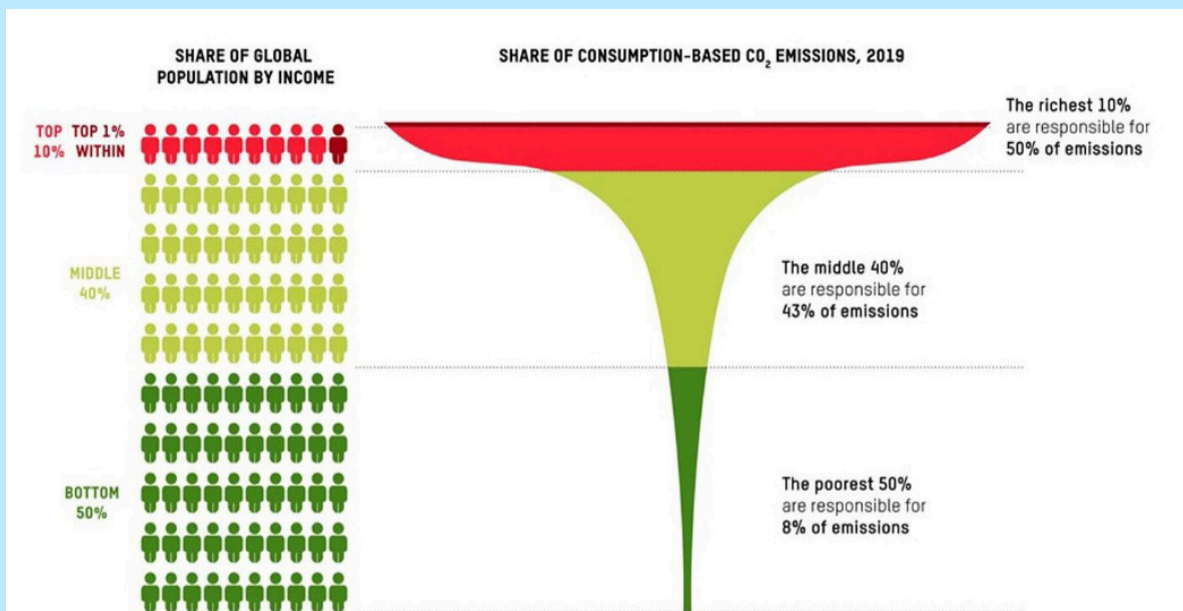
Centering Inequality

Underpinning the scientific message of the Climate Fresk with an enhanced look at intersecting issues of social justice globally and locally.

Inequality at both global and local scale was used as a lens within the Climate Fresk, offering a historic and social justice layer to the detailed physical science. This was in recognition that in many arenas of climate engagement 'carbon counting' is the main focus, missing a critical exploration of the underlying drivers baked into the capitalist economic and political systems within which we exist much of the time, the 'Business As Usual' story.



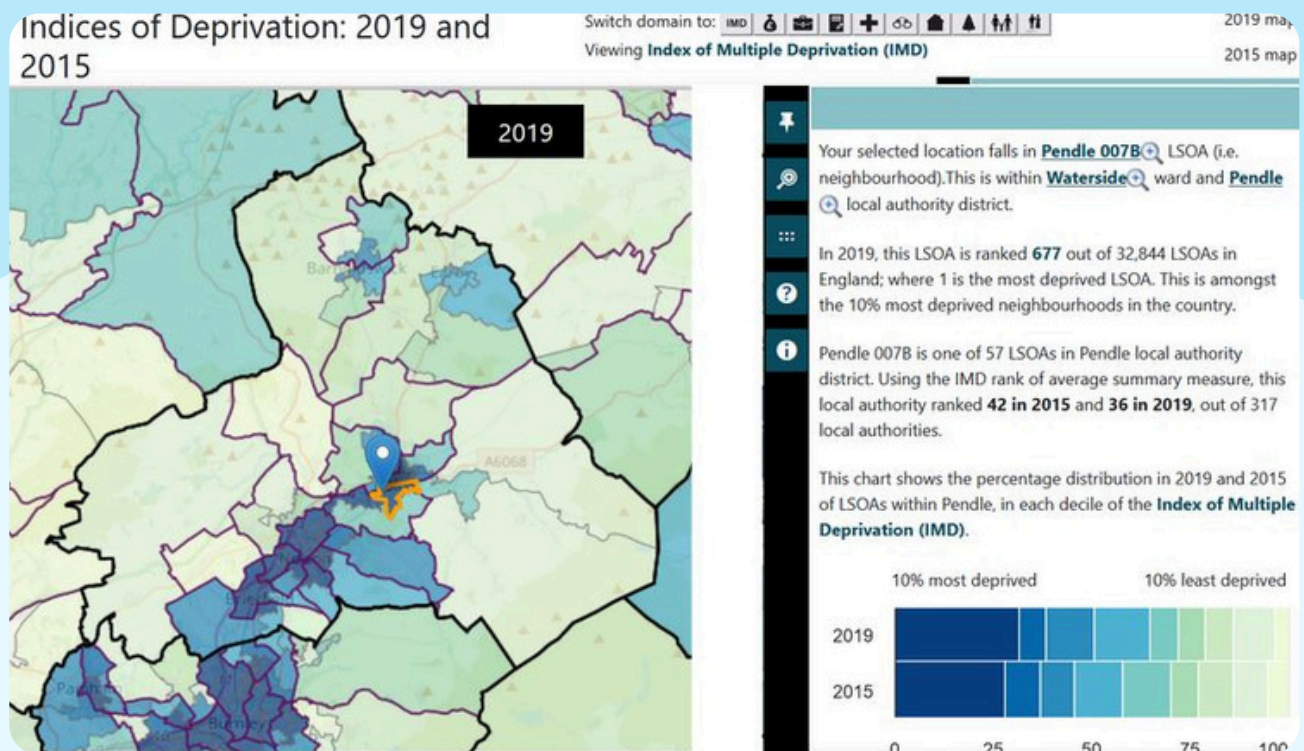
CarbonMap (8) (showing distorted world maps representing historic emissions and areas most at risk from climate change induced extreme weather),



Oxfam (9) (showing the relationship between wealth and emissions at a global level),

This enabled participants to recognize that in general those least responsible for the climate crisis (with lowest cumulative emissions) are being hardest hit by the consequences. And that at all scales the most vulnerable in our communities, wherever we live in the world, are also those most at risk from the climate crisis.

This provides an important lens that reveals the intersectional nature of the climate crisis, offering a social justice way into the issue that pure climate science may not.



Gov.uk Index of Multiple Deprivation (10) (showing how inequality of various kinds plays out at a local level)

Applying this to inequality at a local level - and how this was met by participants / and making the connection between the local and the global, was a key element in this context.

The process enabled people to see how what they or those close to them experience at an everyday level (ie cost of living crisis, fuel poverty, damp and energy-inefficient homes) is part of a bigger picture linked to capitalism, colonialism, and other historic and current oppressions, and that multiple inequalities are linked to, or caused / exacerbated by, climate change.


Engagement

Depth engagement and scalability

Working with initially small numbers that, through training, conversation and identifying opportunities builds momentum over time – the longitudinal results of which can be shown further into the process.




Finding local allies representing the spectrum of local participants can often be a challenge for organisations tasked with ‘community engagement’, for In-Situ building reciprocal relationships across the community is at the core of our ‘embedded practice’.



Collaborating in this way, to build trusting relationships within community, takes time, but led to greater impact:

- Transformations / journeys, work at a deeper level
- Authentic networks and opportunities arise
- A longer term continuation of dialogue with the council and community which connects (is integrated) into all aspects of everyday and civic life
- Leading to deeper engagement uncovering agency rather than pledges at end of process (moving people from direct control to connection)
- Engagement track record enables us to invite people to something people don't want to talk about
- Embedded / trust / longitudinal relationship / ongoing
- Creates opportunity for intercultural and intergenerational dialogue when we bring trusting participants together



Designing an engagement programme of workshops, street based conversations, facilitator training and bigger events, we started small and worked outwards, building scale throughout the process. In selecting participants, we began with our own team, partners and peers, then radiated out to groups like young people and local residents, all of whom had previous experience with In-Situ. We also wanted a depth of engagement with council staff, councillors and business leaders, many of whom were also commissioners of this work via the Council's Environment Working Group.

Holding smaller scale events over time, we built up to a mass event, Inside-Out Pendle, that brought a diverse 100 people together in a scaled and extended version of what we had previously done, for greater impact and understanding from multiple diverse perspectives. This was also an opportunity for earlier participants to facilitate conversations and gain experience to lead their own future events, enabling a scalable impact.

To deliver on this scale involved recruiting Climate Fresk facilitators to support from outside of Pendle. This brought in valuable skill sets and experience to share from other settings across the North and beyond.

Bringing People Together

Creating spaces that enable the discovery of collective agency as community through intergenerational and intercultural local engagement



The Inside-Out Pendle event was designed to incorporate tried and tested artists thinking and methods to bring together school students, young adults seeking employment, community leaders and local business people. This offered opportunities for listening, discussion and collaboration across both age, culture and lived experience.

Talkaoke was used as the 'action debrief' part of the Climate Fresk workshops, as a street engagement tool, and as the 'hive mind' of the Inside-Out Pendle event (embedded within a giant head, inspired by the Inside-Out films). Creating this space for people to voice what was coming up for them through the Climate Fresk cards and sharing of emotions, offered a collective forum to hear each other and move toward community resilience, laying a foundation for sustained collective action to emerge.

The creative, artist-led contribution of The People Speak at Inside-Out Pendle helped make the science and more serious aspects of the Climate Fresk feel fun and engaging and opened up more space for young people's voices to be heard in the room.



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This approach is also about enabling people to see and explore their agency, through framing a collective response that recognises the intersectionality of the many issues we face.

Diversity of Leadership

Engaging those who have local decision-making power as well as 'the community' and amplifying community voices to those in conventional positions of power.



On this programme we engaged people equally at all levels of our community, with Councillors and young people engaging in the same process.



Intergenerational

We heard from young people on a number of occasions how they feel frustrated at those in positions of power not doing enough to protect their future, and that they feel pressed upon to take up the burden they have been left by older generations. We also heard from some adults in positions of decision making power that they feel 'young people' are disengaged and need more climate education as they will be the ones who will be in positions of power in the future (with an implied 'and have to deal with this'). It therefore felt important to include those in positions of decision making power in this community engagement work. Members of the council, including officers and Councillors, were invited to various events, including one Climate Fresk workshop specifically for them.

Intercultural

Cultural diversity of leadership in climate engagement spaces is essential to engaging the whole community. This work was part of trying to address the current imbalance of voices on climate locally, and will be ongoing.

We have found that our work on climate justice and reparation overlaps with long term work amplifying intersectional lived experience within our communities. When considering cultural barriers to climate engagement, we have explored issues of mis and dis information that is purposefully being deployed to divide communities and cause hatred in response to worsening inequality. Creating opportunities for intercultural dialogue and understanding lies at the heart of creating counter-narratives to those that aim to cause division, cause hatred and also deny climate change.

Truth to power

Having an underlying belief in the importance of participatory democracy and flat organisational structures and consensus decision making guided our planning towards these outcomes, and also enabled us to place less experienced staff in leadership positions on this programme with innovative results.

Working long term 'in the tension' between listening and amplifying community voices and advocating upwards and bringing these power imbalances into dialogue and enabling the discovery of leverage at the top as well as agency for collective action.

Having mechanisms planned to feedback and challenge thinking at all ends of the process, and maintaining this beyond the funding period.

Valuing Process and Creativity

Seeing this work as the first step in a longer process that recognises the need for slow , meaningful, transformational engagement over targeting large numbers through communications campaigns.

Giving space and time to the building of relationship and trust between the collaborators in this project was key to the wider outcomes. Building in time for ongoing reflection about aligned values and ways of working, alongside learning and evolving ways to compliment and integrate our different approaches. This was possible through a slow-build start, informal conversations while commuting, and being open to live feedback and iteration through the process.



As a process-led creative organisation In-Situ had a lot of experience in working confidently with emergence and communicating its value upwards. Creativity here is being able to problem solve and consider alternatives, connections and explore possibilities. It is about commitment to what could be, through dialogue and process, rather than on fixed and measurable outcomes.

This was epitomised by the experimental nature of the Inside Out Pendle event, a 5 hour interactive workshop for 100 people, including 20 co-facilitators, taking a deep dive into climate emotions.

Listening

Valuing open dialogue and holding space for conflicting views without judgement as a key part of the process

From the outset, we emphasised the importance of listening not telling. The invitation from our commissioners was linked to an information campaign focusing on individual action. By centering listening, we created space to collectively explore and understand the complexity of the climate crisis and the barriers to engaging with it.

Climate engagement is often focused on ‘teaching’ the science. The pairing of Climate Fresk and Talkoake was key to developing an approach to collective learning through open dialogue and discovery alongside others.

What we learnt about listening:

- The use of participatory tools such as Talkoake offer an inclusive space for the community to be and feel heard on important topics and to learn from others – we see this as an important part of informed decision making at a Borough level, e.g. citizens assemblies;
- When people feel ‘heard’ they are more likely to listen and be open to other perspectives;
- Giving space to listen inwardly, through centring climate emotions, is as – if not more – important for changemaking than learning facts.
- Having a framework for holding conversations across difference enhanced and extended the discussion and reflection part of the Climate Fresk workshops and Inside-Out Pendle event.

Thank you for engaging with this work of Climate Lab Pendle

Above are a selection of our experiences, learnings, insights and explorations. This is very much part of an ongoing journey for us, a Lab, shared here in trust that there may be some value in service of the wider climate engagement and community empowerment work happening where you are.

So, in the spirit of curiosity as a key to learning, here are a few questions from us to you....

How can you hold space for intergenerational connection and dialogue?

Who could you collaborate with in a values-led and/or transdisciplinary approach?

How can you invite leaders and decision makers into participating in 'engagement' learning together?

How can you develop approaches that can hold space for difference and discomfort?

How does inequality manifest in your context, and therefore in what form might social justice be woven into your climate engagement?

Are there tools you could use to explore where people are at whilst also educating about climate science?

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This case study is co-written by Anna Taylor (In-Situ) and Tom Deacon (Climate Educator).

It reflects on the work to date of Climate Lab Pendle, based on a Climate Engagement project initiated by Pendle Borough Council in 2024.

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