

THE HAPPENSTANCE.09
Participatory Practice

Scotland
+ Venice

Place Standard workshop
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INVITE

STIMULATE
STRUCTURE

Scottish Charette
Image: Graham Ross

WORKSHOP

THE HAPPEN STANCE

The Happenstance was Scotland's contribution to the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice, 2018

In this dispatch, Chief Architect of the Scottish Government, Ian Gilzean, looks at the bigger picture around participatory practice and community empowerment. He considers how participation as a creative methodology has great value in that it can stimulate local ideas and increased community awareness of the potential of their places. It can help empower and inspire people to realise their own creativity and help to engender a sense of ownership and optimism. He cites The Happenstance as a project that allowed people to take ownership by activating and programming spaces.



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This publication is one in a series of twelve reflections on The Happenstance. Click here or go to ads.org.uk/the-happenstance-archive-dispatches to access the other publications.



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year of young people
bliadhna na h-òigridh
2018



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‘a participatory approach promotes and supports positive action’



‘among the most vital voices are those of our children and young people’





A cross-generational making workshop in Palazzo Zenobio

‘participatory practice can help to empower and inspire people to realise their own latent creativity, and it can also help to engender a sense of ownership and optimism’

Participatory Practice

Ian Gilzean

The Happenstance, Scotland’s contribution to the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice, 2018, was described as follows within the Architecture Review:-
“A standout triumph of Freespace is Scotland’s rebellious contribution which exuberantly challenges the entire edifice of the Biennale with a participatory pavilion-cum-festival as much of Scotland as of Venice.” “The cutting edge of architecture as a joyful inclusive process is what’s on show here, not just a product.....the only truly free space at Freespace.”

The positive international response to The Happenstance is a welcome acknowledgement of a bigger picture around participatory practice and community

empowerment, which has been developing over the past ten years and which is also reflected in Scottish Government legislation such as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

Over this period, there has been increasing interest and appreciation of the way in which place-based working in Scotland can help to transform communities and improve outcomes. Participation as a creative methodology has great value in that it can stimulate local ideas and it can catalyse increased community awareness of the potential of their places. Participatory practice can help to empower and inspire people to realise their own latent creativity, and

it can also help to engender a sense of ownership and optimism.

A participatory approach to the design of places promotes and supports positive action and it can help to avoid the kind of negative responses that may often result from the imposition of ideas on the shaping of people's local places. To be successful, it is important that all contributors recognise that their ideas are valued. A key issue in a participatory approach to placemaking is the breaking down of the hierarchy between designers, specialists and members of communities.

One of the catalysts which brought about a step change in the support and promotion of participatory practice was Scottish Government's introduction of its Charrette Series around ten years ago. This initiative offered support for local groups towards developing design-led plans for places that properly reflected local needs, priorities and aspirations.

The Charrette Series was a ground breaking programme that sought to combine the important knowledge base of local communities with the skills of specialist designers. Since that time, over 100 charrettes and design-led workshops have been supported by the Making Places Programme that followed on from the original Charrettes Series.

We have also been looking more widely at ways to encourage and support greater public participation in the development of the places in which they live and work. The development of the Place Standard

tool was a commitment of the Scottish Government's 2013 Creating Places policy on architecture and place. The Place Standard tool lets communities, public agencies, voluntary groups and others find those aspects of a place that need to be targeted to improve people's health, wellbeing and quality of life. The collaborative approach to place supported by the Place Standard was recognised by the World Health Organisation European Healthy Cities Network as inspiring and unique to Scotland.

The Venice International Architecture Exhibition 2018 theme of Freespace determined by Grafton Architects suggested not only generosity and thoughtfulness in built environment projects, but also 'a desire to engage' with both users and the wider public.

This theme provided a platform to explore ideas around public participation both here in Scotland and with the people of Venice. The Scotland + Venice project, The Happenstance, embraced ways in which the public can take ownership of places, activating spaces and programming spaces.

The Happenstance also responded to the Biennale theme of Freespace through the lens of Scotland's Year of Young People (YoYP) 2018. We wanted to show the world that Scotland values the ideas of our young people and that we believe they have a great deal to offer in terms of contributing to the development of their future built environment. Among the most vital voices that might shape the Scotland of the future are those of our

children and young people, and this is reflected in our ambition to increase their participation in our planning system.

WAVEparticle's successful competition proposal for the Scottish presence at the Biennale was a natural fit with these aims and ambitions. With WAVEparticle's experience and exceptional skills in creative community engagement techniques, they were ideally placed to develop approaches which involve young people in the project's development and to explore ideas around the interaction between young people and the built environment.

WAVEparticle has previously been employed in providing ways to creatively involve the public in charrettes as part of the Scottish Government's Charrette Mainstreaming Programme including, for example, Johnstone, Elgin, Clydebank, Whitburn, Govan & Partick and Priesthill. Its projects require consultation and engagement to be at the centre of the process, from cultural-masterplanning, to artworks centred round the individual voices in a community.

The Happenstance explored the way in which public spaces of various kinds have the potential to change and grow, depending upon the way in which we choose to occupy them. It demonstrated what can be built through mapping connections, bringing together needs and resources in both Scotland and Venice. Baxendale Studio's interactive armature provided a physical framework that was highly

responsive to the creative ideas of visitors and those who presented as part of the live programme of events The Happenstance generated. The WAVEparticle team helped visitors, of all ages, to The Happenstance to physically realise their ideas about how to use the space. Through this process, The Happenstance became an active agent within the process of rethinking and reclaiming freespace in the built environment.

Importantly, the outcomes from Venice were explored further when The Happenstance returned to Scotland. The international recognition that The Happenstance received was a reflection of the fact that WAVEparticle's work with a range of collaborators from different creative disciplines (such as film-making, architecture and the visual arts) at Palazzo Zenobio, helped to create a genuine freespace and a well-loved community resource for the duration of the Biennale. This has helped to strengthen Scotland's links with Venice which can be built on in future years.

We believe that design-led participatory working should form a central role in the design of new and regenerated places and neighbourhoods. Through working collaboratively, technical, professional and community knowledge can combine positively to create places that support our health, our environment, our economy and importantly, our sense of positive and prosperous community.

The introduction of Local Place Plans in the Planning (Scotland) Act

2019 and the 'Place Principle' which has been endorsed by the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), provide further opportunities for place-based, community-led approaches to shape the future of Scotland's places. From a personal point of view, the notion of delivering freespaces within our built environment is one that will provide inspiration for years to come.

Ian Gilzean is the Chief Architect of the Planning and Architecture Division in the Scottish Government

RESOURCES

- [WAVEparticle Website](#)
- [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)
- [Making Places Programme](#)
- [Place Standard](#)
- [Creating Places](#)
- [Local Place Plans in the Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#)
- [Mansfield, Susan: The Happenstance: People come here with a smile, and go out with a bigger smile, \[blog post\], Architecture & Design Scotland, July 2018.](#)





Present Voices Future Lives exhibition and workshops Ullapool 2019
Craig Stewart

The bigger picture around participatory practice and community empowerment is to inspire people to realise their own creativity and sense of ownership.



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Granton, Edinburgh consultation
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