



## ***Culture connects on climate...***

### **Wrocław's Urbact Transfer Story**

*By: Kamila Bzowy, Senior Specialist for Climate Action and Piotr Matunin, Project Manager, Wrocław City Hall, March 2021*

Climate change and environmental protection have for many years been dealt with in a more compartmentalised way, often seen as someone else's responsibility - city departments, environment agencies, environmental campaigning groups, sector associations etc. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as the gravity of the climate and ecological crises we are facing hits home, we are seeing a groundswell of demand for rapid and urgent action across all sectors of our society. And a recognition that to truly address these crises, we need a more joined-up approach and action across the board. Wrocław's involvement in C-Change, an URBACT-funded group of cities working together to learn from and build on Manchester's experience with cultural collaboration on climate action, has inspired artists and cultural organisations in our city to come together on climate, take responsibility and take action. What's more, Wrocław's culture and climate pioneers are also advocating for action on climate and environment within the sector and engaging with their audiences and communities to inspire them to do the same. The story of how this happened, how small steps have led to bigger change, is best told by the people from Wrocław's arts and culture sector who have been involved.

Environmental protection and sustainable development were already important issues for many of the artists represented by Wrocław's Entropia Gallery. While the gallery was mindful of its own environmental impacts, they knew there was much more they could. Entropia Gallery's Mariusz Jodko says *"Being a part of C-Change was a fascinating experience. It gave us the opportunity not only to learn about the kind of action being taken by the Manchester Arts Sustainability Team but also to connect with and learn from our peers."* For the Entropia Gallery team, peer learning and exchange was key to inspiring them to take bigger, bolder steps on climate and environment.

Katarzyna Roj, curator at Wrocław's BWA Dizajn Gallery, explains that for many years, a number of smaller cultural organisations had been taking action to reduce their environmental impacts, mostly on an individual basis but in some cases through smaller informal networks. *"However,"* she goes on to say *"sharing and exchanging what we had been doing through C-Change meetings enabled us to scale up action. Working together helped us develop a sense of direction and collective purpose while at the same time building recognition of the unique role the arts and culture sector could play on climate action and engagement"*.

The value of collaboration and networking, in informing and driving action was clearly recognised by those from the sector involved in C-Change. Understanding climate change – the science, the consequences, the solutions – and understanding the climate change impacts and carbon footprints of individual organisations, also proved its value. In October 2019, BWA Dizajn Gallery's Joanna Sokalska, Culture Zone Wrocław's Krzysztof Bielaszka, Katarzyna Bochenek from the Swiatowid Creative Arts Centre and Mateusz Ryczek from the Municipal Library, and also a composer, went to Manchester.

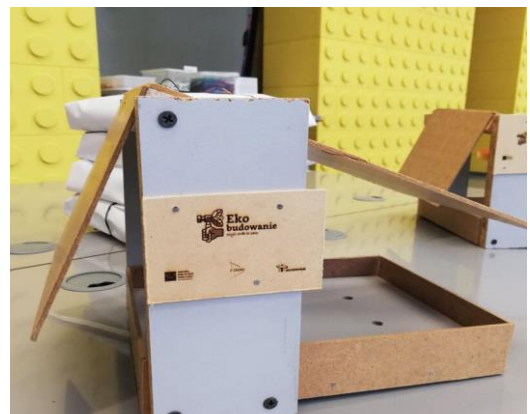
Here they participated in [carbon literacy training](#) led by trainers from HOME, one of Manchester's leading cultural venues, and had the chance to meet with their peers from Manchester and the other C-Change cities, share good practice and develop new ideas. Joanna, Krzysztof, Katarzyna and Mateusz went on to deliver an adapted version of the carbon literacy [training in Wrocław in summer 2020](#) - four training sessions with a total of 48 participants from 27 cultural organisations. The training included tools and examples from C-Change as well as city environmental solutions and projects. Having participated in the training, Mariusz Jodko says "*The depth and breadth of sector-specific action and solutions explored in the training, really helped us work out what we could do.*"



From Manchester (left) to Wrocław (right) - sector training on climate change science, impacts and solution, source photo right: Wrocław City Hall

The municipality has also been working to inform sector action, through funding and sharing the results of energy and environmental audits done in a number of cultural venues in the city. A number of cultural organisations have now also created specific environmental roles to support and lead on climate and environmental action.

At Wrocław's Municipal Library, action now takes make different forms, from environmental awareness-raising activities for employees to creative upcycling workshops for library visitors. [Eco-build DIY](#) is a recent library initiative to raise public awareness about urban wildlife by building birdboxes, bird feeder and even insect drinkers using reclaimed materials and putting them up across the city. It is also an example of a creative solution from a sector which has been particularly hard hit by Covid restrictions. Mateusz Ryczek, an educator at the library's multi-media centre involved in C-Change explains how it works "*We weren't able to do physical workshops due to Covid, so our team prepared DIY kits which went out to all library branches where there were made available to the public. A 'how to' video published on our online platform and YouTube channel, tells people how and what to do.*"



Eco-build DIY bird feeders made from recycled materials and old library bookshelves, photo: Wrocław's Municipal Library

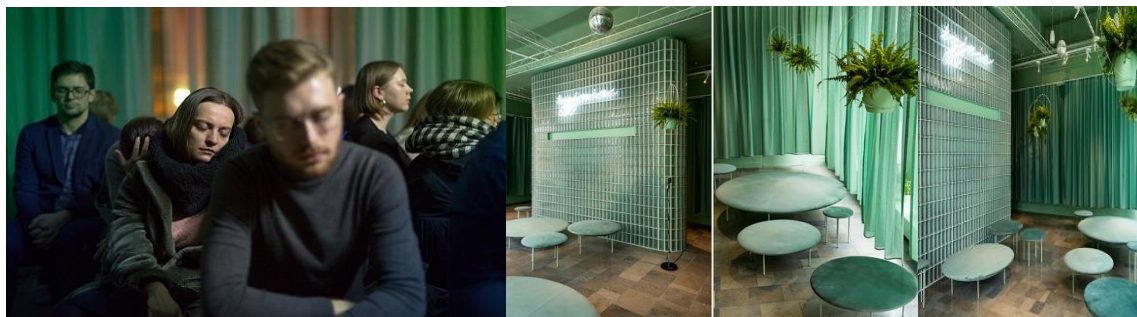
Following on the wildlife theme, but with a very different approach, *The Rescue Whale* is a film made by the Children's Film Studio at the Entropia Gallery using stop motion animation technique. The film shows the impact increasingly polluted seas and oceans are having on wildlife and tells the story of the invention of a new floating water purifier, inspired by the ingenuity of marine wildlife.



Left to right: Children's Film Studio animators at work on *The Rescue Whale* and a still from *The Rescue Whale*, source: Entropia Gallery resources

So far networking opportunities and training have been the key drivers for sector action in Wrocław. The city is now also running a pilot programme providing micro-grants to a number of cultural and creative initiatives on climate and environment, but leaving the scope completely open. These initiatives range from creating a green oasis in a theatre space and the production of a soundtrack for an animated film on environmental issues, to the purchase of upcycling equipment for creative projects. This programme signals the city's intention to bring culture and climate more closely together within the city administration and through sector support.

The results of the pilot initiatives will be presented during the [Wrocław C-Change Festival 2021](#). Another example of what will feature in the festival is the [Zyjnia well-being space](#) at the BWA Dizajn Gallery, designed to environmental principles. Mariusz Jodko from the Entropia Gallery explains the idea behind the C-Change Festival, "*The festival itself should provide a forum for the people from the arts and culture in Wrocław to showcase what they have done, what difference it has and the unique role the sector can play. It should connect creativity, culture and citizens in a common cause of making our city a better, greener, cleaner place to live*".



Left: *Zyjnia* performance "Calmness – the study of calm" by Daria Krawczyk and Adam Zdunczyk February 2020, source: *Zyjnia*, photo: Alicja Kielan

Right: BWA Dizajn Gallery well-being space, source: Buck Studio, photo: Alicja Kielan



In the words of BWA Dizajn Gallery's Katarzyna Roj "*C-Change has catalysed environmental and climate action for our sector. Bringing us together, providing a platform for exchange and collaboration has been central this.*" On the city side and political level, there is a growing recognition of the unique role of the arts and culture can play in responding to the climate and ecological crisis, through their own actions, through their reach and through their ability to connect with people's hearts and minds.

In 2020, during its Culture Congress, a new Cultural Council of the Mayor of Wrocław was elected. The council has been tasked with developing dialogue and cooperation between the local authorities and the creative and cultural sector and developing an integrated cultural strategy for Wrocław. Thanks to C-Change, we now know that climate and environmental action and engagement must be part of this strategy, and that the sector can play a unique role in shaping city climate change policy and inspiring and mobilising the people of our city to action.