



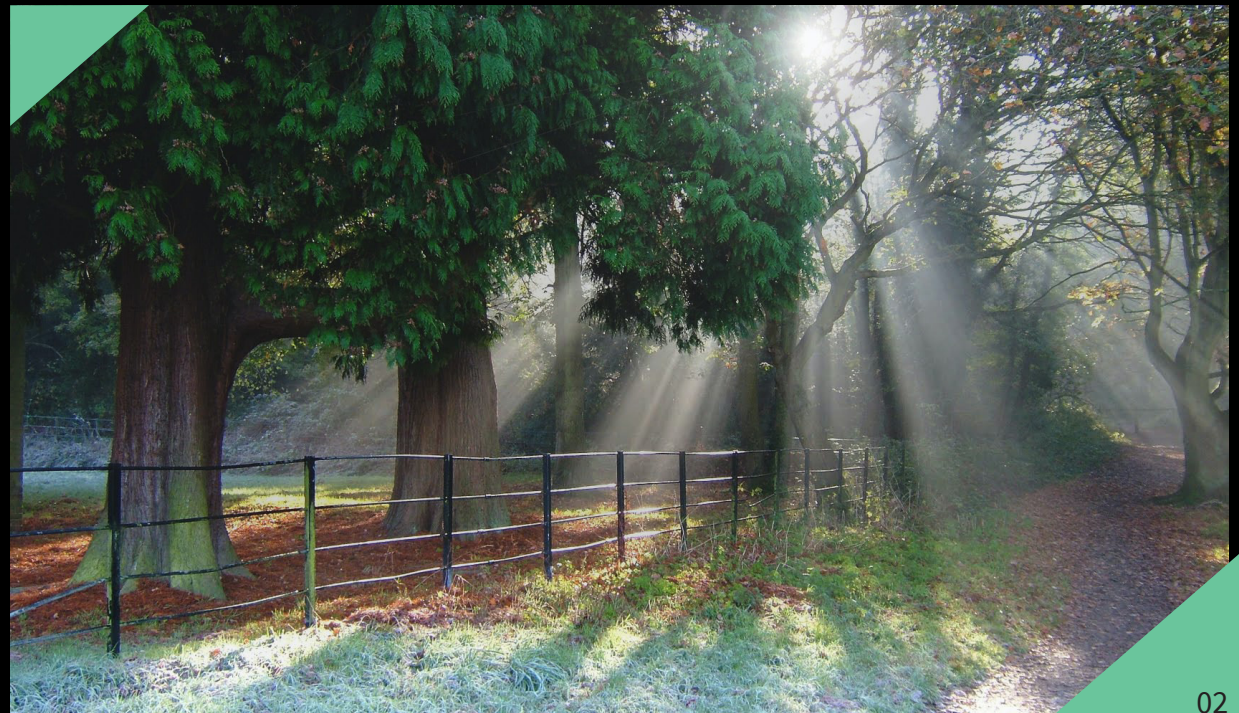
Edinburgh Futures Institute Design Lab

A reflective walk
guided by climate data

Experience in the New Real

Harnessing data-driven experiences to support Edinburgh's festivals and inspire behavioural change that responds to the climate emergency.

As a response to the cultural loss of the Edinburgh festivals in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Edinburgh Futures Institute Design Lab project *Experience in the New Real* developed *AWEN*, a digital walking experience powered by environmental data and modelling that encourages users to connect with their local environment and reflect on the global climate crisis.



Exploring the space between tech, art and climate change

In the summer of 2020, for the first time in 73 years, Edinburgh's festival season was cancelled. The global pandemic prevented any feasible hosting of the International, Fringe and Film Festivals.

Experience in the New Real is a response to the loss of these events, and one of Edinburgh Future Institute's Design Lab projects, a programme created to insert design thinking in research and innovation. The programme supports a series of co-development initiatives that encourage Covid-19 recovery and long-term sustainability in Edinburgh and its surrounding regions.

Experience in the New Real looks to explore the space between leading informatics tech development and cutting-edge artistic expression, while exposing some of society's most important challenges. By harnessing AI and big data, *Experience in the New Real* wanted to create distributed digital experiences that both feel like a festival and have a shared communal purpose - which in this case is the climate emergency.



A data-inspired reflective walk

“AWEN allows people to take a different, more balanced and introspective reflection on climate change and their role within the ecosystem, without pushing blame for not doing enough.”

Matjaz Vidmar

Experience in the New Real

Experience in the New Real is one of several projects in The New Real programme initiated and led by Drew Hemment. The co-creation research behind *Experience in the New Real* is led by Innovations Studies specialist and Experiential AI Research Lead for *The New Real*, Matjaz Vidmar. The *Experience in the New Real* team developed *A walk encountering nature (AWEN)*, a web-based mobile digital experience.

Designed and built in collaboration with the Edinburgh Science Festival, *AWEN* leverages big data and AI to create digital cultural experiences that encourage users to re-interpret and develop new perspectives on the climate emergency. *AWEN* takes users on a self-guided walk through their real-life environment, prompting them to interact with their surroundings and direct their thinking to recognise connections between the global climate and their local environment.



Inspiring behavior change

Inspiring behavioural change is a critical aspect of addressing the climate crisis. Often, attempts at motivating people to live in a more environmentally conscious way fall short, and instead generate anxiety or guilt. Alternatively, *AWEN*'s reflective walk intends to encourage behavioural change in relation to the climate emergency through introspective reflection, connecting people to their environment and finding a message that isn't overwhelming.

AWEN and the *Experience in the New Real* also respond to the rising demand for Edinburgh's festivals to acknowledge and incorporate dispersed digital experiences into their programmes. In this case, the Covid-19 lockdown has served as a catalyst for beginning to meet this demand, but it has been a present need for long before.

To achieve all this, the team used their Open Prototyping framework in a collaborative process engaging artists, designers, scientists,

data scientists, and geoscientists to frame the experience, its narrative and its logic. Around 150 people loaded the *AWEN* experience and gave feedback on how it made them feel, commonly using words such as 'mindful', 'informative' and 'absorbing' to describe the experience. There was also evidence that *AWEN* effectively inspired users to change their behavior, many suggesting that as a result of the experience they would, for example, channel climate-related anxiety into some form of participation, or interact with their environment differently.

In addition, there has been interest in *AWEN*'s potential for use in schools and youth groups to inspire climate-related behavioural change that is more holistic and introspective, and less about pushing blame or a great amount of personal responsibility on people. The team is now pursuing opportunities to fund the scaling of the prototype experience into something more advanced than the current version of *AWEN*.

“This project demonstrates the importance of the Design Lab programme to galvanise parts of industry to sustain themselves now in the face of crisis and develop new ideas on how they can operate in the future.”

Matjaz Vidmar

Experience in the New Real

The role of Edinburgh Futures Institute Design Lab

The Design Lab aims to promote design thinking as an approach to innovation. Due to *Experience in the New Real's* Open Prototyping method, a large team of stakeholders across *Experience in the New Real* and the Edinburgh Science Festival were able to co-create *AWEN* together. This approach enabled the project to be flexible and iterative - which was essential, as this is a way that academia is not used to working.

Get in touch and find out more about
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DDI Data-Driven
Innovation

The EFI Design Lab is part of a new programme alongside the Urban and Regional Data Platform to support the recovery and long-term sustainability of the Edinburgh City and Regions. Initiated over the last year, using Data Driven Innovation (DDI) Programme and SFC (Scottish Funding Council) funds awarded to the University of Edinburgh and distributed by DDI, the programme is led by the Bayes Centre and Edinburgh Futures Institute. The Design Lab encompasses four demonstrator projects that showcase the key themes and objectives of the Lab, including using data driven innovation with design and co-creation, prioritising multidisciplinary approaches and cross hub participation, creating and demonstrating local/regional impact, and evidencing an economic focus on Scotland's post-COVID-19 low-carbon economy aspirations. Image right credit: Edinburgh Futures Institute

