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PRACTICE INSIGHTS

# Climate change is (NOT) funny: insights from a climate change comedy event

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**Abstract**

In recent years there has been an increasing call for new modes of climate change communication. These calls have gone beyond classic consensus-building and fact-sharing to addressing affective dimensions and meaning-making in relation to the climate crisis. In this article we reflect on a proof-of-concept climate change comedy project — *Climate Change is NOT Funny!*. Building on audience and performer insights, we reflect on the effectiveness and affective dimensions of comedy as a climate change communication method, as well as institutional and funding constraints on delivery. Finally, we introduce how we designed our project to go on making an impact beyond the grant's lifespan. By empowering professional comedians to embed new research-informed climate change material into their regular sets, we argue that our approach can amplify the reach of climate communication activities, and in turn provide new forums for individuals to engage with the most pressing aspects of the climate crisis.

**Keywords**

Environmental communication; Public engagement with science and technology; Science communication: theory and models

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## 1 ▪ Introduction

As anthropogenic climate change and the emergency it entails moves from a narrative discourse centred on potential futures, to living and adapting to the unfolding catastrophe, there have been calls for new modes of climate communication. These calls in part centre on a recognition that previous attempts to build a public consensus on the science have focussed too much on persuasive and fact-sharing initiatives at the expense of other more active and engaged community empowerment approaches [see Hall, 2022, for discussion]. This relatively recent shift, from epistemic to affective communications initiatives, is encapsulated in the writings of climate essayist Mary Annaïse Heglar. "I want to change the narrative around our climate crisis, to make it more intersectional, more emotional" writes Heglar, continuing "I don't want a fact-finding mission. I want a truth-telling movement" [Heglar, 2019]. These calls are echoed in a recent special issue of *Frontiers in Climate* focussing on the affective dimensions of climate risk. Noting how we can no longer solely rely on political nor scientific rhetoric to frame the climate emergency, the editors sought to stimulate discussion of the emotional and affective dimensions of the climate crisis [Harada et al., 2022].

These shifts mirror those in science communication more broadly, with the recent third edition of the Routledge Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology embracing the 'cultural turn' in the field, which centres meaning making over information transfer [Bucchi & Trench, 2021, p. 6]. While reviewing Bucchi & Trench, Durant [2022, p. 691] observed that participating "in a science storytelling or science comedy event, is to be made immediately aware that much more is happening than is captured by restrictive notions of information transfer or even — with a nod to anti-deficit model orientations — information exchange".

One element of the call for a new wave of communications around and orientations towards the climate crisis focuses on comedy [Boykoff, 2019; Magon, 2019]. Science comedy and critical discussions around the use of humour in science communication more broadly has a longer history [see Riesch, 2015; Bankes, 2023]. Events such as Bright Club, founded in London in 2009 by Steve Cross and Miriam Miller, saw academics trained in the comedic arts take to the stage in a "thinking person's variety night" [Jahme, 2010; Bankes, 2023]. Similar events emerged in other UK cities and internationally, showing an evident audience for such endeavours [e.g. Pinto et al., 2015; Roche et al., 2020].

Climate change comedy now has its own small but emergent literature focussed both at academic [Becker & Anderson, 2019; Carroll-Monteil, 2023; Osnes et al., 2019] and general audiences [Winning, 2021; Maslin, 2024]. In reviewing the potential role of humour for climate change communications, Kaltenbacher and Drews [2020] suggest humour offers the potential to positively affect various public responses, from reaching new audiences, to triggering interest, and helping behavioural change. Yet, Kaltenbacher and Drews [2020] add that communicators also need to be aware of humour's potential risks, such as the weakening of credibility or the potential trivialisation of issues. Others, such as Carroll-Monteil [2023] find that climate-based comedy can be a positive learning experience and can lead to hope about the future.

It is in this context in which we set out to design and deliver a climate change comedy event. Not as an enterprise in making facts funny, but to give people permission to share in a group

experience, to feel, and to make meaning around the climate crisis through the medium of comedy.

## 2 ▪ The project

In this section we first briefly explain the project concept and our primary aims. We then reflect thematically on the areas of importance and difficulty that emerged during the course of the project. We hope these reflections help readers better understand the motivations and processes of our project and offer organisers of similar future events areas to consider and pitfalls to avoid.

### 2.1 ▪ *Concept & aims*

*Climate Change is NOT Funny!* was an innovative, proof-of-concept public engagement project that aimed to bring together multidisciplinary environmental researchers, professional stand-up comedians, and the local community. The project was funded by a Natural Environment Research Council (UK) public engagement grant and took place in early 2022 (#GR042/NERC_RILEY_2021). Through a series of facilitated workshops, researchers and comedians were able to share their respective expertise and develop comedy sets on the topic of climate change. The project culminated in a live event where researchers and comedians performed their sets to a local audience.

The project had two primary aims:

1. to enable two-way skills and expertise sharing between environmental researchers and comedians; and
2. to trial comedy as a means of public engagement with climate change research.

With regards to this second aim, we were particularly interested in seeing whether the narrative format of comedy and the cathartic power of laughter could be utilised, not only to communicate academic work on climate change and adaptation, but also to empower individuals and communities to proactively face the issues at hand. Further, while utilising science-based comedy for climate communication has been tried before (see *Introduction*), we saw our approach as novel in that we were not solely training climate studies academics to use comedy, but *also* training professional comedians to become confident climate change communicators.

During planning, we envisaged the project in three phases (Figure 1). Phase 1 consisted of the pre-event workshops, where our researchers and performers came together, engaged in training and conversation, built a sense of common purpose, and began to develop ideas for their performances. Here we did not employ a prescriptive approach, researchers were free to develop their own content, or to act in partnership with the professional comedians, informing the development of their new climate-related material. A large part of this phase involved helping researchers become comfortable with the idea of doing comedy about their research and helping comedians become comfortable with the idea that climate change was a subject deserving of their comedic attention. Phase 2 was the event itself, where the comedians and researchers delivered their material to a live audience. Finally, Phase 3 involved the post-event impacts, as discussed in the *Evaluation & impacts* section below.

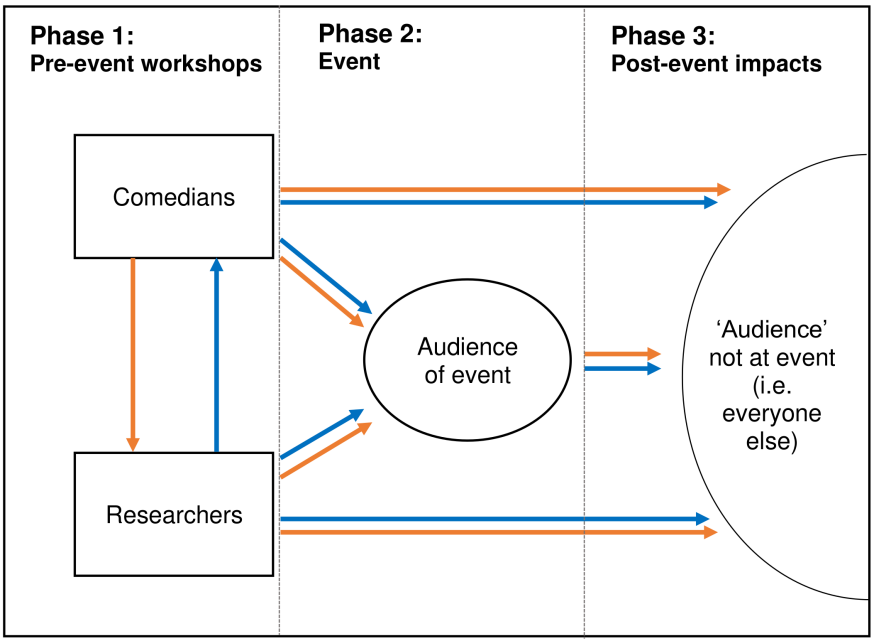


**Figure 1.** The three phases, and impacts, of the project.

### 2.2 ▪ *Recruitment & remuneration*

To identify academic participants, we searched our institution's website for those with research interests in climate change and intersecting issues. We were conscious to not limit participation to those in the natural sciences, and instead broadened our search to any researcher whose work intersected with an important aspect of the climate crisis (see next section — *Multidisciplinarity & expertise*). We sent both individual email invites and invites via gatekeepers of research institutes and groups. This second approach was particularly fruitful, as the gatekeepers could help direct our enquiry to those with an established interest in comedy or science communication more generally.

For academics there was a correlation between early career stage and participation. Mid to senior researchers were both far less likely to respond to initial invitations to participate, and to complete the full programme of events. In fact, from workshops to live performance, the attrition rate among senior-level academics was 100%. This leads to two reflections: senior academics are often very busy, and the time commitments needed for such a project (approximately 4–5 days in total) may have been prohibitive. Indeed, one of our participating senior researchers gave feedback that they dropped out solely because they were too busy. Speculatively, this may suggest such projects are seen as of less value to more senior academics (operating under various institutional constraints and expectations), who in this case prioritised their limited time elsewhere. Finally, we may consider if novel types of public engagement, beyond the traditional public lecture, may open up concerns of reputational damage for more senior academics. Whereas early career and graduate researchers may consider such opportunities to be career-building, rather than potentially career-ending.[1] Pinto et al. [2015, p. 789] observed a similar pattern of career level and participation in their science comedy project, reflecting, that a lack of senior academic participation may be due

1. As of time of publication, no careers have ended due to participation in the project.

to stand-up comedy involving “more risk, exposure and training than other traditional methods of science communication”.

Recruiting comedians was easier than academics, most likely because from the outset we offered speaker fees to participate and perform and at the time live performers were still struggling from the significant disruption to their industry caused by COVID-19 lockdowns. Invitations either went through personal emails, website contact forms, or for more established comedians, via management agencies. We found management agencies to be incredibly useful, and in future will prioritise establishing relationships with relevant agencies at the grant application stage. These types of partnerships can make administering the project far easier, and also have the potential to make grant applications stronger in the first place. When communicating with comedians we were sensitive to differing professional practices — notably around emails and conference calls — which we may take for granted when we mainly communicate with other academics. It is worth bearing in mind how norms of communication within and beyond the academy differ (e.g. planning timelines for touring professionals), and factoring this into your own planning.

In the beginning we did not envisage offering salaried academic participants performance fees. However, in time we acknowledged that this approach was unfair and potentially inequitable. While we may envisage public engagement as a public good that should be a dedicated component of academic job roles, we must recognise that for many academics, particularly those on precarious contracts, public engagement is often additional to their normal workload. Such involvement in public engagement activities is, unfortunately, often free labour, with the associated ethical implications and structural ramifications for the academy. Thus, we decided that offering remuneration for academic participants was a fairer approach — especially for early career and Ph.D. researchers who are often in more unstable financial situations. Public engagement should not run on free academic labour.

Considerations:

- How will you identify and contact relevant academics, and how will you convince mid- to senior-career researchers it will be worth taking part?
- Can you partner with a comedy management company, even at the pre-funding stage?
- What level of remuneration is a fair reflection of your academics’ and professional comedians’ time?

### 2.3 ▪ *Multidisciplinarity & expertise*

Often science engagement events rely solely on expertise or knowledge from the natural sciences, yet, other disciplines contribute greatly to our understanding of socio-scientific issues. From the outset we sought to include voices of participants from across the academy. Eventually including participants from environmental humanities, psychology, law, and sociology, as well as the natural sciences, all of whom speak in important ways about different aspects of the climate crisis. Often, it is experts from the humanities and social sciences who have the most engaging stories to tell about communities living through the climate crisis. From the hows and whys of climate disinformation [e.g. Lewandowsky, 2021], to the unequal impacts on poorer communities [e.g. Dennig et al., 2015], and to the role of cultural

identity and community memory in shaping our conceptions of the climate [e.g. Hall, 2022]. Leaving the humanities and social sciences out of the conversation leaves too much unsaid.

In our project design, we also broadened our view of multidisciplinarity beyond academic researchers to include the comedians — equally valuing their skills, disciplinary norms, and expertise. During the workshops, our comedy performers shared valuable expertise on how to construct an arresting narrative, how to develop an idea, how to connect with an audience, and how to find the funny in the serious or mundane. These interactions greatly benefited our academics, for some of whom it was the first time attempting a comedy performance. Thus, in Phase 1 we envisaged the workshops as an opportunity for two-way expertise sharing and community building between academics and comedians (Figure 1). In theory then, these two bodies or modes of expertise and experience were then combined and mobilised in Phase 2, the event itself. Though we conceived of Phase 1 to be just as important, in some senses more important, than the live event itself (see *Evaluation & impacts* for more).

Considerations:

- What disciplines beyond the natural sciences also speak meaningfully to the issue or subject at hand?
- How will you allow space for everyone to share their sometimes-conflicting views?
- How will you facilitate expertise and skills sharing between comedy performers and academics?

### 2.4 ▪ *Workshops: co-creation, visual aids, & ownership*

Initially we planned face-to-face workshops, but due to a marked surge in COVID-19 cases, the decision was made to pivot online. We had to be responsive to the developing situation and act responsibly for the health of our participants.

Prior to the first workshop we shared a list of resources with participants, which aimed to familiarise our academics and comedians with the broader affective push in studies on climate change communication, and also to share examples of how climate change comedy had been done before (Table 1).

The workshops themselves had a strong focus on community building. We wanted all participants to feel comfortable with each other, our aims as organisers, and the material they were going to incorporate into their performances. In conceiving and developing jokes about a sensitive issue such as climate change, we had to ensure that there was a level of trust amongst the group. We introduced ourselves, played structured games, and got to know each other. Only then did we progress onto co-creating material. Building a sense of community between academics and comedians was a central goal of the project.

Science-based comedy is not without its pitfalls. As Riesch [2015] has argued, humour that relies on superiority and ridicule may well be counterproductive for outreach. In this context, for example, the lampooning of climate deniers. In the workshops we were keen to stress this to our comedians and academics, noting the old comedic adage that performers should not ‘punch down’.

Stand-up comedians, on the whole, tend not to use visual aids in their performances (although of course there are exceptions, such as the work of Dave Gorman). Building on

**Table 1.** List of resources shared with participants before workshops.

| |
|---|
| **Have a read:** |
| A little humour may help with climate change gloom, *The Conversation*, https://theconversation.com/a-little-humour-may-help-with-climate-change-gloom-125860 |
| A Translator for the Climate Crisis, Grief Included, *NRDC*, https://www.nrdc.org/stories/translator-climate-crisis-grief-included – News article about the approach of climate justice essayist Mary Annaïse Heglar, centring feelings, emotions and the personal. |
| Mary Annaïse Heglar's climate essay reading list, https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2020/02/11/climate-personal-essay-reading-list/ – A list of essays curated by Heglar on personal dimensions to the climate crisis. |
| **Have a watch:** |
| Joe Lycett vs. The Oil Giant, *Channel 4*, https://www.channel4.com/programmes/joe-lycett-vs-the-oil-giant |
| We Forgot to Save the Planet, *Channel 4*, https://www.channel4.com/programmes/how-we-forgot-to-save-the-planet/on-demand/72659-001 |
| Marcus Brigstocke – Climate Change Speech, *NMP Live*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7essCRxpSOg |
| Stand Up for Climate Change, *University of Colorado*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIey4g-UP-o |
| President Obama's Anger Translator, *C-SPAN*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkAK9QRe4ds&t=257s |
| Climate Change Debate: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, *HBO*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjuGCJJUGsg |

Alexander Hall's eight years of experience running a regular stand-up comedy night for academic researchers,[2] we initially suggested participants (whether academics or comedians) avoid using visual aids, lest they lean on them too much and the content becomes too close to a lecture. However, during the workshops it became clear many participants did want to use visual aids. We advised that they could be used, so long as text was kept to a minimum and they were used to help drive home a comedic point. Interestingly, in the final show more comedians used visual aids than academics — and to great effect. This was likely a role reversal effect, with the comedians jumping at the opportunity to use a presentation technique outside of their industry's norms.

As the workshops were co-creative, and we brainstormed and riffed jokes on various parts of the climate crisis, soon the issue of ownership arose. In comedy (just as is supposed to be the case in academia) it is something of a faux pas to use someone else's material uncredited. In the end we reached a consensus agreeing that anyone could use ideas, jokes, or scenarios we co-created during the workshop sessions; but that if people planned to do this, they must let us know in advance. This was to ensure that on the night multiple acts would not be performing on exactly the same subject, or worse still, performing the same joke.

Considerations:

- How will you build a sense of community and common purpose?
- What training will you offer to both comedians and academics?
- Are visual aids to be used, and if so, what rules will you set about them?
- How will you negotiate ownership of co-created materials?

2. Alexander Hall was a co-organiser of the volunteer run science comedy show, Bright Club Manchester from 2013 until 2022. For more information about the event and organisers see https://brightclubmcr.org.uk/ [last accessed 20 Sept 2023].

**Figure 2.** A photo from the event, showing the room set-up.

### 2.5 ▪ *Venue & event*

Venue selection is incredibly important in science communication activities. Not only are a venue's physical attributes important — the seating arrangements, accessibility, lighting, sound capabilities etc. — but so is the venue's social context. Your venue is the window through which you reach your target audience. It is your main tool of attracting different types of people. If you want a diverse, non-standard science event crowd, then pick a comedy club or pub to perform in. We were restricted in our venue, via our institution's co-sponsorship of the project and so used the University's new public engagement building. However, while the venue was more of a traditional conference, rather than comedy, space, we managed to arrange it to feel as much like a comedy gig as possible (see Figure 2). This included taking direction from our comedy performers, on how to set out seats and spotlight the performance area to recreate the stand-up comedy aesthetic. Again, this reinforces the point of recognising our comedic performers' expertise.

The event was compèred by our most high-profile comedian, who began by getting the crowd warmed up (pun intended) then expertly stitched the evening together, improvising connecting segments to draw links between each act. Like the majority of our professional comedians, while our compère had previous experience performing on social justice issues, they had no prior experience of performing about climate change or science more generally. To ensure the event ran as smoothly as possible, we were careful and deliberate in curating the running order and schedule for proceedings, considering aspects such as experience, levity and format in deciding on the final running order.

The sets performed by our comedians and academic researchers took a wide range of approaches, from scripted stand-up routines on forest laboratories, through to

character-based sketches, one of which featured a greenwashing social media influencer funded by a fossil fuel company. Given our aim to demonstrate the importance of providing spaces for people to process their climate grief, anxiety and anger, the evening also included plenty of opportunity for audience interaction, both via the more conventional light-probing of our front row by the compère and via a segment of improvised sketches whereby the audience shaped the scenarios for our professional improv-comedians to bring to life.

### 2.6 ▪ *Evaluation & impacts*

The final show had 62 members in the audience, filling all of the allocated seats for the venue. We were particularly keen not to break the perception of the audience being at a normal comedy night, where being asked to fill out a post-event survey is an abnormality. Therefore, evaluation was carried out as the audience left the show whereby event staff asked attendees their thoughts on the event and noted down their responses. 23% of the audience gave us feedback via this mechanism. This snapshot feedback given by audience members was universally positive, with attendees particularly noting how they enjoyed the innovative elements of the night (Table 2). Audience feedback confirmed that comedy centred on tough issues can work, and with regard to climate change, our audience feedback suggested it is sorely needed. The night was funny. We created a sense of shared identity. People felt free to share their emotions in relation to the climate crisis.

The academics and comedians who participated in our project were sent evaluation emails at two weeks and eight months post-show. At two weeks we asked open-response questions regarding if they had been talking or thinking about climate change more than they would have otherwise, if they planned on using the material they had developed again, what they thought went well with the project, how the project could be improved, and for any additional thoughts on their experience. At the eight-month follow-up we were interested in if they had used their material again, and if the project had influenced their professional practice, or life more generally.

Both of the project's primary aims — to trial comedy as a means of climate change research public engagement, and to enable two-way skills and expertise sharing between environmental researchers and comedians — were achieved. The carefully designed workshops were at the core of providing the two-way skills sharing. While COVID-19 related challenges meant the workshops were delivered online, all performing participants managed to share expertise and begin to build networks with each other, some of which have

**Table 2.** Selection of audience feedback.

| |
|---|
| "A really good and engaging format for talking about the climate. Loved all the acts so much! Great night, will return if put on again." |
| "Really engaging and thought provoking." |
| "Awesome!" |
| "Really informative and great to see the level of innovation." |
| "Really fun, informative evening! Please do more!! Live, laugh, love a gig." |
| "Fun evening, full of exciting facts and laughs." |
| "INCREDIBLE!! Loved it. Thank you 😊" |

**Table 3.** Comedy performer and academic participant feedback on project (2-week post-event).

| |
|---|
| "This project has made me reflect and reconsider my relationship with climate change and triggered the desire to 'do better'. Prior to the project, I have been on a gradual personal journey by cooking majority vegan, trying to use less single use plastic, trying to engage with dialogue about it when I can. What this project gave me the permission to do was 'be ok' with my ignorance with experts and ask more. I loved connecting with the academics and comedians through the workshops and learning about the broad range of research into the topic and communication around it. The event itself felt like a really refreshing and relaxed way to engage with the issues in a way which wasn't a lecture/documentary or Extinction Rebellion. Whilst learning about the stats of climate change always feels shocking, being invited to laugh with it made it feel cathartic and healing.<br>This sort of activity is exactly what the world needs right now- interactive, playful ways to engage in issues of dire importance!"<br>*— Comedy performer 1 (F, 30s)* |
| "Having the training sessions was really helpful to help the acts write their material… The project helped me to reflect on the ways I could explain my research in an engaging way. I have since reused my set for another comedy night and this kept the conversation rolling and meant I told others, that I otherwise wouldn't have, about climate research."<br>*— Academic 1 (F, 20s)* |

continued after the project. Similarly, the workshops received high praise from both the academics and performers involved (see Table 3).

From the first conception of the project, we had envisaged three phases of impact (Figure 1):

- Phase 1 involved bringing comedians and academics together into a space to share, collaborate and co-create;
- Phase 2 involved delivery to the audience during the live event and its effects upon them;
- Phase 3 was the post-event impacts that often escape consideration, but we argue, at least in this instance, are the most important to consider.

Phase 2, the live event, is where the more traditional impact of our engagement project occurred, i.e. this is the space where we had the opportunity to directly impact our audience. In our project, the audience entered a space where climate change could be talked about in a new and different way. They were told stories, jokes, whimsical asides, and were given permission to share their emotions on the subject. After the event, via the exit snapshot feedback, other informal conversations with attendees and performers, as well as via evaluation emails, we received various confirmations that people intended to or indeed were changing their behaviours to be more environmentally friendly, in light of their experiences at the event and as part of the project. Notably, this was particularly the case for our comedy performers. In Table 4 we display responses regarding the self-reported influence of participating in the project on the lives of our comedy performers from our 8-month follow-up evaluation emails.

Across many public engagement activities, there is a tendency to solely focus on the importance of Phase 2 direct audience impacts (Table 2). Often, this comes at the expense of other stages of outreach projects, with Phase 1 and particularly Phase 3 impacts tending to go under-strategized, emphasised or acknowledged. In our project the Phase 1 impacts were those that occurred due to the workshops, between the comedy performers and

**Table 4.** Comedy performer feedback on the influence of the project on their lives (8-month follow up).

| **Has anything you learnt from being part of the project influenced your practice, or life more generally?** |
|---|
| "For sure — I've committed to cutting down on meat consumption and been more aware of conversations about climate change in the media and how these are communicated. I would love to go to another climate change comedy night."<br>*— Comedy Performer 1 (F, 30s)* |
| "Definitely. The research I did about the carbon footprint of food has massively influenced how and what I eat. Some of the research supported what I thought to be true. But some of the research I did was really surprising. I have massively reduced certain products from my diet as a direct result of what I found out."<br>*— Comedy Performer 2 (F, 30s)* |
| "I think what I learned in relation to fast fashion has certainly been an influence, I've been more aware online recently of companies who get advertised to me a lot and it has made me research more generally into the impact fast fashion is having globally. I didn't actually know that term before this project and I think unconsciously I've also been influenced as when I have a big event to go to such as a wedding where I might have a dress that I wear once or twice I've been looking at dress rental companies instead of buying something new."<br>*— Comedy Performer 3 (F, 30s)* |

academics. This was conceived of from the start as just as important a part of the communications process as the live event itself. We gave five professional comedians the time and headspace to think and develop comedy content around climate change, in direct contact with multidisciplinary expert researchers on the subject.

Our hope in this regard was that the comedians involved would incorporate some of the jokes they developed for our project into their more regular sets, and in doing so, would take their expert-informed jokes on climate change to thousands of comedy fans across the UK and beyond. An offhand remark to a friend. A single joke at the Edinburgh Fringe festival. A tweet to 100,000 people lampooning the fossil fuel industry's role in the heatwave of summer 2022. Via these Phase 3 impacts, difficult as they are to measure or evaluate, the jokes and climate knowledge embedded in them and the feelings they engender, will go on having impact as they ripple across comedy's cultural landscape. We do have evidence of this wider impact occurring, with one of the comedians involved now giving up eating one animal per month after learning about their carbon footprint during the project. They are centring this journey in their regular stand-up routines. Now, that's (Phase 3) impact!

Likewise, through the project we hoped to empower the academic researchers involved to seek out new creative opportunities to communicate their work to diverse non-specialist audiences. Indeed, following the show we were invited to take an abridged version to the Green Man Festival in Wales. Thus, in direct demonstration of our hoped-for Phase 3 impacts, in August of the same year, three of our academics performed to a packed comedy tent in a festival setting. The setting had changed, and we were without the reinforcement of our professional comedians, but post-event conversations with the audience reflected the experience of the original event — being empowered to laugh, to feel, and to share in a group experience on the climate crisis.

## 3 ▪ Discussion & conclusions

In this project we attempted to be part of the move away from 'fact-sharing' towards 'meaning-making' in climate change communication. Giving researchers, comedians, and the audience spaces in which they could explore the emotive dimensions of climate change using laughter as the primary tool. From the feedback collected, the project met both its aims: (1) to enable two-way skills and expertise sharing between environmental researchers and comedians; and (2) to trial comedy as a means of public engagement in climate change research. In particular with regards to this second aim, we were interested in seeing whether the narrative format of comedy and the cathartic power of laughter could be utilised, not only to communicate academic work on climate change and adaptation, but also to empower individuals and communities to proactively face the issues at hand.

From conception onwards, we always understood that this project was going to be a challenge, and we were going to have to adapt accordingly as it progressed. In this regard our main learning point was that delivering a project of this scope within the short turnaround timeframe required of a typical, small public engagement grant is difficult. Coordinating people across different industries, where norms around communications and scheduling timelines differ greatly presented a major challenge. To help rectify the amount of time spent overcoming these logistical challenges in future projects when engaging with new industries we would seek to establish partnerships with gatekeeping organisations (such as comedy management agencies) prior to applying for funding.

Even with such a partnership-led approach, the way in which the majority of funding calls are structured in the UK public engagement landscape is still somewhat prohibitive to the type of event we wished to pursue here. Often, calls are tied to a particular topic, sub-topic, or discipline, which makes multidisciplinary perspectives on an issue hard to incorporate.[3] There is a real need for more public engagement funding schemes which are not tied to a specific discipline, but which enable various perspectives on the issue at hand to be explored and widely communicated. After all, human brains, particularly those outside of the academy, are not so tightly bound by the labels we place on departmental doors. Ironically, it is to the detriment of science communication that it has thus far, to a great extent, centred scientific knowledge over other forms of expertise, empirical data and ways of knowing the world around us. As a result, other forms of expertise which highlight, narrate, or emphasise important parts of socio-scientific issues often go underfunded and thus unexplored in public spaces.

Planning and design are key for the success of public engagement events. In this article we have attempted to stress that impacts should be strategized beyond solely the audience of the event itself (what we call Phase 2 impacts in our design). Impacts on the researchers and comedians (Phase 1) and post-event impacts (Phase 3) were valued equally in the design of our project. Further, we think that resisting a preoccupation with Phase 2 direct audience effects can help public engagement practitioners conceptualise, strategize, and capture the broader impacts of their work (see Table 4).

There is also a larger discussion to be had about the relationship between laughter, emotion, and (in)action. We do not have representative data to comprehensively answer such concerns,

3. See the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's website for a list of engagement grant opportunities: https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/funding-opportunities.

however, indicatively, participation in this project led some participants, particularly our comedy performers, to begin pro-environmental behaviours, such as eating less meat or resisting fast fashion. It lit a fire to "do better", rather than releasing all the steam from the system. Interestingly, in a recent controlled, intervention-based study, Carroll-Monteil [2023] found that climate-based comedy can be a positive learning experience and can lead to hope. Osnes et al. [2019] also found that through developing comedy skits around climate change, students were able to positively process their negative emotions and to sustain hope for the future. Counteracting doomism and climate fatalism is important if we want to alleviate the worst of the climate crisis. For those who believe in climate change, hope can be a motivational force for pro-environmental behaviour [Ojala, 2012].

Having played various roles (as organisers, participants, and audience members) during this project, we certainly feel more hopeful than before about the future. The project itself, and the people involved, inspired us to do better. It made an often-abstract global catastrophe human. And, as humans, we should allow ourselves to find the humour in even the darkest of situations.

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