

# Creativity in climate adaptation Conceptualizing the role of arts organizations

## La créativité dans l'adaptation au climat Conceptualiser le rôle des organisations artistiques

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Résumé de l'article

Face à l'urgence climatique, il devient évident que le changement culturel est une transformation nécessaire pour assurer la survie de l'humanité. Le changement climatique est lié aux dimensions comportementales et sociales de nos vies, ce qui nécessite une transformation culturelle pour accéder au potentiel des solutions climatiques existantes. Bien qu'il y ait une augmentation de la recherche sur la façon dont les arts peuvent contribuer à cette transformation culturelle nécessaire, ainsi qu'une participation croissante au travail sur le climat par les acteurs du secteur artistique, le mariage entre les preuves et la pratique dans ce domaine n'en est qu'à ses balbutiements. La littérature existante met en évidence le potentiel passionnant des arts pour apporter des contributions significatives à l'action climatique par le biais de contributions interdisciplinaires à la création de connaissances, de forums d'engagement public qui vont au-delà du partage de faits, et de l'imagination de scénarios futurs pour notre monde. Cela dit, les organisations artistiques sont souvent exclues de la conversation. Afin de combler le fossé entre l'étude et la pratique dans ce domaine, cet article rend compte d'entrevues avec des membres clés de CreativePEI pour mieux comprendre comment une organisation artistique et ses membres conceptualisent leur rôle dans l'action climatique et pour identifier les obstacles critiques à la réalisation d'un travail sur le climat dans le domaine des arts. En outre, l'article situe les résultats de l'étude dans la littérature actuelle, en examinant les synergies entre les résultats de l'étude et les travaux universitaires dans ce domaine. En présentant les façons dont une organisation artistique se situe dans le projet plus large du changement climatique, ce travail jette un nouvel éclairage sur l'état actuel du travail sur le climat dans les arts au Canada et sur la façon dont les organisations culturelles peuvent réimaginer leur rôle pour mieux s'aligner sur les preuves de ce que les arts peuvent offrir de façon unique à l'action climatique.

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# Creativity in climate adaptation: Conceptualizing the role of arts organizations

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*Abstract:* In the face of the climate emergency, it is becoming clear that cultural change is a necessary transformative shift that must occur to ensure human survival. Climate change is entangled with behavioural and social dimensions of our lives, necessitating that we undergo cultural transformation to access the potential of existing climate solutions. While there is both an increase in research regarding how the arts can contribute to this needed cultural transformation, as well as increasing participation in climate work by those within the arts sector, the marriage between evidence and practice in this field is in its infancy. Existing literature highlights the exciting potential of the arts to make meaningful contributions to climate action through interdisciplinary contributions to knowledge creation, public engagement forums that go beyond fact-sharing, and imagining future scenarios for our world. That said, arts organizations are often left out of the conversation. In an effort to bridge the gap between study and practice in this field, this paper reports on interviews with key members of CreativePEI to better understand how one arts organization and its members conceptualize their role in climate action as well as identifying critical barriers to conducting climate work within the arts. Further, the paper situates the results of the study within the current literature, examining any synergies between the findings of the study and scholarly works in the field. By showcasing the ways in which one arts organization situates itself within the broader project of climate change, this work sheds new light on the current state of climate work in the arts in Canada and how cultural organizations can reimagine their role to better align with the evidence about what the arts can uniquely offer to climate action.

*Keywords:* CreativePEI, art organizations, public engagement, Canada arts, climate action

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mariage entre les preuves et la pratique dans ce domaine n'en est qu'à ses balbutiements. La littérature existante met en évidence le potentiel passionnant des arts pour apporter des contributions significatives à l'action climatique par le biais de contributions interdisciplinaires à la création de connaissances, de forums d'engagement public qui vont au-delà du partage de faits, et de l'imagination de scénarios futurs pour notre monde. Cela dit, les organisations artistiques sont souvent exclues de la conversation. Afin de combler le fossé entre l'étude et la pratique dans ce domaine, cet article rend compte d'entretiens avec des membres clés de CreativePEI pour mieux comprendre comment une organisation artistique et ses membres conceptualisent leur rôle dans l'action climatique et pour identifier les obstacles critiques à la réalisation d'un travail sur le climat dans le domaine des arts. En outre, l'article situe les résultats de l'étude dans la littérature actuelle, en examinant les synergies entre les résultats de l'étude et les travaux universitaires dans ce domaine. En présentant les façons dont une organisation artistique se situe dans le projet plus large du changement climatique, ce travail jette un nouvel éclairage sur l'état actuel du travail sur le climat dans les arts au Canada et sur la façon dont les organisations culturelles peuvent réimaginer leur rôle pour mieux s'aligner sur les preuves de ce que les arts peuvent offrir de façon unique à l'action climatique.

*Mots clé* : CreativePEI, organisations artistiques, engagement du public, arts du Canada, action climatique

## Introduction

As humanity grapples with the scale and complexity of the climate crisis, and with the slow pace of progress on activating existing climate solutions, we are collectively seeking new ways to mobilize resources and shift public and political will towards sustainable transformations. In the face of climate change, many point to the critical role culture must play in ensuring humanity's survival. This has led to growing engagement by researchers with the potentialities for the arts to contribute to climate action as key stakeholders.

The paper investigates the role of arts organizations in climate transitions by undertaking an in-depth engagement with key members of the organization CreativePEI. Using a lens of Norm Activation Theory (NAT), we investigate the readiness of CreativePEI to engage in activities related to sustainability and the arts (SATA). NAT suggests that for personal norms to be translated into behavior aligned with those norms, individuals must have both an awareness of the consequences of a problem, as well as a sense of personal responsibility for the problem (Schwartz, 1997). In this context, NAT helps us understand whether CreativePEI's conceptualization of its role in climate change situates them well to participate in SATA activities.

By undertaking interviews with key members of this organization, and analyzing their responses alongside NAT, we seek to contribute new knowledge on how arts organizations can be activated to apply their arts-based mandates and skills to the challenge of climate change. In this paper we aim to answer the question "How does CreativePEI conceptualize its role in fostering transformations towards climate action and adaptation?". In answering this question, we hope to learn how to better integrate evidence and practice and continue the process of contextualizing artists and arts organizations in the work of climate change. Better understanding of where arts organizations see themselves playing a role in climate

action can help us as researchers to understand how to better uplift, support, and enhance their work by providing new understanding in priority areas.

While this research seeks to understand how one arts organization and its members conceptualize their role in climate action, this paper serves as an example of meaningful engagement between SATA researchers and arts organizations and contributes new understanding to the benefits of and barriers to successful climate work taking place within the arts. Further, this paper provides one window into understanding how arts organizations can be activated and how climate-engaged work can be integrated into arts activities.

## **Background and Context**

The state of knowledge on sustainability and the arts:

It is well established in the literature that climate change is more than a biophysical challenge (Dessein et al., 2015). Martusewicz, Edmunson, and Lupinacci (2011) argue that climate change presents us with a “cultural crisis”. In describing the failure of governments to successfully respond to the enigmatic challenge of the climate crisis, Maggs (2021) describes climate as a “hopeless entanglement of natural, social, and technological forces” (p.31). This understanding that humanity must undergo cultural transformations to tackle the climate emergency is where scholars have found access points for the arts to meaningfully contribute to climate adaptation (Doll & Wright, 2019; Galafassi et al. 2018; Tyszcuk & Smith, 2018). Recognizing the potential for the arts to deploy cultural capacity has led to increased work at this intersection, both within academia and the arts sector, in turn leading to growing understanding of the many ways the arts can contribute to overall efforts in this domain (Marcuse, 2011; Packalen, 2010).

While scholars are learning more and more about the potential of the arts to play a meaningful role in climate adaptation, there remains a limited amount of scholarship in the field of SATA. In their 2019 bibliometric study of SATA literature, Wright and Llang identified a mere 77 articles published between 2000 and 2018. Among existing SATA literature, there is very little discussion of the role of arts organizations in climate adaptation and with that, a lack of recommendations or roadmaps for practitioners. This gap in understanding represents a roadblock for further mobilizing the arts sector to contribute capacity to the climate crisis. Among arts practitioners for whom climate engagement is unfamiliar territory, they may lack the motivation and know-how to meaningfully engage in SATA projects.

Answering the need for climate-engaged cultural work, artists and researchers are beginning to grow their practice and scholarship around Sustainability and the Arts (SATA) (Galafassi et al., 2018; Hudson Hill, 2020; Wright & Llang, 2019). While arts administrators are beginning to join this movement, arts organizations to date have not been engaged on a meaningful scale in discussions of how they can contribute to sustainable transformations (Julie’s Bicycle, 2021). Similarly, a lack of understanding of the role the arts have the potential to play in climate work, paired with a lacking sense of collective responsibility to contribute arts capacity to climate efforts, have kept work in the space disparate and small scale (Julie’s Bicycle, 2021). Even so, both artists and arts organizations play a significant role in the development of cultural norms (Ernstman & Wals, 2013). In 2011, artists represented 0.78% of the labour force in Canada, and other cultural workers represented 3.82% (Toronto Artscape, 2015). Arts organizations hold a significant portion of the capacity that exists within the arts and by determining their

own work priorities, these organizations hold meaningful power in what the arts collectively offer to society. In efforts to mobilize the arts sector towards climate work, arts organizations cannot be ignored.

### CreativePEI:

CreativePEI is a sector council for creative industries on Epekwitk (the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island) with a mandate to contribute resources, build capacity, and advocate for artists, arts organizations, and arts initiatives (CreativePEI). Epekwitk is an island located on the East Coast of Canada in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. CreativePEI operates out of the province's capital, Charlottetown, a city with a population of approximately 40,000 (StatsCan, 2021). Epekwitk is located within the Appalachian region and its surface is made up of sandy and clay soils, and outcroppings of sandstone or mudstone. These sandy and clay soils have high concentrations of iron, and the resulting reddish color, as well as the province's sand dunes, are significant draws for tourists (Holman & Robb, 2023). In 2019, the island hosted roughly 1.6 million tourists (TourismPEI, 2022). Agriculture represents another key industry in the province, and both industries face threats from climate change. The island is significantly impacted by erosion which has degraded valuable agricultural land and the northern shore's sand dunes and become a key conservation priority for the province (Holman & Robb, 2023).

Founded in 2006, CreativePEI is mandated to “empower Prince Edward Island’s art, culture and creative professionals to improve their outcomes and incomes” (CreativePEI, n.d.). The organization is comprised of a small team of permanent staff and a Board of Directors with members representing numerous artistic and cultural disciplines including education, videogames, museums and heritage, music, dance, writing, Indigenous arts, theatre, festivals, libraries, film, visual arts, and crafts. The organization boasts a diverse range of projects which serve various purposes to support the artistic community on the island. Their strategic directions in 2023 include providing information about the arts sector, convening conversations among sectoral actors, delivering training within the sector on relevant skills, advocating for the arts and culture sectors on PEI, leading collective action initiatives, and providing shared services to practitioners within the arts on the island. The membership of the organization includes MusicPEI, TheatrePEI, FilmPEI, VideogamesPEI, the PEI Crafts Council, the PEI Writers’ Guild, and the PEI Community Museums Association (CreativePEI, n.d.). With this diverse membership and representation of many dimensions of Epekwitk’s arts and culture communities, the organization represents an entry point into the rich landscape of arts practice on the island and allows engagement with the arts across many disciplines.

CreativePEI’s first foray into climate work was their 2021 partnership with The River Clyde Pageant to host an intern through the University of Prince Edward Islands’ ClimateSense program. Through this program, artist Alexis Bulman joined the two organizations to explore ways in which the arts can help audiences to navigate negative emotions brought by climate change. In this role, Bulman created *Future Booths* (see Figure 1 below), an installation piece engaging with the island’s culture of road-side produce stands and with the ways in which climate change is set to alter agricultural yields locally (CreativePEI, 2021). The booths represent an engagement between farmers, the public, and the multidimensional changes climate change will bring to the island’s industries and culture.



Figure 1: Alexis Bulman's Future Booths, located in rural PEI, feature lavender and quince, both crops that are adaptive to the high temperatures and drought expected on PEI as climate change progresses (photo credit Alexis Bulman).

Also in 2021, CreativePEI and The River Clyde Pageant launched *Riverworks*, a project in which three artists independently created artworks on the topic of ecological transformation. As mentioned above, erosion is a key impact of climate change and a priority area in Epekwitk's climate adaptation plan (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2022). Several shoreline preservation techniques exist, and living shorelines are one such solution. Living shorelines provide a nature-based alternative to more common hard-armouring techniques, using natural materials to reinforce the shoreline without destroying habitats (Howard et al. 2022). Each *Riverworks* artwork (Figure 2 below) is (or was) located on a different living shoreline in Charlottetown or the neighbouring town of Stratford. Together, the shorelines and artworks present an opportunity for the public to engage with transformations in their communities brought about by climate change.



Figure 2: The Riverworks artworks. From left to right, Doug Dumais' Shoreline Palimpsest (photo credit Stewart MacLean), Kirstie MacCallum's Pollinator Clock (here pictured at the 2022 Riverworks exhibition in Charlottetown), and Alexis Bulman's Lillian's Place.

Together, these projects represent CreativePEI's first foray into SATA work and the starting point from which they will approach future climate work. With the success of *Future Booths* and *Riverworks*, CreativePEI now turns their sights towards the possibility of continued engagement with climate change related projects. The vulnerability of Epekwitk's shorelines and industries to the impacts of climate change make it a particularly interesting case for considering the importance of the role of culture in sustainable transformations. The above projects are examples of arts-based interventions aimed at supporting the public in navigating the changes taking place on the island and give contextual understanding of the position and experience CreativePEI has in this moment of engagement. It is within this context that we worked with CreativePEI as a case for exploring the role of arts organizations in climate action. Through

this research, we explore how CreativePEI understands their role in climate adaptation towards contributing new insight into better activating artistic capacity towards climate action.

## Methods

Our research involved semi-structured interviews with nine participants. At the time of the interviews, all the participants were members of CreativePEI's staff and Board of Directors and represented several artistic disciplines. All the participants in the study have prior experience working in the arts (ahead of their time at CreativePEI), either in roles at arts organizations or as independent artists. Many of the participants have ongoing artistic practices and hold one or more professional roles with various arts organizations. None of the participants reported directly engaging with climate change through their professional work experience to date, but all participants reported some level of personal concern about climate change, with half of the participants describing it as a passion or area of major concern in their personal lives. The implications of this are discussed further in the results and discussion below.

Engaging with this group of participants allowed us to access organizational knowledge and cultural insights held by key stakeholders of the organization. This approach also allowed us to access the perspectives of key individuals driving and actioning the organization's work. This approach recognizes the significance of individual experience, knowledge, and values to the outputs of an organization and the impact of its activities (Galloway, 2009). This participant pool, with significant arts expertise and limited experience with climate engagement, also allowed us to engage in questioning with individuals who may not commonly be engaged with climate work. This is key to our approach and interest in exploring how climate action can be expanded into sectors that are less commonly targeted for such work. By exploring conceptualizations of arts-situated climate engagement among participants with limited experience with climate work, we can identify potential knowledge contributions and gaps within the arts sector that can be harnessed or addressed to bolster effective action.

In order to carry out interviews which would show both how CreativePEI as an organization conceptualizes climate change, as well as how that conceptualization positions CreativePEI for participating in future climate action, interview questions were framed using NAT. NAT has been used heavily in environmental contexts, particularly regarding individual pro-environmental behaviour (ie. recycling) and is lauded as an effective model outlining the conditions that lead to activating behaviours (Blamey, 1998). To garner a sense of responsibility (a core condition within NAT), Stern (2018) highlights the importance of having an awareness of solutions and a feeling of capability to employ those solutions. This brings into focus a few important conditions for understanding how CreativePEI conceptualizes their role in sustainable transformations. These conditions can help us understand how to activate arts organizations into SATA engagement. It is from these conditions that we determine the interview themes for this study, as shown in Figure 3 below.

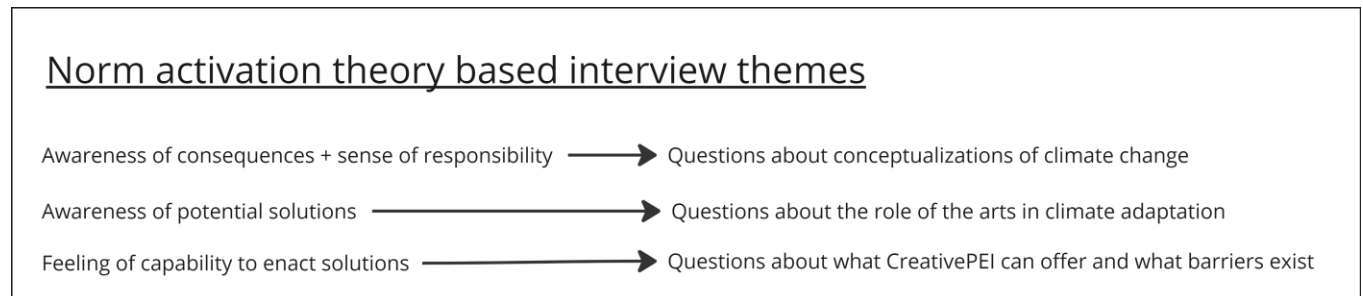


Figure 3: Interview themes developed from NAT.

A hybrid coding approach incorporating both a priori and a posteriori coding techniques, as outlined by Palys and Atchison (2014), was carried out in this study using the qualitative analysis software NVivo. Our findings were explored through a lens of NAT by arranging the final a priori and a posteriori codes under the interview themes as outlined above (Figure 3). By structuring our data collection and analysis to investigate the key conditions for norm-driven behavior, we were then able to identify the extent to which each of these conditions is present in CreativePEI's conceptualization of their role in climate change.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of the interviews provides a glimpse into how CreativePEI situates itself in the world of SATA, as well as revealing benefits and barriers to engagement. The below sections present the major results of our analysis under each of the NAT-guided interview themes.

### How do participants conceptualize climate change as engaged members of CreativePEI and as practitioners in the arts sector?

The participants were asked several questions related to how they think about climate change and the feelings they associate with climate change. This included "What experience do you have working in climate change?" and "What comes to mind when you think about climate change? When you think about addressing climate change?". Following these questions, participants were also prompted with "What does climate change mean to you?" and "What do you think of or feel when you hear the term climate change?". Participants were also asked "How do you think climate change is impacting CreativePEI and its community now? In the future?". These questions were asked to get a sense of the participants' knowledge of and familiarity with climate change and climate-engaged work. Engaging with participants who are immersed in the arts world necessitates gauging the groups understanding of climate change. When considered under NAT, these questions help us to understand the participants' awareness of climate change and its consequences. As outlined above, an awareness and understanding of the consequences of an event or challenge is a critical first step in moving towards taking action (Schwartz, 1997).

Key insights that came from these questions included a strong connection to the local context on PEI, the use of emotional descriptors in discussing climate change, and the perception of climate change as a grand challenge that requires action from all sectors, including the arts. While there is limited existing research on the way arts practitioners conceptualize climate change, Yakamovich & Wright (2021) find an



“existential immersion with place” in their study of environmentally engaged artists (p. 41). Artists describe deep connections to their local community and environmental surroundings which is reflective of the ways in which participants in this study expressed their conceptualization of climate change. This was reflected in these interviews, with many participants referring to the local context on PEI. This was apparent through references to shorelines, landscape change, and the particular vulnerability of the island. Participants also talked about the importance of thinking in local terms for both their own comprehension of climate change and for connecting effectively with others on the topic. As Participant 2 stated: “...it also makes learning and researching and working in climate change a little bit easier for mental health, [thinking] about it as a localized thing and not globally, because that gets *really* scary.” While participants were asked how they think climate change is impacting CreativePEI and its community (and what impact it might have down the road), they were not otherwise prompted to speak specifically to the ways in which climate change is already experienced in their communities, or things they anticipate are to come. These reflections show that the participants’ awareness of the consequences of climate change is linked to both local and global scales, but with the local scale showing up more prominently in these interviews.

Another key theme from this set of questioning, and from existing SATA and climate change literature, is the presence of emotion in individuals’ conceptualizations of climate change. Participants mentioned frustration, gloominess, anxiety, fear, hope, passion, grief, worry, disappointment, empathy, pessimism, and depression. Participant 11 states: “I feel tons of anxiety and tons of fear, because it’s hard to kind of move through the world without holding on to those emotions these days.” While participants were prompted to share how they feel about climate change, in many cases, specific emotions came up before that was asked. These expressions of emotion indicate an awareness of the consequences of climate change among this group of participants.

SATA literature shares a strong common call for the critical integration of arts and cultural activities into climate action. While this was not stated as directly by this group of participants, they did share the belief that climate change is a grand challenge that requires action and effort from everyone and through all channels. They also described the arts sector as having a responsibility to contribute efforts to climate action due to the unique skills, the deep-rooted connection to society and culture, and the platform the sector has to offer. Participant 11 captured this concisely stating that “the arts can serve as a model for behaviors and for shared action on climate change.” These comments came up throughout the interviews, frequently in response to questions about the role of the arts in climate action. In these reflections, we see both direct statements from participants acknowledging the consequences of climate change, as well as a sense of responsibility for these consequences within the arts sector. Remembering NAT, these two key conditions for readiness to take norm driven action are clearly present among these participants.

As outlined above, participants showed a deep understanding of the unique role the arts play in society and the ways in which the arts are reflective of and integrated into the grand challenges humanity faces. However, these deeply engrained beliefs about the arts had not been translated into clear links to climate work for many participants. This was demonstrated by a comment from Participant 10 in response to being asked if they had done any professional or volunteer work related to climate change: “Not really... I’m more into the culture than into the science part”. This comment shows that for this participant, even though they have spent their career in the arts and spoke to the transformative power of the arts, climate change does not register as a cultural issue. While we have identified some key ways the insights from

these interviews align with the literature, when it comes to referencing and understanding climate change as a cultural issue, this is where we see a notable divergence. While existing SATA literature makes strong calls for culture to be a valued element of climate action, participants did not convey a strong sense of climate change as a cultural issue through the interviews. The closest participants come to discussing culture change is when reflecting on what adaptation might look like in their own lives, and when two participants brought up the challenge of cultural divides making certain conversations difficult and certain communities hard to reach.

Remembering that the participants in this study have limited prior direct engagement with climate change (such as through professional or volunteer roles) is important context to keep in mind here. This desire to separate culture from climate is reflective of climate discourse over time and demonstrates a need for connecting those dots explicitly for practitioners within the arts to demonstrate the clear connections between the arts and climate work. This will also allow artists and other practitioners to see the unique value of their own skills to addressing a challenge many in the community care deeply about, removing barriers to feeling able to contribute to solutions. While we cannot conclude from this that participants do not believe culture change to be an important part of climate action, it does not appear to be a top-of-mind connection, even among a group of individuals who are situated within the arts and who, for the most part, expressed deep personal concern about climate change. This may represent a gap in how CreativePEI understands the nature of climate change and its consequences and is an area for further reflection by the organization.

These reflections situate CreativePEI in terms of the perspectives, understanding, and opinions towards climate change of a selection of key members. Participants conveyed a strong sense of connection between climate change and its consequences on Epekwitk, as well as near consensus that climate change requires action and adaptations from all sectors and communities, including the arts. Overall, the interviews show that an awareness of the consequences of climate change is present among this group, and that they recognize the responsibility of all sectors to contribute solutions. Where there is room for further exploration, and perhaps space to deepen these participants' conceptualizations of climate change, is in articulating climate change as a culture issue. This could strengthen the participants' understanding of the relevance of their own activities to the challenge of undergoing sustainable transformations and help to centre the cultural offerings of the arts as critical in this emergency.

## What do participants perceive to be the role of the arts in the climate response?

Our second set of questions sought to reveal what participants perceive to be the role of the arts in climate action. To investigate this, we asked: "Do you think there is a link between the arts sector and climate change?" following up with "What do you think is the role of the arts sector related to climate change?" and "What do you see as key issues related to the arts sector and climate change?". These questions allowed us to build upon our reflection of the participants' understanding of climate change, and investigate whether the intersection of the arts and climate action is an overlap participants understand and see pathways for action in. Considering NAT, we incorporated these questions to glean an understanding of the extent to which participants have an awareness of arts-based climate interventions.

In response to these questions, a few key insights emerged. Specifically, participants demonstrated a strong sense that there is an important role for the arts to play in the climate response and they highlighted a number of ways in which the arts can contribute, echoing much of what is offered in SATA literature. These questions revealed that participants do see an important role for the arts in climate adaptation, reinforcing the presence of an acceptance of responsibility identified from the first question set above.

Participants listed many ways the arts can make important contributions to climate action including by boosting the creation of climate art, providing new modes of public engagement on climate, provoking new ways of thinking, contributing to accessibility, adding aesthetic dimensions to climate adaptations, and by taking part in collaborative initiatives. Much of what was highlighted by participants as important ways for the arts to make contributions to climate work is in line with what SATA research has highlighted to date. For example, a key theme of existing SATA literature is the unique ability of the arts to offer new strategies for meaningful public engagement – a badly needed element of climate adaptation (Gibbs et al. 2020; Hudson Hill, 2020; Shugar et al., 2019; Yusoff & Gabrys, 2011). While this group of participants did not explicitly talk about the need for new public engagement strategies in climate work, they do speak to the arts' capacity to contribute to accessibility, and the power of the arts to provoke new ways of thinking and relating to our surroundings. As Participant 11 stated: "Art has the capacity to unsettle your sense of self and I think that sort of unsettling is really important in being able to challenge your thinking or perspectives." Comments such as this demonstrate the participants' recognition of the arts' capacity to be thought-provoking and disruptive, and how those qualities can contribute to climate solutions.

Accessibility was discussed in terms of physical, cultural, and intellectual accessibility. As Participant 3 stated: "...people might see [climate art] as a little less intimidating to engage with than just being confronted with facts... It's kind of like mediated information that makes people feel a little bit more comfortable." Other participants echoed this, highlighting the ability of the arts to create multiple entry points into engagement with climate action and adaptation. Such statements suggest that the participants see ways in which the arts can engage audiences in new ways. This also speaks to the ability of the arts to contribute creative capacity and imagination to the climate response. Further, and along this theme, participants highlighted the arts' unique way of grabbing attention and the power of arts to direct the conversation.

Where there is more divergence between the results of this work and that of the existing literature, is in discussion of emotional engagement. While emotional engagement was a major theme of the power of climate art in the literature, it came up very little in the interviews. Participants who did speak directly on emotional engagement spoke about the potential of the arts to help with grief, about the arts as a mode for us to talk about what is going on around us, art as a tool to help people adjust to change and remain resilient, and to combat climate despair. These comments are in line with the literature but were not widely cited by participants, perhaps suggesting space to expand the participants' awareness of potential solutions, specifically within the context of what the arts can uniquely offer.

Overall, the participants demonstrate an awareness of potential solutions, or ways the arts can contribute to climate work. There is room for a more nuanced and direct understanding of climate change as a cultural issue, which may enhance participants' ability to identify or imagine arts-based interventions.

What can CreativePEI offer to climate work and what stands in their way?

For our final set of questions, we asked participants questions about CreativePEI's specific context and ability to contribute to climate-engaged work. These questions included: "How do you think CreativePEI's, mission, objectives, and strategic priorities relate to climate change?"; "What do you think was valuable about the climate related projects CreativePEI has done?"; "Has engaging in climate art projects changed the work of CreativePEI?"; "What do you want to see CreativePEI do in terms of their climate impact?"; and "What do you see as challenges to CreativePEI's potential to contribute to addressing climate change?", followed by "What do you see as benefits?". While the questions discussed in the previous section allowed us to investigate the participants' awareness of potential solutions, these questions allow us access to the specific context of CreativePEI and initiate reflection on whether the organization is capable of enacting existing solutions. This brings our discussion to the final conditions of NAT that we are considering in this analysis.

From these questions, participants revealed alignment between CreativePEI's mandate, and work highlighted by and called for from existing SATA literature; highlighted specific barriers to CreativePEI's success with SATA activities; and uncovered collaboration as a distinct way forward that capitalizes on CreativePEI's skills, and which has the potential to mitigate key barriers.

Among the myriad ways participants suggested the arts could contribute to climate action, participants identified synergies between the mandate and skills of CreativePEI as an organization, and things SATA literature calls for. Throughout these interviews, participants demonstrated a clear, shared understanding of what CreativePEI's strengths are and what they have to offer to the collective climate project. The things CreativePEI brings to the climate table are aligned with what they offer outside of the climate context and seem to present a natural place for CreativePEI to play a role in facilitating the creation of climate art. Participants described CreativePEI as being good at connecting individuals, sectors, and initiatives; informing and communicating with the public and the sector; supporting others (through capacity building, funding, and administrative support for example); and doing advocacy. Participant 1 described CreativePEI as the "organization of requirement", saying "CreativePEI is what it needs to be at any given time." The importance of climate art and of creating opportunities for artists to explore climate change through their artistic practice was strongly represented in these interviews. It became clear that for CreativePEI, creating more opportunities for artists to create climate art and see it as a viable avenue for work is a clear goal. Participants illustrated climate art as a challenge and opportunity for artists and as a way to reach and connect with more people on climate change. Participants also revealed a synergy between supporting climate work in the arts and CreativePEI's existing mandate. Participant 1 said: "If we're able to energize a group of the community to take on this subject matter, actually make an impact, and do well on their careers, do work they're proud of, then we're totally doing our job." With this, participants expressed a desire for CreativePEI to sustain some level of engagement with climate change through their work.

Participants were also asked about barriers to CreativePEI making meaningful contributions to climate work within the sector. In response, funding and capacity were highlighted as key concerns. Many participants commented on the fundamental need for funding to carry out projects. Participants also linked the funding challenge to their desire for impact measurement tools (in order to demonstrate success in grant applications for example), and to capacity challenges (the need to hire staff to lead projects). Funding challenges were generally linked to the underfunding and precarity of funding in the

arts more broadly, rather than being linked specifically to climate related work. This is in line with the state of employment and the challenges of precarity facing the arts sector (The Conference Board of Canada, 2019; Maggs, 2021). Six of the nine participants also made direct connections between climate change and possible career opportunities for artists. For CreativePEI, this is another way in which participants see the organization's principal role in climate work – through the tangible support and engagement of artists in the creation of climate-engaged work.

Comments on capacity challenges were closely linked to those on funding. When asked about what might prevent CreativePEI from engaging further in climate work, many participants highlighted the small size of CreativePEI as an organization and the challenges that brings. Two participants also mentioned burnout as a common issue both among artists and those working on climate. Participant 2 highlighted the need to not only build but also sustain capacity through things like ensuring artists are paid for their work, and having mental health supports in place when working on emotional issues like climate change. They stated: "I fear that artists, like other climate professionals, will be expected to contribute without being offered mental health support. If that's the case, the turnover will be rapid and that will negatively impact everyone's ability to create sustained and meaningful work."

Another challenge that was brought up by two of the participants was the rural-urban divide that exists on Epekwitk in terms of both the variations in those populations' access to the arts, and in terms of cultural differences and their intersections with climate change. Participants highlighted that this is an area of weakness for CreativePEI, and others trying to undertake public engagement through the arts. The rural-urban divide is closely tied to shoreline challenges, and this requires that climate communications are sensitive to cultural differences. While this specific challenge was only brought up by two participants, it is an important consideration under the accessibility conversation. When thinking about the accessibility of climate art and SATA programming, practitioners will need to reflect on who the work is being made accessible to and what the limits of its accessibility are. For CreativePEI, this will mean reflecting on who their community does and does not include. Beyond the mention of CreativePEI's disproportionate engagement with urban communities, detailed reflection on the organization's audience and reach was not present in the interviews. This suggests that active thinking and reflection on who their activities serve, what systems they benefit from, and what worldviews they are informed by and perpetuate, will be a key next step for the organization.

The limits on CreativePEI's engagement and reach, along with the funding and capacity challenges discussed above, suggest that CreativePEI's sense of capability to enact solutions varies with context. This makes the context in which SATA activities take place an important consideration for the organization, and for those seeking to boost SATA engagement in arts organizations. Considering this, collaboration emerged from these interviews as both a core pillar of how CreativePEI operates, as well as a key strategy for enhancing the quality of projects in the arts sector. For CreativePEI, collaboration emerged as an important element of the organization's ability to enact the climate solutions identified in the section above. Collaborations both among artistic disciplines, and between the arts and other sectors, was brought up by almost all participants. The main through-line here was the significant power of collaboration to build capacity and realize larger goals. Collaboration also allows for projects to be strengthened by bringing in a creative component with intentionality. As Participant 5 stated: "...CreativePEI isn't sector specific so they talk to all these other different sectors and we might be seeing more [climate work from within the arts], because as the climate impacts everybody around, CreativePEI

could be the bridge to the artists.” This direction of supporting artists and fostering connections within and outside of the creative sector towards meaningful collaborations is established through these interviews as a distinct goal for the organization’s climate work. Participants clearly express ways in which CreativePEI is capable of participating in SATA activities.

## **Conclusion**

This paper serves as an example of meaningful engagement between SATA researchers and arts organizations and contributes new understanding to the benefits of and barriers to successful climate work taking place within the arts. Further, this paper provides one window into understanding how arts organizations can be activated and how climate-engaged work can be integrated into their activities. Reflecting on these interviews through the lens of NAT shows that with a continued commitment to collaboration, and with support and connection to SATA education, CreativePEI is well poised to engage in SATA work in the future. The interviews demonstrate an understanding of the consequences of climate change and a feeling of responsibility for the arts sector to participate in mobilizing solutions. Participants’ awareness of the consequences of climate change is strongly linked to the local context on Epekwitk and is demonstrated through the use of emotional descriptors such as fear, anxiety, frustration, and empathy. There is a strong expression that climate change is a grand challenge that requires action from all sectors, including the arts sector. Participants also highlight the platform the arts sector has and the responsibility that brings.

We also find significant awareness of potential solutions among the participants, with many references to the unique value of the arts and the distinct skills those in the arts have to offer. Finally, we find conditional feelings of capability to participate in enacting solutions. There are strong links made between CreativePEI’s existing mandate, and what they can offer to climate action. The participants in these interviews uncovered a natural compatibility between what CreativePEI already offers and is good at, and what is needed to support the creation of climate art. CreativePEI operates as a “sector catalyst and connector that empowers Prince Edward Island’s arts, culture and creative professionals to improve their outcome and incomes” and in these interviews, participants identify a desire to take part in SATA activities, with a focus on enabling the creation of climate art. The sentiment of responsibility extends to this, with participants expressing a responsibility to uplift others doing SATA work in the sector. In addition to the many potential solutions discussed, real barriers to CreativePEI engaging in SATA activities are identified, showing that CreativePEI’s capability to enact solutions is circumstantial. While there are barriers to CreativePEI enacting climate solutions on their own, when collaboration is introduced, a strong sense of capability can result and lend to dynamic and feasible projects (particularly if that collaboration comes with funding and capacity).

This research served to activate arts organizations by undertaking an in-depth engagement with individual members of one arts organization and facilitating a thought exercise through the interviews. This process initiated intentional thought and communication within the organization about climate work to a degree that, for the most part, members had not been engaging in previously. Scholars in the field of SATA have documented and highlighted the lack of shared language and existing work in the field. Researchers document a lack of shared keywords, a lack of understanding of who all is working in the

space, and a lack of clarity around what work has happened or is planned (Galafassi et al. 2018; Maggs, 2021; Wright & Llang, 2020). While this challenge was only directly addressed by one participant (who brought up the lack of best practices and codification around climate art), it also emerges through the disparate ways participants discussed the contributions the arts can make to climate adaptation. By facilitating these interviews, this research began a process of putting language to these concepts for members of CreativePEI, advancing internal understanding of how the organization can best contribute moving forward.

This lends to the implications of this work for both future SATA research and for the field of practice. The growing field of SATA in academia must include more consideration for those on the ground carrying out SATA work and how to bring them into SATA research in ways that are meaningful and relevant for their unique structures, goals, and contexts. Thus, there must be consideration of both what conditions will be necessary for this, and what conditions practitioners require to meaningfully engage in SATA research. Utilizing NAT to frame this analysis positions this research well to lend insight to this. NAT allowed us to investigate CreativePEI's readiness to act on climate change and is a lens that should be further considered and explored in similar contexts. As this study focuses on one organization, further research is needed on how those across the arts sector conceptualize climate change and what they see as the role of the arts in fostering sustainable transformations. This, accompanied by efforts to bring language and current knowledge around SATA to those in the sector, as well as initiatives to pay artists to create climate art, will bolster capacity and work on climate within the arts.

This research has also indicated some key next steps for both CreativePEI and beyond to ensure effective activation of arts capacity towards the climate emergency. First, collaboration is a key consideration for mitigating key barriers to climate engagement from within the arts. While collaboration can expand capacity and available funding, it can also be harnessed to address other barriers that were identified in this research such as mental health supports and limits on audience reach. As participants pointed out, capacity is a chronic challenge within the arts sector, and calling on artists and organizations to engage in climate work stretches limited resources further. Mental health support for those who engage in this work will be critical to ensuring sustainable engagement with these grand challenges.

Cultural divides among audiences are also a key consideration here. As these interviews showed, cultural differences within audiences impacts the means of engagement and outcomes achieved. Further internal reflection for CreativePEI on their audiences and the worldviews and ways of knowing that inform their projects will be essential. This consideration is also relevant to the sector more broadly, as audiences are a critical consideration in climate action and adaptation. Further climate work from within the arts must closely consider who is and is not being engaged or benefitted through the work. The systems and ways of knowing informing the work, and the implications of that, must be reflected on.

These are also areas for consideration by policymakers. Funding was identified as a key barrier to arts organizations undertaking SATA work. At the same time, these participants strongly echoed the unique and powerful ways the arts can contribute to climate action as are identified in the literature. Recognition of arts organizations as powerful actors and incorporating support for SATA work in climate policy, would lend to building the capacity arts organizations will require for this undertaking. In addition, cultural policymakers must realize the very real cultural dimensions to the climate crisis and the sustainable transitions facing humanity, thus ensuring climate considerations are integrated into cultural policy. Calling for increased action on climate from the arts will also require support for

artists and practitioners taking that charge. As mentioned by a participant in this study, sustainable and meaningful climate action cannot happen within an environment of burnout.

Our analysis also suggests that existing research is shedding meaningful light on the many possible activations of the arts towards climate adaptation, but that we have a way to go to develop a fulsome understanding of how practitioners conceptualize the role of the arts in climate adaptation. By showcasing the ways in which one arts organization situates itself within the broader project of climate change, this work sheds new light on the current state of climate work in the arts in Canada and how cultural organizations can reimagine their role to align with the evidence about what the arts can uniquely offer to climate action.

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