

EXPERIENCING THE SHIELING

I'd like to give a background into my approach and role within this project. I'm a designer, and my focus is on experience design within Innovation and finding ways to engage people in complex issues and build beautiful experiences and narratives around complex topics.

For me experience design is a powerful tool for engagement. I believe it is most exciting when combining methods from both art and design to provoke feelings and thoughts among participants. It is a powerful way to open up the imagination and create impact when people feel connected to a subject in multiple ways. I use multi-sensory, immersive methods including creating scents, sounds, taste-scapes, visual prompts and story-telling.

Gina has talked about this project's parts and theory around transhumance, landscape and food and seasonality and the role of the shieling on those topics. My talk is going to focus more on the practical side of creating an immersive experience and a way for people to engage in all of that beautiful theory and concept.

I came to this project with the task of creating a workshop for students and a way for people to engage in some of these ideas. My approach to this was less about workshopping and more about experiential learning through experience design methods.

We wanted students to engage in a few different aspects of the subject.

Firstly, in the transhumance and the way that actually would have felt in the past. Secondly, in how people lived off the land and people's relationship to that land, we wanted people to think about that in a multi-sensory way. Not just looking at images or reading about it, but actually being aware of the senses, people experienced in the past and using that as a way to connect to this topic.

We designed something beyond a workshop; *for me*, that's the exciting part. It is more around experiential learning and participation than a workshop.

Firstly, I love to approach everything with the idea that it has to be delightful. It has to be exciting for people to come along. Secondly, we used a methodology that was both about design and art.

That's where it becomes quite exciting in terms of experience because you have the beautiful and the creative on one end and then the impact and learning on the other.

So, for me, experiential engagement should be about the senses and unlocking emotions and inspiration through different sensory methods. It has to be immersive, instead of students coming along and being taught something or lectured. It becomes something you learn by doing, learning by feeling immersed in a situation and creating a deeper connection to the topic.

And an essential thing for me when designing something like this is to be feeling-provoking before thought-provoking.

That idea of feeling-provoking is fundamental because it's about engaging people to feel different and, therefore, to think differently and, through doing that, connect to the landscape, past culture, and heritage of a place.

These were the key parameters that I set for the design.

We incorporated some vital elements into the experience that helped to enable all of those things to happen. The aim was to connect participants with the past in a visceral way. We wanted them to understand the practices of the people who lived in the shielings. We wanted the participants to touch, taste and smell the same things that those people living that way of life would have experienced in order to bring that world to life.

The first key thing I've talked about is the senses, which are really about unlocking memories, new meanings, and building those connections.

The senses offer us a way to have a richer experience. They offer a way to think differently about what we're reading or engaging with

And notably, the sense of smell and taste is an essential combination connecting us to what other people would have experienced in the past.

The second element was storytelling. And not only did we create a space to share ideas and stories and talk about some of the things we were doing in the workshop. We also designed a sense of immersion and the idea that we were in a place through a story. Narrative is essential for helping people to visualise the context of what they are experiencing and learning about. Gina created a story that led us on a visual journey so that once people started to engage in the activities, they were already very much grounded in place and time. They had an idea of the visual things around them that would have been there in the past.

Another key element was the topography of the landscape and the movement through that landscape. One of the things that we wanted to create as part of the experience was getting people to really think about this movement. Obviously, people weren't moving as part of the experience, but through their senses and activities, they were moving in their imagination.

The final element was food. Food is an incredible way to evoke feeling and memory, get people to think about emotions, and connect people to places, heritage, and culture.

But it's also something that we all really enjoy. And so as part of the experience, we obviously had butter making, we ate bannocks, and our participants shared a meal. There's something significant about sharing a meal and what that actually does in connecting people and bringing the whole experience into final perspective.

These elements were the start of what we saw as the imaginative journey.

We designed specific touchpoints throughout the experience to bring this idea to life...

We were creating the sensory experience. So we made three simple fragrances that people would have engaged with in the past but also helped people to think about the connection to nature and landscape while making butter.

The fragrances were made very specifically from different things. Each one connected to a part of the Transhumance, Soil, Shieling, and Meadow.

The Shieling was made from Hawthorn charcoal. As Gina mentioned, Hawthorn has a great connection to this project but the charcoal was significant in emulating the

smell of burning peat inside the shieling which occupants would have used for heat and cooking.

As well as charcoal, there was also oak moss, which gave us the sort of musty, more natural smell that people may have encountered inside the Shielings.

The meadow was created using a mix of sorrel that Gina and I picked, Yarrow, and Long Meadow grass from the Altyre Estate. This would have been the smell of the high pastures. High pastures were not just monocultures of grass that we see today in Scotland but a mix of different herbs, shrubs, and grasses that the cows would have eaten. This mix would have created a rich, nutritious butter.

It felt important to me to create a meadow fragrance that captured what people would have been smelling around them and was a nod to what makes good butter.

In terms of the soil, it's obvious. We made that from the Altyre Estate soil but added things like moss from the bottom of pine trees and created a much more earthy smell.

These are smells people would have encountered through this process of moving their cattle across the land in Scotland at that time.

Soil made people think about the start of that growing season and the movement from earthy growing land to high pasture. The Shieling obviously was to make people think about the smells they would have had inside their buildings while churning butter while living in them. The meadow was very much around, getting people to think about the richness and the lands the cows would have eaten, which translated into butter.

We also made landscape jars, which were created for students to see the landscape and touch it.

Each landscape jar was linked to soil sheiling and meadow. For some students, that was the first time they'd seen things like moss or Hawthorn.

We had hands-on making as part of the experience, and we made butter because that was fundamental at that time and what people would have lived off as part of our Transhumance past.

We wanted the students to really understand what making butter feels like and engage with it and students guided themselves through the process. We went from whisking cream all the way down to shaping butter and then obviously eating it with the Bannocks as part of the shared meal.

In experiential learning, there's something about doing and seeing the change.

We could have shown butter, or we could have just talked about butter, but actually, it's a much richer way to learn through making.

How things change, and the wonder of something going from a very loose sort of cream to something that resembles what you might find on a shop shelf or what people would have made in the past.

This needed to be something the students could engage with and taste, smell, and touch as part of the process.

The final designed part of the experience was materiality, and as part of the long Shieling table, we had a range of different natural materials, including Hawthorn, pine, moss, and heather. The students could touch and look at them but also understand that they are currently present on the Altyre Estate. They would have been part of the past but are still around us. Creating a way for people to connect to things currently around them that existed in the past is really important as a way of engaging with nature and relating to culture and heritage on the land. It can help us evaluate and critically examine what is missing and what has changed.

All of these designed touchpoints created this experiential way of understanding the theory and complexity that Gina has described. They also helped the participants achieve a deeper understanding of the natural world and the heritage of this land. I hope it inspired them to think about why the land has changed, why the landscape is different, why food culture is different and why we have lost these processes.

In addition to learning about the past and locality here in Scotland, the sharing of the meal and the conversations that spontaneously happened after the experience

led people to think about home and their own connection to food and their own memories of food.

That's the joy in designing something that isn't just a static workshop but is actually something that you fully immerse in, it does unlock your ability to think differently, to really engage in your creativity.

It also unlocks creative thinking that allows you to think about how this relates to yourself, the environment around you, and your sense of place in a new location.

This whole imaginative journey really was about creating that opportunity. The key takeaways from me in terms of this are that actually, things that are joyful and delightful and hands on and experiential really help us to connect to cultures and heritages that are often more abstract or less known.

My final point is

Suppose we use a methodology of feeling-provoking experience design. In that case, we can help people understand, engage and connect with complex topics such as transhumance, food culture, seasonality, and how the landscape around us has changed in Scotland. As well as creating something exciting and enjoyable for participants.