

University of California, Davis / Design in Europe

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Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh / Challenge project

12 July 2023

Itinerary

10:00 – 11:00	Garden introduction	departs from East gate cottage
11:00 – 11:45	Exhibition	self-led tour of <i>Shipping Roots</i> , Inverleith House Gallery
11:45 – 12:30	Lunch	Inverleith House lawn/meeting room
12:30 – 13:00	Project briefing	Demonstration garden
13:00 – 15:15	Studio time	Inverleith House, basement meeting room
15:15 – 16:00	Presentations	Inverleith House, basement meeting room
16:00 – 16:30	Tour	Public Engagement offices, Inverleith House, floor 2

Context

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh delivers world-leading plant science, conservation, education and creative arts programmes. Together with its three Regional Gardens - Benmore, Dawyck and Logan - the 'Botanics' topography, soils and climate enable an exceptionally wide range of plant life, one of the oldest and most extraordinary plant collections on earth. The garden's collection of living plants includes more than 13,500 species built up over centuries of global exploration. The herbarium collection of preserved plants includes approximately three million specimens, representing two thirds of the world's flora.

Project

The world I can't see: Experiences that interpret nature's invisible story.

Objective:

The garden is keen to explore new content to engage directly with our smallest audience segment, visitors 16-24 years who make up only 7% of our 1 million annual visitors. The challenge seeks to interpret a single theme in a new and engaging format as part of our in-garden visitor experience.

Choose a theme*:

1. Lichens
2. Fungi
3. Pollinators
4. Wildlife

*Assuming 8 groups of 4 participants, assign 2 groups only per theme. This will help facilitate the in-garden introduction to these themes and briefing portion of the day.

Process:

1. **Research** – in person in-garden during briefing
2. **Brainstorm** – how could my theme be interpreted?
3. **Develop** – working through the visitor experience and messaging
4. **Design** – what is the user experience, what do you need to create
5. **Present** – how you will communicate your ideas and explain the experience

Considerations:

- Nature blindness
- Emotional connection
- Multi-sensory experiences
- In situ in the garden
- If nature could speak, what would it say?
- Establish your audience segment

Outcomes:

- **Engagement** – potential to reach underserved audiences
- **Emotion investment** – worth my time, why should I care?
- **Connection** – supports audience comfort with nature
- **Impact** – supports positive experience, nature advocates

Presentation:

Using the available supplies, draw, build or make whatever you can to demonstrate your ideas and proposed visitor experience solution to the wider group and facilitators. All team members should participate in a **5-minute** group presentation as explainer, presenter or fabricator. Remember to define your audience from the audience segmentation in Appendix 1 at the start and explain how your proposed experience might work to achieve outcomes.

Facilitators:

Christopher Muniz, Head of Interpretation and Design

Greg Kenicer, Head of Graduate Education and Professional Learning

See Appendix 1 on following pages for additional supplementary information.

Appendix 1: Supplementary information

Interpretation

Is a process that transforms complex information into enjoyable content, without losing the subtlety of key messages.

It forms a bridge between experts and target audiences.

Experiential design

is a process that merges interpretation with multiple design disciplines to produce memorable experiences that achieve a specific goal, facilitate understanding and elicit a positive emotional response.

Motivations

To develop meaningful interpretation, we start with what our visitors bring with them to our Gardens. Analysis of Edinburgh surveys¹ and academic studies combined with RBGE visitor research suggests the most significant reasons for making a visit include:

- To explore and enjoy the landscape and plants – 77%
- To walk and take exercise – 63%
- To relax, relieve stress and recharge – 52%
- To visit the café, particularly for locals – 33%
- To socialise with friends and family – 24%
- To learn more about plants – 19%

In 2022 RBGE hosted more than 1 million visitors across our gardens, a huge audience for our messages. Visitors aged 16-24 years make up only 7% of those 1 million annual visitors and are an underserved audience.

Consumer research has found that concerns about biodiversity loss, climate change and other environmental issues are greater among older people than younger², although some evidence suggests older people are less prepared than younger to change their behaviour to address this³.

¹ Edinburgh Garden surveys Scotinform (2023), (2017), Clark (2013) and Karasah and Var (2017); Benmore, Dawyck and Logan surveys; in US garden Wassenberg (2015)

² BVA BDRC (2021)

³ Scotinform (2023), personal correspondence

Audience segmentation

We segment our audience based on available data so we can devise a range of visitor experiences and layer our content within our Gardens. We have followed an approach that segments our audience based on attitudes, motivations and values relating to plants and botanic gardens⁴.

Audience	Description	Needs
Social visitors	Socially motivated to have a pleasant day out with friends. Often repeat visitors and locals with a good knowledge of the Garden. Note, this segment describes those whose primary motivation is sociable.	They want comfort, respond best to more visual and interactive interpretation that prompts discussion, enjoyable activities and tours. They ideally want places to picnic and chat.
Fun-seeking families	Socially motivated to do something outdoors with the family. A mix of ages and often visiting more than once a year, they have little knowledge of plants or issues, seek educational content for their children.	They value child-friendly facilities as well as support for a range of age needs. Safe spaces for children to run around are appreciated while they are also interested in fun, hands-on activities, with some learning.
Escapers	Emotionally motivated to experience the beauty of the gardens, find peace and quiet outdoors, and escape everyday life to recharge but also find inspiration. Often locals, tend to be older and seeking a walk or exercise.	They prefer interpretation to be unobtrusive, succinct and delivered through traditional formats like panels. Some will actively reject planning their visit and respond negatively to interventions.
Experience seekers	Spiritually motivated consumers of culture who come to our Gardens in search of an inspiring experience. They are keen to explore and experience new and impressive things. Often include overseas visitors.	They want interpretation that shares inspiring stories about plants and what makes our Gardens so special. They enjoy interactive and engaging activities. They expect high quality and prestigious interpretation based on high quality research.
Sightseers	Socially motivated tourists who are drawn to the garden as a scenic destination rather than to the plants growing in it. They derive satisfaction from having 'been there and done that'. Most are first-time visitors.	They need help with orientation and are grateful for the easy identification of highlights, a sense of place and significance, as well as good facilities including retail.
Knowledge seekers	Intellectually motivated people who seek inspiration and to develop their knowledge of plants and gardening. Often include overseas visitors and sometimes researchers and students.	They prefer interpretation that engages with the detail of plants and gardening, including RBGE's work. They are dismissive of populist or unsophisticated interpretation and can find technology intrusive.

⁴ Speer (2017)