

The Greenhouse by BoxedIn: A Case Study

Challenge: How do we begin to address sustainability at the Edinburgh Festivals?

Solution: Develop and create The Greenhouse, a sustainable theatre experience for the Edinburgh Fringe.

Project Outline:

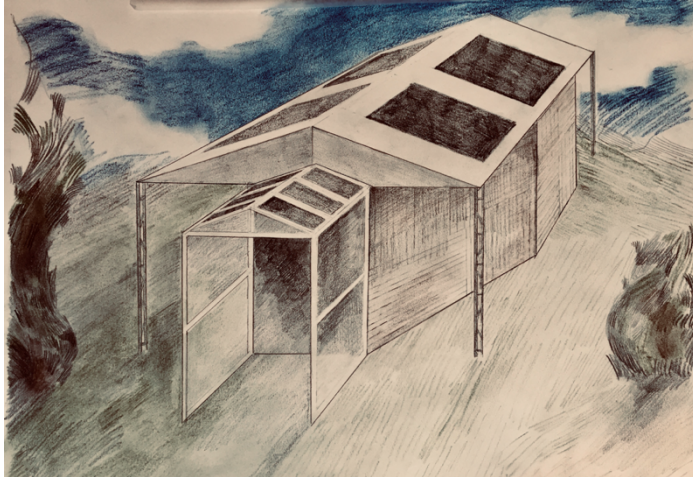
It is hard to deny that large-scale festivals, by default, create massive quantities of waste; it is the natural progression of gathering millions of people together for a single activity. Although this comes in many forms, in the uptick in personal vehicle use, single-use disposable items, venue construction, advertising, etc., it is important to acknowledge that although these effects may be the natural progression of a large-scale temporary event, it is also a human driven phenomenon. When the idea for the Greenhouse was first conceived, it was based on that acknowledgement: we made the mess, so we clean it up. For an event as large as the Edinburgh Festivals, and with such a revolutionary origin, it is indisputable that the responsibility for creating a more sustainable festival experience lies partly with the artists. For example, the Fringe recommends that most shows think ‘in the low thousands’ when ordering flyers. There are over 3,500 shows each year at The Fringe. Taking a low-end estimate that each show orders just 1,000 flyers, that’s over 3.5 million flyers in total. A flyer weighs about 6 grams – that’s over 21 tonnes of paper waste. At a low-end estimate. Many shows use new material to build their external venues or sets, littering skips and landfills with their barely used building supply at the end of the month. Single-use coffee cups, the influx of Uber drivers, there are many other examples of flagrantly wasteful practices that have become the norm at the Edinburgh Festivals, by definition, unnecessary.



The Greenhouse by Boxedin Theatre set out to prove that this need not be the case. The original idea was for a venue, purpose built and environmentally focused, created completely from recycled materials. What it became was a waste free experience. Not only was the venue built completely waste-free (using materials that either had a previous life or would have gone into the bin), all nine shows, each with an environmental focus, were marketed without the use of paper flyers or disposable products.



The initial hurdle was design. We had to design a temporary structure that would be able to accommodate lots of unknowns. Because many of the materials would have to be found onsite, or sourced closer to the build date because of storage concerns, the design had to be adaptable, yet standardized. We did this by basing our structure around a skeletal trussing, which we were able to acquire second-hand. This was, surprisingly, the most difficult point in the process. Sourcing material was relatively easy and went miles towards proving that sustainable festival design is not only feasible, it is preferable.



The first reason for this is cost. A majority of the materials we found were free because they had been thrown away, but they were not, as one might expect, in bad shape. In most cases we were able to reclaim things like wood, fixtures and other ornamental material from places like closing construction sites, excess from personal projects, and online advertisements. Destined for the bin but in many cases completely new. Instead of purchasing thousands of single-use

flyers, we utilised portable smart tablets, which were acquired used and extremely cheap. We proved you did not have to sacrifice quality for cost, literally to the point of zero.

The second reason is sustainability. If more large-scale venues focused on sourcing their venue material waste free, or at least reusing single purchase materials, the sustainability of the Edinburgh Festivals would increase ten-fold. We were able to save many of our projects reclaimed material for future projects, allowing us more financial and logistical freedom.



The end result of The Greenhouse was both a unique and typical theatre experience. Our end goal was to produce a venue and process that brought new and enjoyable experiences to the festival, but also proved that you can create a standard theatre experience while also being one hundred percent waste free. Although we believe that the responsibility for sustainability does lie with the artists, it is also important to recognize that collaboration and cooperation is vital to a more sustainable Festivals season. What that may mean is both Festivals Edinburgh and the

Fringe Society taking a more leading role in ensuring participants operate on a sustainable agenda. While many argue that is not their role, without sustainability there could soon be *no festivals*. The future of arts festivals like the ones which occur in Edinburgh every year lie in our collective hands.