

# AWEN: When Data Meets Nature



Image credit: Ciara Flint

Can a mobile phone app help us rediscover our connection to the natural world? In 2021, as the world grappled with lockdowns and virtual interactions, The New Real team created **'AWEN'** – a data-driven walking experience that would lay the groundwork for more ambitious explorations of how technology might help us

understand environmental change via local, embodied experiences.

## Vision and development

'AWEN' (from the Welsh word for 'inspiration' and the symbol of 'air, earth and water') emerged from a simple but powerful observation: while we have access to unprecedented amounts of environmental data, we struggle to connect this information to our daily experience of nature. The New Real team, led by conceptual artist Inés Cámara Leret, sound designer Tom deMajo and interaction designers Ray Interactive, set out to bridge this gap through a unique combination of environmental science, satellite data, mobile technology and artistic sensitivity.

Unlike typical mobile experiences, **'AWEN'** doesn't demand attention – instead, it gently guides users to notice their surroundings in new ways.

## The experience

'AWEN' invites users on a self-directed ambulatory experience, walking through their local environment, with their digital devices becoming windows rather than barriers to engaging with their surroundings. The web-based application tracks location and movement, triggering soundscapes, visual overlays and poetic prompts that encourage reflection and action. But unlike typical mobile experiences, 'AWEN' doesn't demand attention – instead, it gently guides users to notice their surroundings in new ways.

crucial in the development of The New Real Observatory. It suggested new ways of making global environmental change tangible at a local level.

*'We know that people don't necessarily need more information about climate change – the science has been clear for a long time,' explains Matjaz Vidmar, the project's technical lead. 'They need new ways of connecting with that information, of feeling its relevance to their daily lives.'*

**As thousands of users created their own unique journeys through their local environments, ...'AWEN' began to map not just physical landscapes but our changing relationship with nature itself.**

The technical innovation lies in how the app combines multiple data sources. Global climate models and satellite observations are mapped to users' GPS coordinates, creating experiences that are both locally relevant and globally informed. Each walk becomes unique, shaped by both the specific location and the moment in time.

## Beyond technology

'AWEN's' significance extends beyond its technical achievements. The project demonstrated how artistic practice could transform environmental data into meaningful experience – an insight that would prove

## Legacy

Launched at the Edinburgh Science Festival and showcased at COP26 in Glasgow, 'AWEN'



established key principles that would inform The New Real's subsequent work. It demonstrated how technology could enhance rather than detract from environmental connection, and how artistic practice could transform data into experience. Most importantly, it suggested how individual interactions with technology might contribute to collective understanding. As thousands of users created their own unique journeys through their local environments, 'AWEN' began to map not just physical landscapes but our changing relationship with nature itself.

### Footnotes

'AWEN' was developed by [The New Real](#) with conceptual artist [Inés Cámara Leret](#), sound designer [Tom deMajo](#) and interaction design company [Ray Interactive](#) in collaboration with the [Edinburgh Science Festival](#).

The 'AWEN' experience is the outcome of the Experience in The New Real project, made possible by [Scottish Funding Council](#) COVID-19 Recovery funding to the [University of Edinburgh's Data-Driven Innovation initiative](#). It was commissioned by [The New Real Observatory](#), and piloted at the [Edinburgh Science Festival](#) in April 2021, before a full launch on Earth Day in Summer 2021 and a showcasing of the experience at [COP26](#) in Glasgow in November 2021.

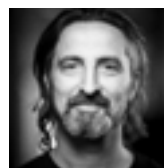
### Artist bios



Lead 'AWEN' artist **Inés Cámara Leret** is inspired by the transformative nature of materials, the methodologies used to understand these and the relations that arise. Exploring life through that which is unseen, portrayed as static or seemingly ephemeral, Cámara Leret works across disciplines. In doing so, she nurtures long-term collaborations that create expanded networks and bridge traditional and academic ways of knowing.



[Ray Interactive](#) is a dynamic creative studio specialising in public interactive artworks that seek to inspire, inform and entertain. Directed by Brendan McCarthy and Sam Healy, Ray Interactive seeks to collaborate with other passionate individuals and organisations on purposeful, ambitious and thought-provoking projects.



**Tom deMajo** is a freelance composer, sound artist and sound designer known for making engaging video games, multisensory installations, architectural interventions and sonic environments. He is a founding partner of [Biome Collective](#), Scotland's first games collective, where he was designer and sound designer of award-winning location-based sound game 'other.' Co-founder of Warp Technique electronic music. Independent artist and collaborator. He enjoys working with small

teams with big ideas and talks about audio and the place of sound in our world.

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## Links

1. [Explore 'AWEN'](#)
2. [Explore the underlying science](#)
3. [Watch a summary video](#)
4. [Watch the 'AWEN' virtual event video](#)
5. [Technical paper explaining development of 'AWEN'](#)