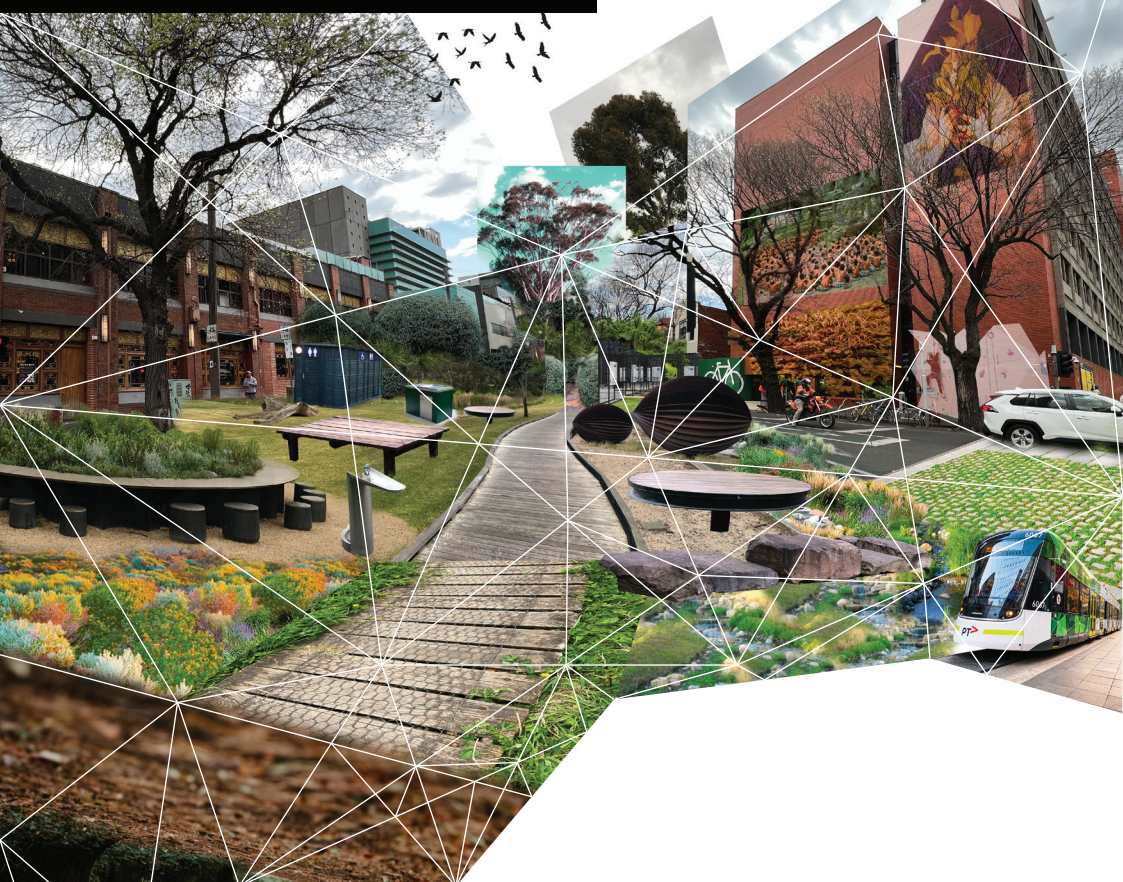


# Cardigan Commons



# Wild Streets

 PlaceLab Zine

# Long Story, Short

RMIT PlaceLab's Cardigan Commons Research Project explored Cardigan Street's potential to transform into a more inclusive, collaborative and wild 'greenscape' with a focus on community perspectives and aspirations.

## What We Explored

What would it look like to transform Cardigan Street into an innovative green space that enhances local ecology, environmental health, and community wellbeing?

Cardigan Commons explored this question, investigating the opportunities available when reimagining local streetscapes – such as neighbourhood permeability, breathing life into public space, and connecting to nature and each other. The project engaged with local community groups and key stakeholders through activities such as surveys and workshops, culminating in this zine, and a final exhibition showcasing the community's vision for the future of Cardigan Street, as well as on-street planting prototypes developed by our academic collaborators.

## Context - Social Innovation Precinct and SDGs

Cardigan Street is located in Carlton, Victoria, Australia. The street runs parallel with the iconic Melbourne streets, Swanston and Lygon. This project focuses particularly on the section between Queensberry and Victoria St.

Two major urban development initiatives provide an opportunity to rethink the future of Cardigan Street. RMIT University is actively developing a plan to transform part of Cardigan Street into a pedestrianised, greened, public space. This is part of RMIT's Social Innovation Precinct - a place where technology and society come together. Additionally, the future State Library Metro Station will trigger unprecedented changes to the area as a new connectivity hub on the fringe of Melbourne's CBD.

Considering the global challenges imposed by the climate crisis and socio-spatial inequalities, our urban environment can create opportunities for mitigating biodiversity loss and extreme weather events through greening strategies and strategic partnerships.

In this regard, RMIT PlaceLab's 'Cardigan Commons' Research Project subscribes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provides insights to the following goals:

More Info: [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment)



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



15 LIFE ON LAND



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



# Reimagining the 'Commons'

**Urban open spaces are often highly contested. There are many needs and wants – and it is difficult to fulfil them all.**

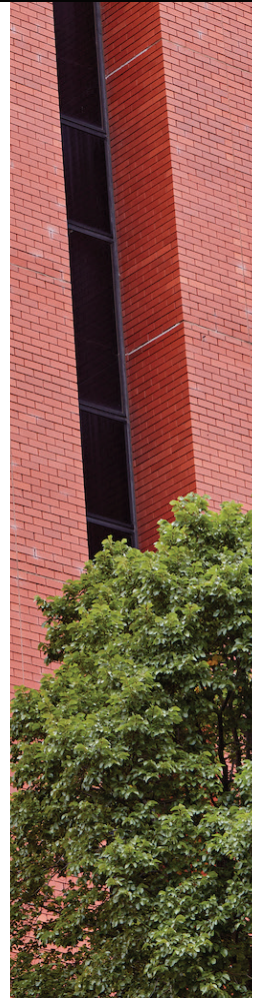
In its essential form, commons are natural and cultural resources available to all. The 1968 'The Tragedy of the Commons'<sup>1</sup> theory states that any freely available resource will be depleted until it is exhausted – a theory now widely criticised given the many examples of communities working together to live sustainably.

The real 'tragedy of the commons' is that when we cannot agree on how an open space should be used, it remains unchanged. In doing so we waste our chance to create connection, enhance ecology, combat climate change, and generally improve upon urban and global systems, as well as the health, wellbeing and happiness of our community. In this sense, the 'tragedy of the open space' is a microcosm of the complexity of solving the planet's most important challenges, as the solutions exist, but more unity is needed to act.

Let us take you to a more local scale: Cardigan Street. This research is a pre-emptive move to gather community together and to better understand their perspectives, including potential barriers to revitalising the street. Our project tackles the challenge of representing these many perspectives. We also sought to understand the impact of educational events on these perspectives, and, to investigate new ways to collaboratively envision a street.

In this way, we hope to reveal the desire lines of the street's future, before we walk them.

We hope that this work will help to create a community of people interested and engaged with the future of Cardigan Street, to serve as a starting point for envisioning the street, and to create forward momentum to a brighter, greener, cooler, and happier future.



<sup>1</sup> Hardin, G. (1968). The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science*, 162(3859), 1243–1248.

**RMIT PlaceLab acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the Eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.**

**RMIT PlaceLab respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present, as the original and continuing Makers of Place.**

# What we did - Our research activities



## Surveys

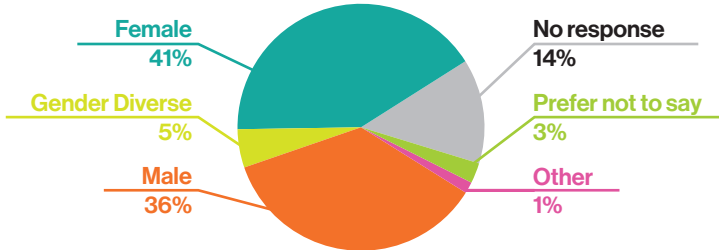
We gathered 212 surveys over 2 months. We asked about people's perceptions of Cardigan Street now, and what their wildest dreams for its future might be.

## Wild Nights

We hosted a series of interactive workshops: a wildlife experience with real-life urban animals, a botanical drawing class focused on eucalypts, and a watercolour workshop where we painted microbats.

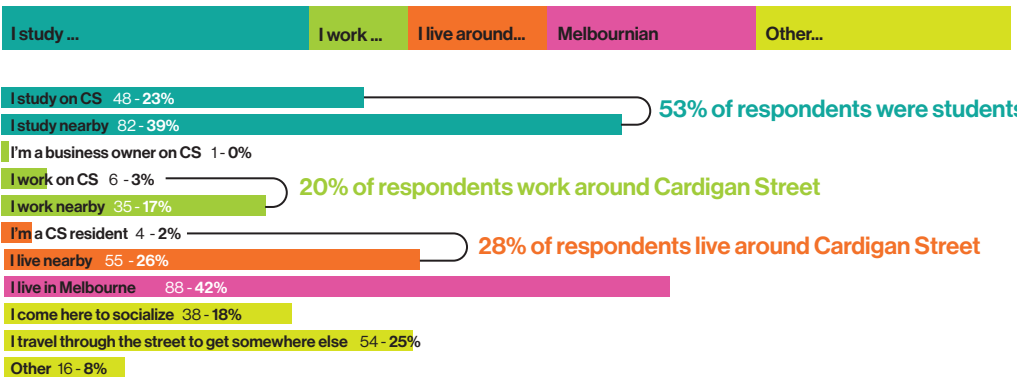
## Surveys - Who did we talk to?

### What gender defines you the most?



Respondents were aged between 18 and 72, with a mean of 29 years old.

### What is your relationship to Cardigan Street?





20-21 Sep



2023

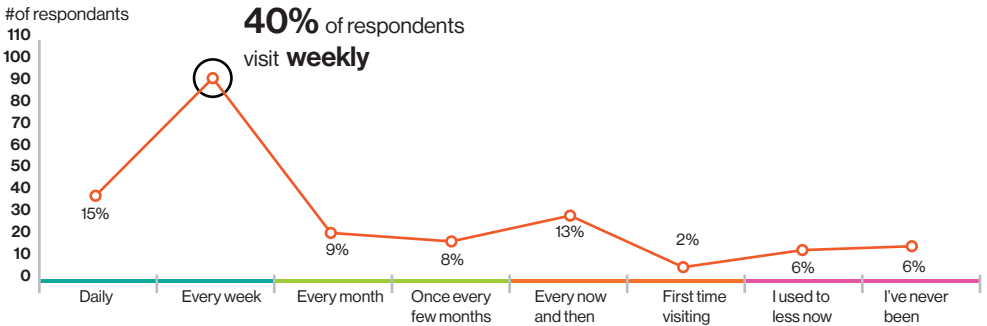
## Co-Lab for Cardigan

We invited various stakeholders to imagine the future of Cardigan Street by testing out a Place-Lab community engagement tool for envisioning public space.

## Work with students

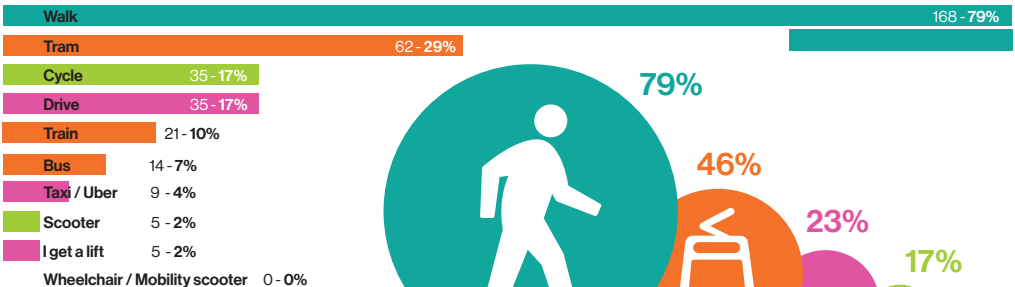
We engaged with RMIT students and academics across different disciplines of the College of Design and Social Context, including Industrial Design and Landscape Architecture.

### How often do you visit Cardigan Street?



### How do you normally travel here?

Select all that apply:



# Surveys - What did they say?

**Cardigan Street is generally perceived as the safe, green and quiet north-south connection, alternative to Lygon and Swanston.**

When analysing the diversity of survey responses, we defined 4 categories to help systematise the perceptions and preferences of the past, present and future of Cardigan Street. To fully capture the insights each question could provide, we also created different sub-categories for each, based on the values represented in the responses.

## 1. Streetscape

While the patches of greening and general amenities Cardigan Street offers are highly valued (particularly Argyle Square and local cafes), the car-oriented street design, as well as disturbances from construction sites in the area, were criticised.

However, the width of the street is perceived as an opportunity to transition and provide residents, workers and students a more human-oriented environment. Respondents were particularly interested in having more sitting spaces, spaces to meet, shade and greening.



Physical



Amenities



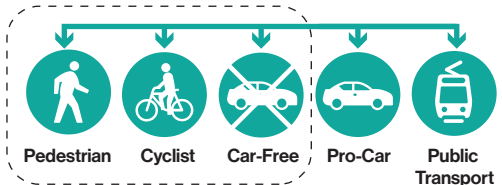
Feel



## 2. Mobility

Within this category we identified patterns in terms of 'Location' (vicinity to the opportunities the CBD offers, but with a local identity) and 'Connectivity' (the modes in which people move around).

With Lygon Street to the east (offering bus services and restaurants), Swanston Street to the west (with tram services and a university vibe), and the future Metro Station at the intersection of Victoria and Cardigan Street, public transportation is well supplied. There is strong support for more active modes of travel (pedestrian and cycling), but also concerns about parking and car travel.



# Categories



Streetscape



Mobility



Urban Nature

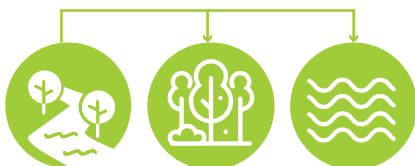


Community



## 3. Urban Nature

Cardigan Street's trees and Argyle Square are green features that are highly valued. When dreaming the future of the street, respondents' most popular response had to do with having greener spaces while also providing refuge to more-than-human species. In terms of design features, Water Sensitive Urban Design and native trees and plantings were also highly valued.



General

Green

Blue



## 4. Community

Opportunities to socialise were seen as an important characteristic for the street, with an emphasis on more spaces for recreation. Participants also noted a need for exclusive spaces for noisy activities, for quiet and reflective activities, and for more-than-human species to thrive without human interaction.

Respondents valued the student community, and universities were seen as having a potential role in community creation that could reverberate into the public realm; collaborative spaces could be used by university goers and the public alike.



Social



RMIT - Learning



 **Cardigan St**

## Cardigan Street NOW

What do you like about Cardigan Street?

What don't you like about Cardigan Street?

## What's the Cardigan Street of your wildest dreams?



# Cardigan Street NOW

## What do you like about Cardigan Street?



**Streetscape**



**Mobility**



**Urban Nature**



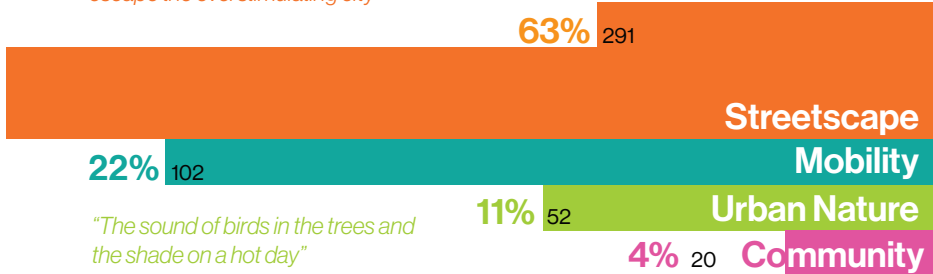
**Community**

*"Its a blend where uni seamlessly morphs into residential and business"*

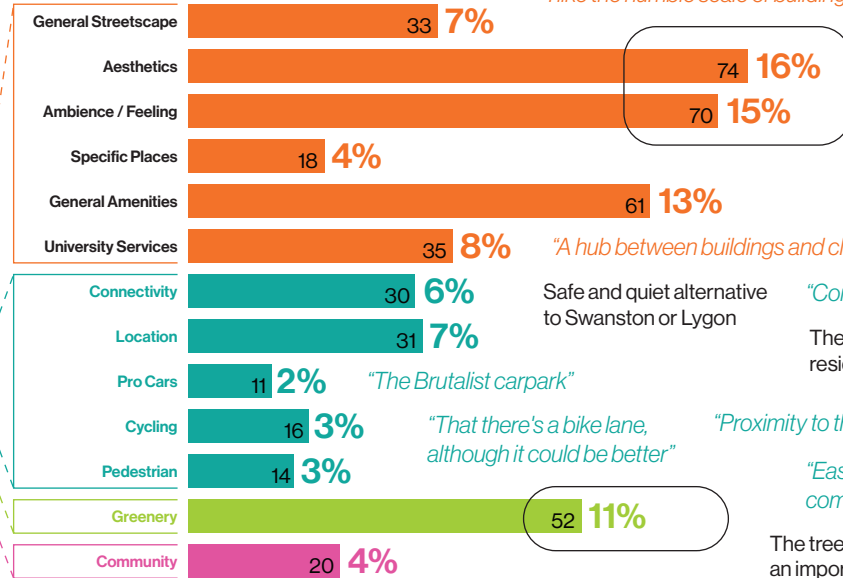
**465 responses**  
(up to 3 responses per person)

*"I like the quieter, slower, more relaxed atmosphere of the street, especially as opposed to the city and other parts of RMIT. Good for people who are neurodivergent and find they want to escape the overstimulating city"*

*"The width of the road and the potential it has"*



*"The sound of birds in the trees and the shade on a hot day"*



*"I like the humble scale of buildings on the street"*

People are particularly fond of how the street looks (aesthetics) and feels (ambience).

*"Varietals of restaurants and bars, especially around University area."*

*"A hub between buildings and classes"*

Safe and quiet alternative to Swanston or Lygon

*"Convenient access route"*

The central location with a residential-educational vibe is valued

*"The Brutalist carpark"*

*"That there's a bike lane, although it could be better"*

*"Proximity to the CBD, and suburban feel"*

*"Easier and quieter for a walk compare to other street nearby"*

The trees along the street are seen as an important feature, especially in comparison to other parts of the CBD.

## What don't you like about Cardigan Street?

**392 responses**  
(up to 3 responses per person)

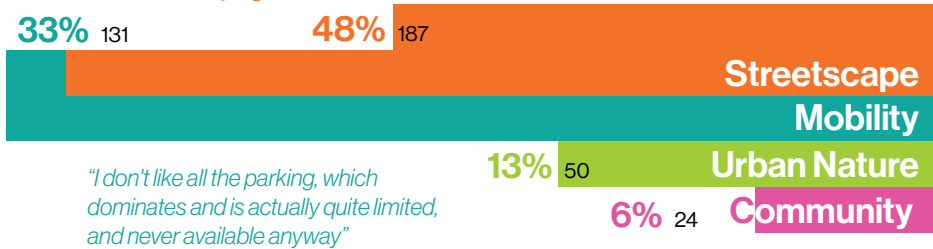
*"Pavement quality could be more even and stable for people using wheelchairs"*

*"A lot of carbon-based materials"*

*"In the summer, the paths are quite exposed, not enough shade in between 12pm-4pm on east side. Exposure to UV rays are searing."*

The on-street materials, it's conditions (uneven concrete), its global scale implications, and their consequences on the experience of public space, are mentioned as negative characteristics.

*"Its a concrete jungle"*



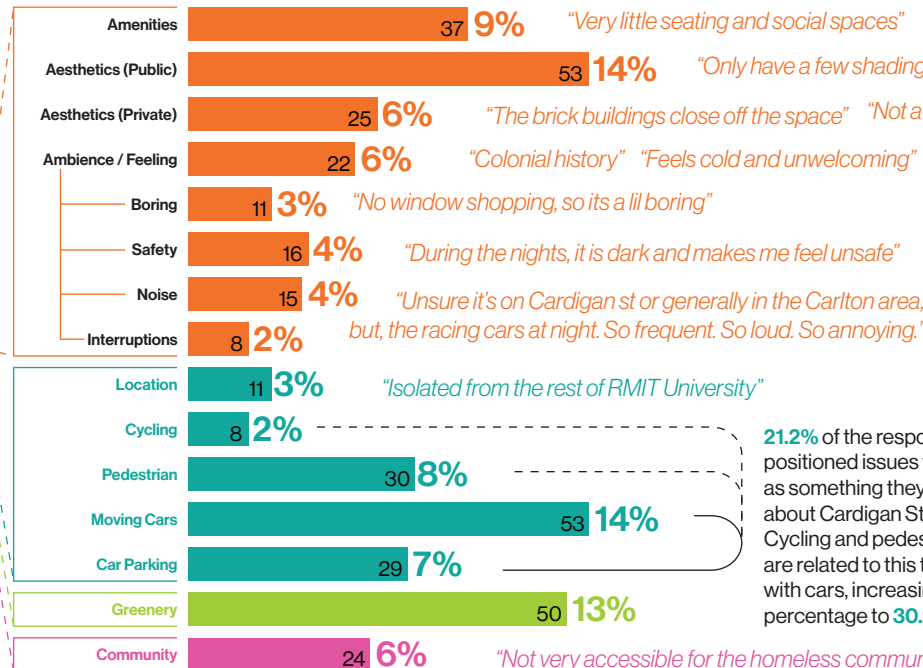
*"I don't like all the parking, which dominates and is actually quite limited, and never available anyway"*

*"Lack of greenery."*

*"Wish I could see more nature and wildlife"*

*"London Plane trees make me sneeze and I don't even suffer from hayfever."*

The high amount of parking in the area is controversial. Some criticise its negative impact on their experience and the opportunities for the other uses for the space, while others are concerned about free parking and availability.



*"Very little seating and social spaces"*

*"Only have a few shading for rain and sun"*

*"The brick buildings close off the space" "Not a lot of culture or atmosphere."*

*"Colonial history" "Feels cold and unwelcoming"*

In contrast to the many positives identified in the streetscape's most liked features, participants identified negatives a the lack of activities, interactive spaces, night security, development interruptions and general use of materiality.

*"No window shopping, so its a lil boring"*

*"During the nights, it is dark and makes me feel unsafe"*

*"Unsure it's on Cardigan st or generally in the Carlton area, but, the racing cars at night. So frequent. So loud. So annoying."*

*"Isolated from the rest of RMIT University"*

**21.2%** of the respondents positioned issues with "Cars" as something they don't like about Cardigan St. Moreover, Cycling and pedestrian issues are related to this tensions with cars, increasing this percentage to **30.9%**.

*"Cars vs bikes"*

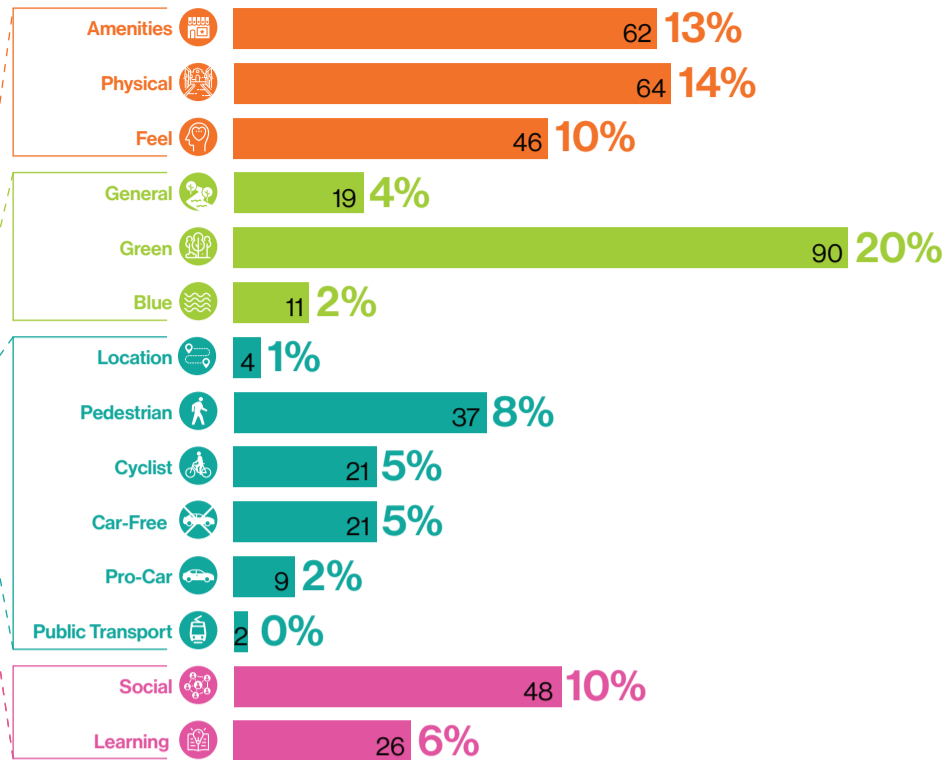
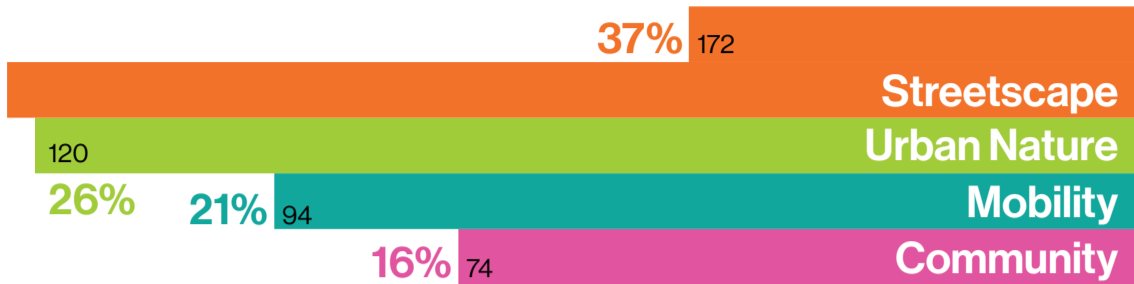
*"Lots of traffic"*

*"Lots of cars"*

*"Not very accessible for the homeless community"*

# What's the Cardigan Street of your wildest dreams?

169 responses  
460 mentions across 14 sub-categories



"Cardigan Street would have extremely limited access to cars and trucks and be a quiet place to listen to the birds, overhear an interesting conversation, meet people I wouldn't otherwise meet, and maybe do 30 minutes of quiet study. It's got comfortable tables and chairs, has ambient warm lighting at night, plenty of diverse plants and pockets of different ecosystems which reflect Victoria's biodiverse past, acknowledgment of Indigenous custodianship and an area to quietly contemplate the frontier wars."

"In my wildest dreams it would be a landscaped waterpark with a gardens stream, free veggie and herb patch for locals, artist markets and pop up events, workshops, foodie options galore all spilling out onto an area that is heated during the winter to provide an outdoor Swedish vibe and shaded with huge trees, ferns and water fans in winter for hawk markets and festivals"



"80% canopy. Fully pedestrian. Great places to sit, both at cafes and free. Climbing walls. All hard surfaces (including any remaining road) covered in awesome murals like the one on Rose St, Fitzroy. Loads of biodiversity, especially birds. Fountains feeding it all."



"Open air auditorium with green space. Place for free speech and arts. No thru traffic."



"Cardigan street should be a place that attracts people and native birds."



"The area of Cardigan Street offers a representation of the wonderful Golden Essence unique to Melbourne, that is, clean air, clean water, a sense of opportunity, renewal, the refreshing freedom that we have, and the warm, generous and welcoming nature of all Melbournians."



"Happy, green and lively!"



"Lots of food options and cafe, maybe a market, some artistic spots like small galleries, print shops, art workshops; more well-designed apartments that suits the overall academic aesthetics of Cardigan st. Its somewhere that I could easily gets whatever I need in any time of the day."



"Plenty of green, open space where the road is narrowed down to effectively fit one lane of cars travelling b/w Nth to Sth on a side each. This means similarly to how it is now but offering a wider footpath to allow two directions for foot traffic and designated bike path which may or may not be on the same level."



"Honestly, a space that feels safe, where you can have a picnic, hang out with friends and talk throughout the entire year. No cars, but cycling and tram lanes at most that allows people to use the space as a park instead of a means to only travel."



"I would like it to blur the lines between public park and public space, essentially one long, walkable/cycleable park with a mix of businesses, public services, study space and open green space for recreation."



"A street full of colour."



"Closed to motor traffic. Dutch style bike lanes in the middle of the road and the rest turned into an urban forest. Something that is similar to the rainforest walk at Monash University or the wetlands at Newcastle University. I want Cardigan Street to become a new Inner City park. A micro Hyde Park. A place to gather and have lunch and be with nature."



"People meet unexpectedly and make vague, disparate goals and ideas into a project."



"More green and trees to provide shade/cover but still easily walkable and unobstructed by closed walkways. Why not a nice creek? Perhaps a pool? Public table tennis and chessboards! Why not a treehouse?"



"An amusement park! A destination rather than just somewhere to walk through or past"



"Working food forest with well-maintained bike/pedestrian lanes running through it interspersed with designated picnic areas"



"A green spine that links many learning facilities together as well as an inviting space for the public to also transition through"



"Healthy environment, plants and people."



"Murals exhibiting beautiful Aboriginal Australian, Torres Strait Islander and other creative expressions from Australian Artists of Indigenous and ethnic backgrounds."



"Cardigan St could be an urban plaza on the edge of the city- it catches the sun and breeze and people could be encouraged use it more in different and flexible ways. Different groups could mix together: students and residents, the older traditional immigrants and workers."

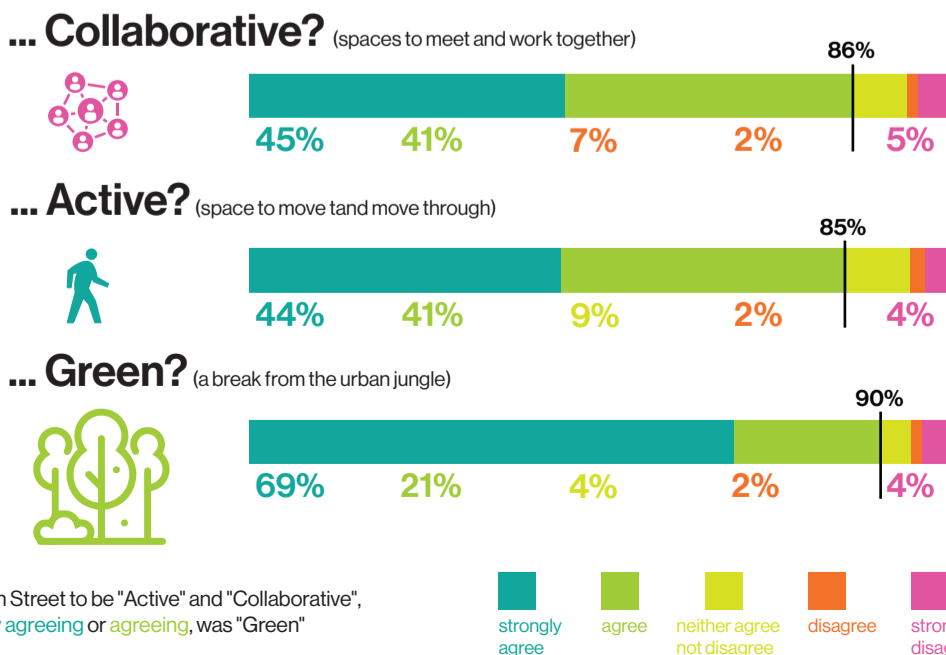


## Qualities Wordcloud from adjectives in responses



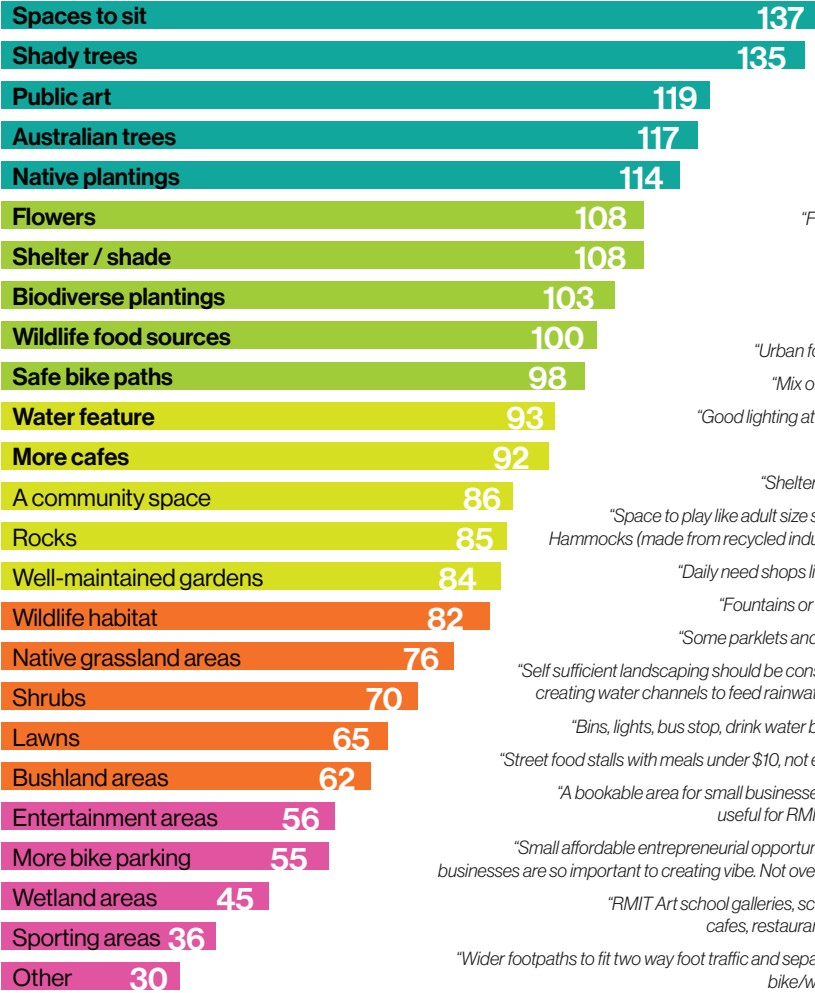
Participants generally wanted the future Cardigan Street to be "Active" and "Collaborative", but the most popular quality either strongly agreeing or agreeing, was "Green"

## Do you want the future Cardigan Street to feel...



# What features would you want most for Cardigan Street ?

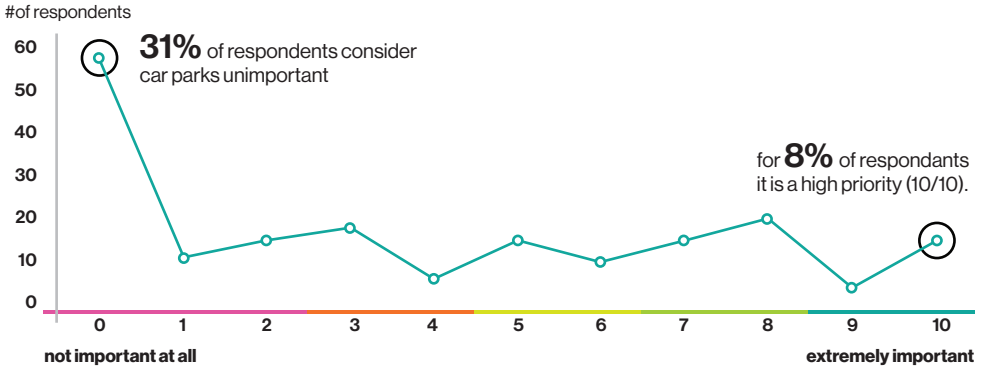
Choose as many as you want.



## Other:

- "Safe access"
- "Free seed library"
- "Cinema"
- "Trams"
- "Car parks"
- "Urban food production!"
- "Mix of sun and shade"
- "Good lighting at night. Galleries."
- "Drink fountains"
- "Sheltered bike parking"
- "Space to play like adult size swings and slide. Hammocks (made from recycled industrialist rubber)"
- "Daily need shops like Coles or Aldi"
- "Fountains or water elements"
- "Some parklets and outdoor dining"
- "Self sufficient landscaping should be considered. Such as creating water channels to feed rainwater to the plants."
- "Bins, lights, bus stop, drink water bottle refill, toilets"
- "Street food stalls with meals under \$10, not expensive cafes"
- "A bookable area for small businesses, possibly even useful for RMIT Activator use."
- "Small affordable entrepreneurial opportunities for first time businesses are so important to creating vibe. Not overdone of course."
- "RMIT Art school galleries, sculpture gardens, cafes, restaurants, music stage"
- "Wider footpaths to fit two way foot traffic and separate designated bike/wheelchair paths"
- "spaces for flexible programming- a sense of agency and adaptability, play streets for children. less top down programming."
- "Wheelchair disability access and parking"
- "Study spaces outdoors & shops drawing us to the area on ground level"
- "There are plenty of co working spaces - it would be great to put more emphasis on creative workshop and smaller event spaces"

## How important is it to you for Cardigan Street to have car parks?



## Would you have any concerns about Cardigan Street becoming more green or having more nature?

**NO**

148 **81%**

**YES**

35 **19%**

*"Removal of parking for frail aged and disability. Doesn't need to be much but omission limits the diversity of people and families coming to Cardigan."*

*"I have concern for native wildlife being attracted to the greener cardigan street, and then being disturbed by the surrounding city scape noises and vehicles."*

*"Whether the animals introduced are going to be ok, whether it would disrupt an ecosystem, whether it's balanced or not. Also humans might bring trash or food for animals that may not be good for them."*

*"I would hope that if time and money are spent on greening Cardigan Street that a plan is also put in place to maintain the new green space. I feel like these sort of projects often happen with good intentions and look great at first but are not planned for longevity. Sometimes they feel like green washing."*

*"Insects."*

*"Some ecology types, perhaps native grassland, may present a local fire hazard."*

*"Concerned about it not really ending up more green, and instead becoming a lawn with a pumping event space and so losing the quieter sensibility that it has that I love."*

*"Car parking is also important considering we cannot find car parks on Lygon st and the city."*

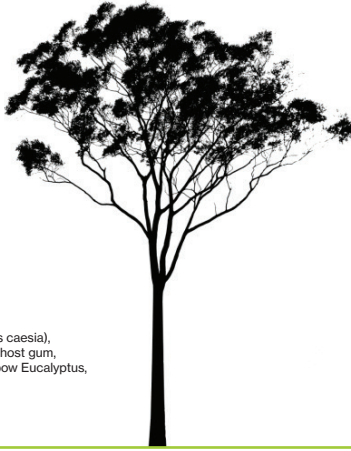
*"Delay in moving through street and reduced parking."*

*"Safety if the green space is not properly maintained, particularly if trees that self-prune drop branches. Tree roots damaging paving and creating trip hazards. Plants not being pruned and protruding into walkways, impeding safe travel."*

# What's your favourite kind of...

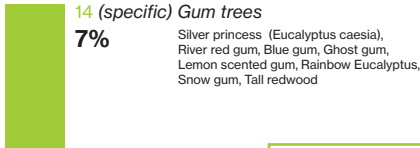
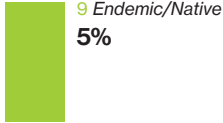
## ... Tree?

189 responses



69 Other trees  
(single mentions)  
**37%**

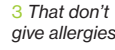
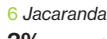
Banksia, Cherry Blossom, Magnolia,  
Fern, Fig, Angophora, Banyan, Bonsai,  
Ginko, Elm, Pine and 42 others



**32% of participants specifically preferred native species, particularly Gum trees / Eucalyptus.**



**11%** participants mentioned species that are not native to Australia



**Native species**   **Foreign species**   **Other**

Around 15% of respondents focused on tree characteristics, instead of a species

### Why should we care for native trees?



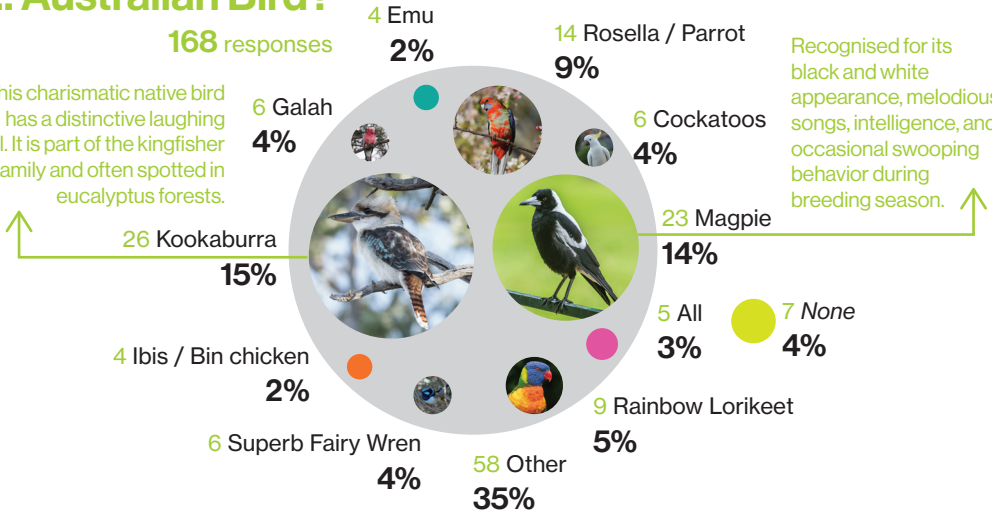
Caring for native tree species is essential for maintaining local and global ecological balance, cultural heritage, and overall environmental health. It contributes to the preservation of unique ecosystems and the well-being of both nature and humanity.

## ... Australian Bird?

168 responses

This charismatic native bird has a distinctive laughing call. It is part of the kingfisher family and often spotted in eucalyptus forests.

Recognised for its black and white appearance, melodious songs, intelligence, and occasional swooping behavior during breeding season.

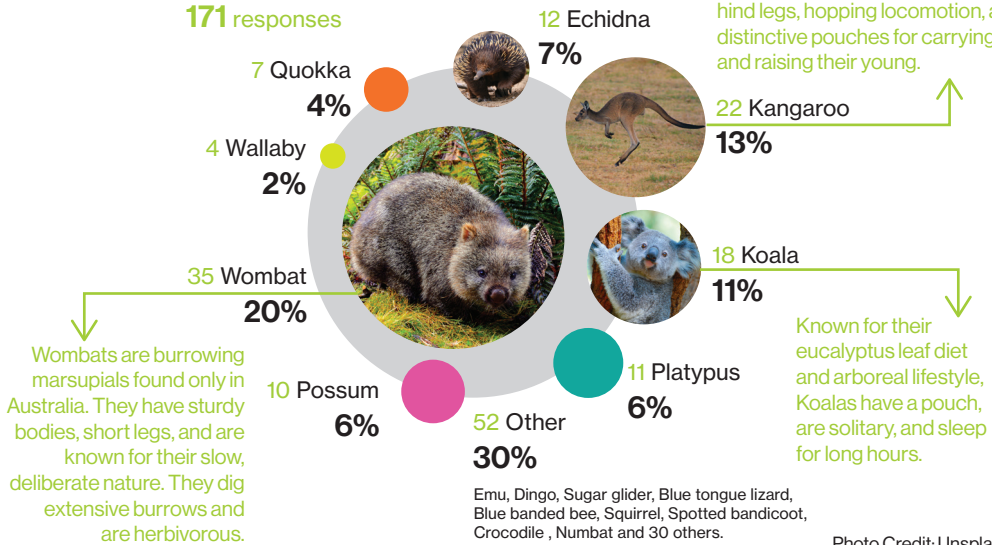


Wedgetail Eagle, Pigeon, Magpie Lark, Ostrich, Butcher Bird, Honeyeater, Lorikeets, Sparrows, Lyrebird, Seagull and 31 others

## ... Australian Animal?

171 responses

Iconic marsupials native to Australia, known for their powerful hind legs, hopping locomotion, and distinctive pouches for carrying and raising their young.



Wombats are burrowing marsupials found only in Australia. They have sturdy bodies, short legs, and are known for their slow, deliberate nature. They dig extensive burrows and are herbivorous.

Known for their eucalyptus leaf diet and arboreal lifestyle, Koalas have a pouch, are solitary, and sleep for long hours.

Emu, Dingo, Sugar glider, Blue tongue lizard, Blue banded bee, Squirrel, Spotted bandicoot, Crocodile, Numbat and 30 others.

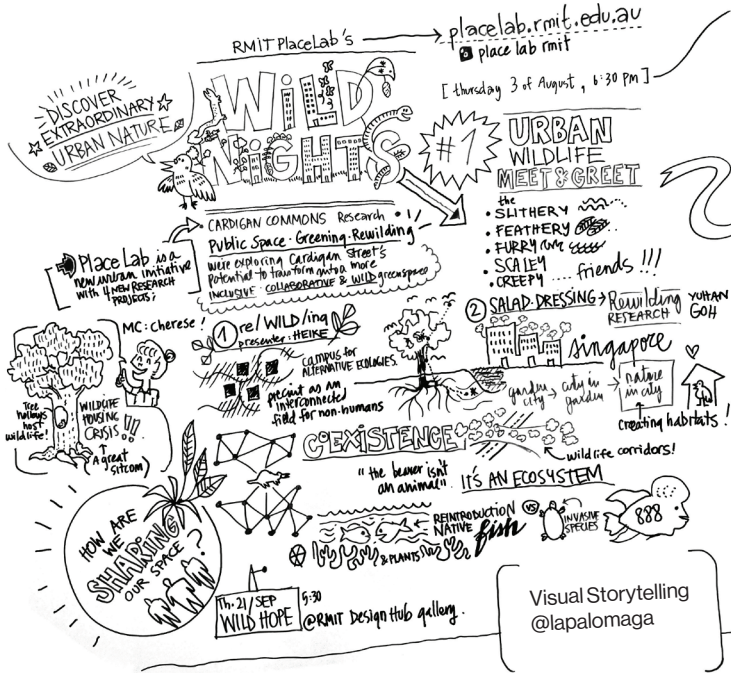
Photo Credit: Unsplash

Before European colonisation, the land where Cardigan Street now stands, was lovingly tended by Indigenous custodians, and in turn, Mother Nature flourished. Wombats, Kangaroos, and Emus roamed freely and were in tune with the First Nations' synergic ways of embracing their environment.

# Wild Nights



Photos Credit: Emily Brigid



Visual Storytelling  
@lalalomaga

## Discover extraordinary urban nature

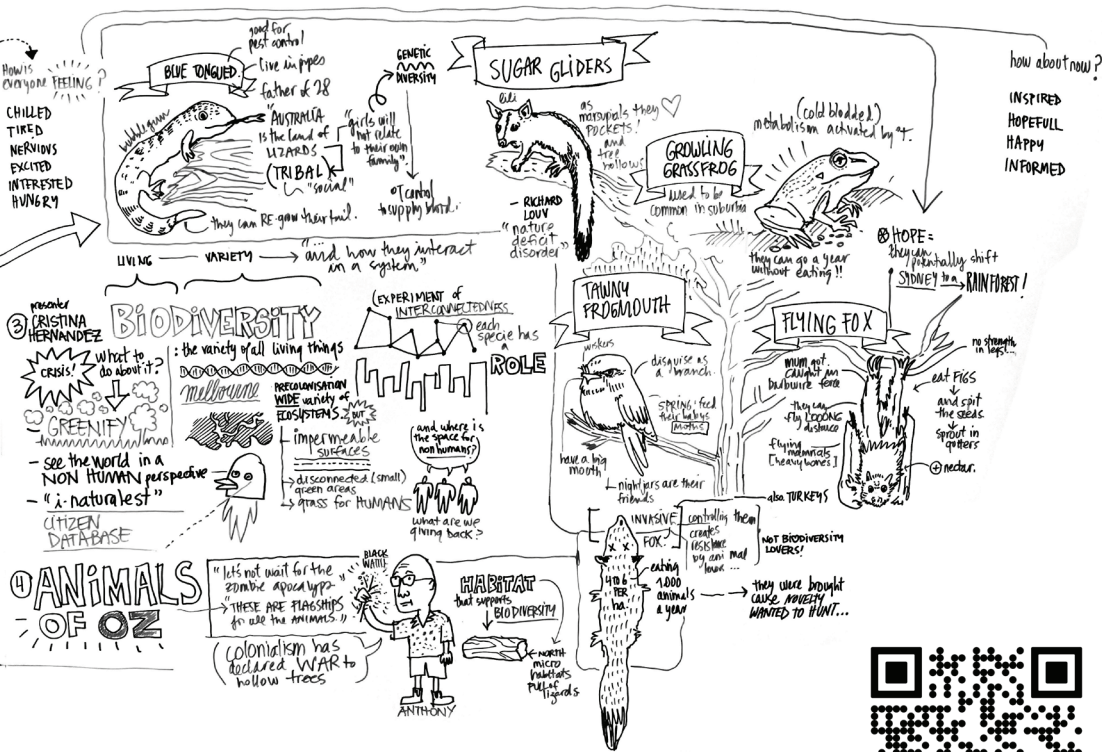
RMIT PlaceLab's Wild Nights were an experimental event format devised to connect people with the extraordinary nature we live alongside right here in Melbourne's city. We paired expert talks with hands-on experiences focused on urban species and ecosystems and invited the community along!

Over three Thursday nights we hosted a wildlife experience with real-life animals, a botanical drawing class focused on eucalypts, and a watercolour workshop where we painted microbots. We met a cheeky sugar glider, sketched some beautiful gum leaves, and learned many bat facts!

## Why hands-on activities?

We know that not everybody is interested in nature. A 2023 study by Selinske and colleagues<sup>2</sup> found that people in Melbourne who were less connected to nature were not interested in nature events. So how to bring those people the wellbeing benefits (e.g. happiness!) we know are associated with that connection?

This series of events was created to have an appeal outside just nature enthusiasts. By having meet-and-greet and art events, we hoped to interest people who were just curious and looking for something fun to do. We were particularly inspired by a 2022 study called, "Exploring integrated ArtScience experiences to foster nature connectedness through head, heart and hand". Renowden and colleagues<sup>3</sup> ran a similar series of events that engaged participants heads (mind), hearts (emotions) and hands (through physical artistic activities) to nurture a greater connection to the more than human world.



## Why a wildlife experience?

A study based in Singapore<sup>4</sup> found that direct experiences with wildlife (as opposed to in books or documentaries) influenced a positive attitudes towards wildlife and willingness to co-exist with them. This was even true for less desirable species such as bees and crows.

## Why botanical illustration?

We wanted to create an event to combat "Plant blindness"<sup>5</sup>. This is where humans are less likely to notice plants in their environment, seeing them as just background noise. This is partly because plants don't have faces, so our brains ignore them. This ignoring of plants has broader implications, creating a disconnect from the natural world, less knowledge, and less appreciation for these important organisms.

## Why microbats?

Although we have so many amazing species living alongside us in the city, most people don't know about them. That, and people don't usually like bats. They are often associated with disease and fear. But there's some evidence that greater understanding of bat biology can increase positive attitudes towards bats<sup>6</sup>, which is important to ensure they are given the space they need to help our urban ecosystems function.

Check out the details of the experience>>



<sup>2</sup> Selinske, M., Harrison, L., Simmons, A. (2023) Examining connection to nature at multiple scales provides insights for urban conservation. Biological Conservation, Volume 280

<sup>3</sup> Renowden, C., Beer, T., Mata, L. (2022) Exploring integrated ArtScience experiences to foster nature connectedness through head, heart and hand. People and Nature, 4: 519–533

<sup>4</sup> Ngo, K.M., Hosaka, T. & Numata, S. (2022) Attitudes and preferences of wildlife and their relationship with childhood nature experience amongst residents in a tropical urban city. Urban Ecosyst, 25: 1939–1948

<sup>5</sup> Kritzingner, A. (2018) 'Plant blindness' is a real thing: why it's a real problem too. The Conversation, (September 20)

<sup>6</sup> Prokop, P., Fančovičová, J., Kubiakto, M. (2009) Vampires Are Still Alive: Slovakian Students' Attitudes toward Bats. Anthrozoös, 22:1, 19-30



# Wild Nights - How did it go?

We used three methods to understand participants' experience of Wild Nights:

## 'Vibe Check'

We devised a new tool to measure how the mood of the audience might change as a result of their experience. The audience was asked to shout out 'one word' to describe how they were feeling at the start of the event, and again at the end.

## Whiteboard question

We left an open question on the whiteboard for people to answer, 'how do you feel about nature in the city?', with participants adding to it after each event.

## Post-event survey

We sent out experience surveys after the event to find out the impact the event had on attendees.

## Vibe Check

### #1 Urban Wildlife

Chilled → Inspired  
Tired → Hopeful  
Nervous → Happy  
Excited → Informed  
Interested  
Hungry

### #2 Botanical Illustration

Tired → Inspired  
Relaxed → Refreshed  
Keen → Hopeful  
Mobile → Capable

### #3 Microbat Watercolour

Curious → Happy  
Tired → Excited  
Excited → Informed  
Engaged → Relaxed  
Warm → Energized  
Creative → Proud  
Overwhelmed

## How do you feel about nature in the city?

"Fantastic experience"

"Yes, please"

"Feel inspired to think about ways we could support biodiversity in our home"

"Feels like an escape to my pure being"

"Set the animals free"

"We need more! I would love to hear more animal sounds in nature around the city"

"curiously entangled"

"Country boy with a city heart!!"

"Excited to hopefully see more nature + biodiversity in Melbourne in future"

"I love it & I'd like to see more of it"

"Is necessary for life, liveability, spirituality, meaning!"

"Re-energized!"

"Required – absolutely necessary"

"Pretty cool:P"

"Be like Singapore: plants everywhere"

"Nature is fascinating and inspirational"

"Non-negotiable, mandatory, compulsory, essential, required".

"Always needed, more green"

"Absolutely necessary for the survival of human and animal kind!"

"Needs lots more"

"Grateful"

"Mother Earth makes me alive"

"Excited and curious"

"I always appreciate it and wish there was more of it"

"A moment of peace, conflicted by overpopulation of certain species & their welfare (possums)"

"(merri creek) my safe space, calming down, space to breathe & connect"

"new found love"

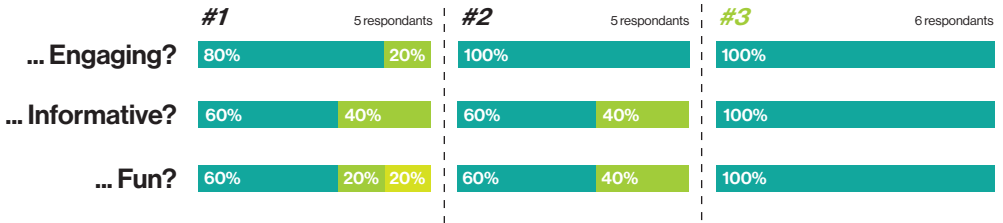
"Interesting and Important"



## Did you find Wild Nights...

16 respondents

strongly agree agree slightly agree neither slightly disagree disagree strongly disagree



**88%** of participants said their experience at Wild Nights changed either their perspectives or understanding of urban nature

**50%** of participants noted a change in how they connect to nature in the city

*"The diversity of creatures within the urban environment and their importance in the ecosystem - particularly fruit bats and their seed distributing qualities."*

*"I had no idea we had sugar gliders here- or foxes! I didn't know skinks or tawny frogmouths were common, or that tawny frogmouths weren't owls."*

*"The next day I was able to identify golden wattie! I also look at nature strips and parks with a new lens."*

*"Thinking about the definition of weeds."*

*"Was totally unaware about micro bats in the city. Informative re the area surrounding rmit. Hopefully spreads throughout more of the cbd."*

*"Already somewhat tuned in but as part of the workshop felt part of greater movement with others."*

*"I feel more aware and informed and will try my best to contribute toward nature in the city (where I can)."*

*"I am one of those people who is always looking around and pointing out birds and animals. Now I look to see them, but also to see where they live and what they are eating and doing."*

*"More aware of how city designed for humans and not animals."*

*"I walk a lot and spend a lot of time walking in the city. I often aim to get to parks more but unfortunately there isn't enough of them in Melbourne. Wild nights has made me aware and appreciative of creatures that surround me."*

*"I make a point of going for a walk every day and take notice of the nature I encounter along the way. I also try and get outside for micro-breaks and check out which birds are visiting my garden. This hasn't changed but only because it was already such a prominent feature of my life. One thing that has changed is I am even more motivated to put bat boxes up in my yard and check for places in our old sheds that bats might like to roost so that I can keep those accessible to battys."*



# Co-Lab for Cardigan



Photos Credit:  
Dijana Risteska

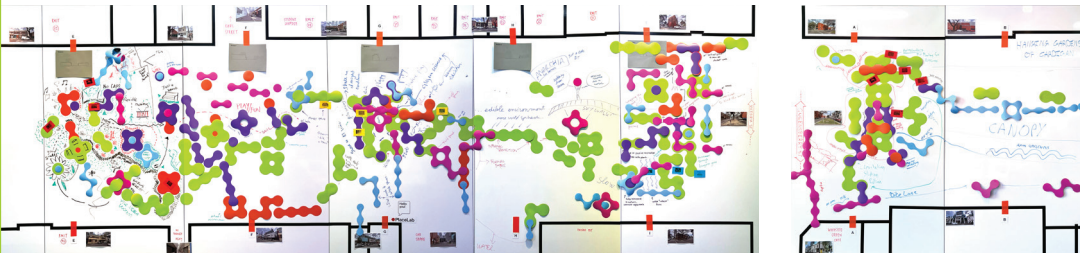
## Envisioning our street together.

RMIT PlaceLab aims to develop research methodologies that capture the dreams, commonalities, and discrepancies in urban open spaces through collaborative design tools. Our place-based approach helps us understand our specific case study and become active stakeholders in the environment we work and research, as we then define and refine our research questions. Due to challenges and time constraints in recruitment for applying our tools, this research primarily focuses on presenting the methodologies developed, rather than showcasing what should be a long-term strategic community engagement process. Nonetheless, we are excited to share this process, hoping that the valuable content captured in 'Co-Lab for Cardigan' can inform ways to reimagine the future of collective open spaces, with input from the citizens who use and give meaning to these places. Potentially, streets can transition into more-than-human and water-oriented environments with a connected and resilient community, fulfilling the opportunity space to assist in the global transition for our societies to thrive in place.

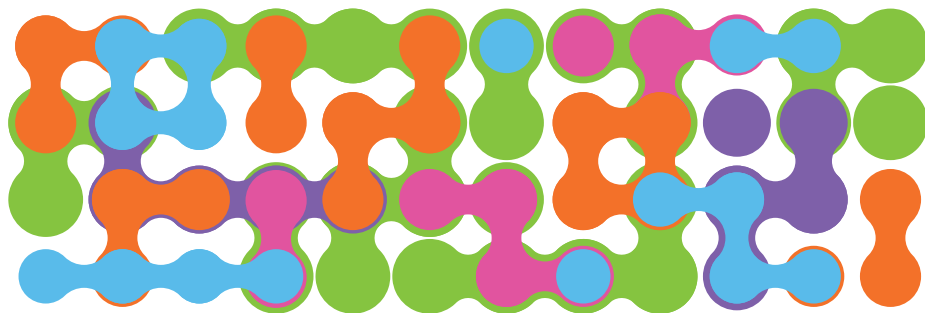
As part of Cardigan Commons research, this toolkit has been thought of as a playful way of bringing different -often conflicting- voices together to have their say of what they'd like to do in public space. The methodology includes codesign dynamics, prompts for facilitators and useful ways to analyse the data that is captured. Our 'blob' modules, a visual and playful way of organising ideas in space, helps envision without the design constraint codesign methodologies often face.

## Objectives

- > To join different community voices together in a collaborative design experience
- > To create a collaborative image of the desires of the members of the community
- > To promote empathy between participants and with more-than-human organisms



Co-Lab results for Day 1



## codesign toolkit

### Envisioning our street together.

Download our tools for  
collaboratively envisioning  
the commons



- Instruction zine + Blobs template
- Prompts for facilitators
- More than human personas
- Evaluation Survey
- Excel file for Analysis
- Illustrator file for Analysis
- ... and more!



Co-Lab results for Day 2

# Co-design

## How can a street be designed to fit the needs of a community and our societal challenges?

With climate change, biodiversity loss, and urban isolation becoming pressing global concerns, cities are an opportunity hotspot to address these critical challenges<sup>7</sup>. For this potential to flourish, societies must not only redesign our built environment, but also the development processes in which these evolve<sup>8</sup>. When it comes to public space, as a shared asset of the city, it is particularly challenging ensuring that the multiple stakeholders with agency and/or interest are taken into consideration through collaborative design processes. While co-design has been identified as a pathway for effectively increasing green areas for biodiversity enhancement in the city<sup>9</sup>, inclusive community engagement is seen as a pathway to congregate stakeholders, improve social cohesion and create smart sustainable cities<sup>10</sup>.

There are a wide variety of co-design methodologies, also known as 'Participatory Design' (PD),<sup>11</sup> that aim to bring different stakeholders together and express their individual and collective dreams for the city. These efforts seek to overcome 'The Tragedy of the Commons' and create spaces that foster the needs of the community, promote their stewardship of the land, and create places that thrive both for humans and more-than-humans<sup>12</sup>. For a successful 'PD' to take place, community engagement requires a critical place-based approach for meaningful citizen participation<sup>13</sup>, seeking consensus building<sup>14</sup> to overcome inevitable – yet necessary – conflict.

<sup>7</sup> Oke, C., Bekessy, S.A., Frantzeskaki, N., Bush, J., et al. (2021) Cities should respond to the biodiversity extinction crisis. *npj Urban Sustain* 1, 11. doi.org/10.1038/s42949-020-00010-w

<sup>8</sup> Goličnik, B., Ina Šuklje, I. (2020) Understanding co-creation within the public open space development process. *C3Places, Culture & Territory* 04, pp. 25-37

<sup>9</sup> Basnou, C., Pino, J., Davies, C., Winkel, G., De Vreese, R. (2020) Co-design Processes to Address Nature-Based Solutions and Ecosystem Services Demands: The Long and Winding Road Towards Inclusive Urban Planning. *Front Sustain Cities*, 09 December 2020, Sec. Urban Greening Volume 2

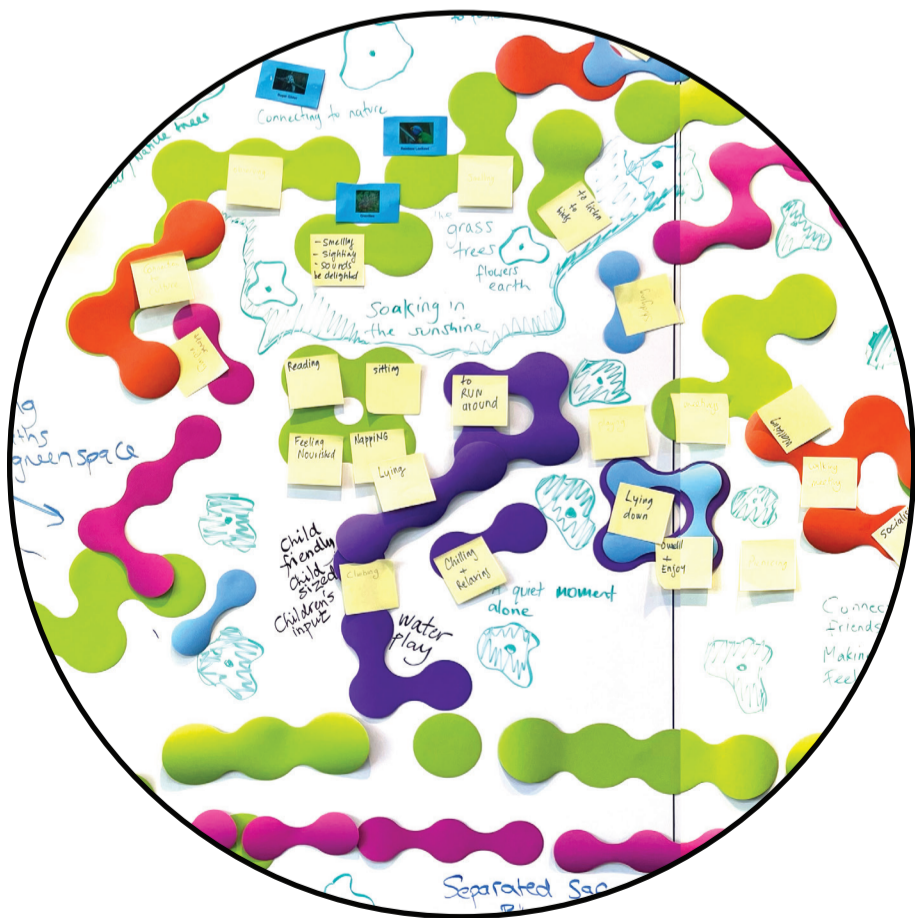
<sup>10</sup> Bokolo, A. (2023) The Role of Community Engagement in Urban Innovation Towards the Co-Creation of Smart Sustainable Cities. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*. doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01176-1

<sup>11</sup> Halskov, K. Brodersen, N. (2015) The diversity of participatory design research practice at PDC 2002-2012. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*. Volume 74, Issue C. doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2014.09.003

<sup>12</sup> Hernandez-Santin et al (2023) Integrating biodiversity as a non-human stakeholder within urban development. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, Volume 232. doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2022.104678

<sup>13</sup> Arnstein, S. (1969) A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Volume 35, 1969. doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225

<sup>14</sup> Innes and Booher (1999) Consensus Building and Complex Adaptive Systems: A Framework for Evaluating Collaborative Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. Volume 65. doi.org/10.1080/01944369908976071



# Co-Lab: What happened?



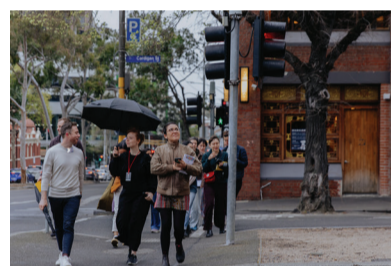
We got together at our Melbourne studio...



... heard about Urban Greening from our academic collaborators...



... we met and connected with each other...



... had a mindful-grounding walk through Cardigan St...



... talked about what we'd like to do on the street space...



... developed visual data to capture our dreams...



... with our more-than-human lens to inform our ideas...



... and created a collective image of what Cardigan could look like!

'Co-Lab for Cardigan' was our chance to test out the 'Street Codesign Toolkit' we've been developing for envisioning the commons.

20-21 Sep 2023

The two workshops were delivered on two days in September, with a total of 23 attendees from across local community, RMIT academics, students and staff, and urban/environmental professionals. Participants were divided into groups led by facilitators from RMIT's School of Architecture & Urban Design. The two-hour sessions, started with introductory talks to set the scene around PlaceLab and the Cardigan Commons Research Project. We also heard from Brent Greene, a Senior Lecturer from RMIT's School of Architecture and Urban Design, who presented on "Rewilding" strategies from an LA perspective, as precedents to question and reimagine street design's status quo.

From there, participants broke into groups to introduce themselves, connect, and share their thoughts around the icebreaking question: "What is your favourite public open space?". Following this discussion, and to immerse the participants in the ambience of Cardigan Street, we then went for a guided grounding walk to explore and consider the streetscape and its design.

On returning to the PlaceLab Melbourne studio, each team member was given their 'Co-Lab' Toolkit, which included an instruction zine to guide the co-design process. The first step involved each group discussing the question, "What are your team's values?" For this, they were provided a list of values from various RMIT strategies and reports as inspiration and asked to choose six values from the list or to create their own for presenting back.

The purpose of the workshop activities up to this point was to foster connections among team members and find shared values. As a playful conclusion to this section, they were tasked with naming their team.

The following stages of the workshop had the now connected participants, working together on their allocated sections of the street, to create a collage-like map of Cardigan Street focusing on the area between Victoria and Queensberry Street.

Participants were then prompted to brainstorm in their groups, the question "What would you like to do in Cardigan Street?". The verbs/ actions that arose from this discussion were then linked to coloured magnet pieces – or 'blobs' (inspired by Tetris configurations), categorised into colours. This common coding across teams, had the purpose of spatially systematising the outcomes of the workshop.

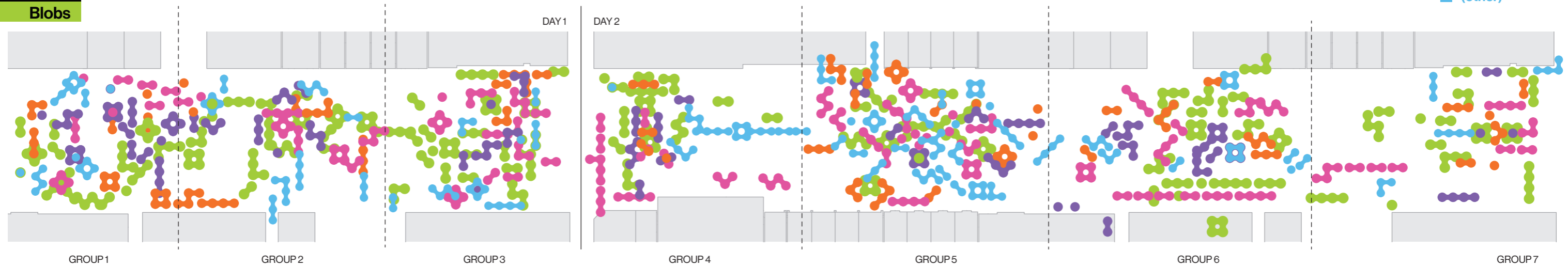
For a second iteration using the 'blobs', we adopted a unique perspective, taking on more-than-human personas assigned to each participant. We asked, "How should the street be designed from their perspective?". Each group was prompted to present the key features of their proposals in a two-minute presentation, while paying special attention to the group working on their neighbouring section of the street. At the end of this exercise, all groups discussed together how to fill in any activity gaps between the sections, resulting in a complete collage-like image of Cardigan Street.

# Co-Lab Results

The diagrams below are a visualisation of the data that was captured on PlaceLab's whiteboard during the Co-Lab workshops. This data intends to provide designers a preliminary community input for generating an initial concept design to trigger a strategic and inclusive community engagement process.

- Urban Nature
- Collaboration
- Recreation
- Moving
- (other)

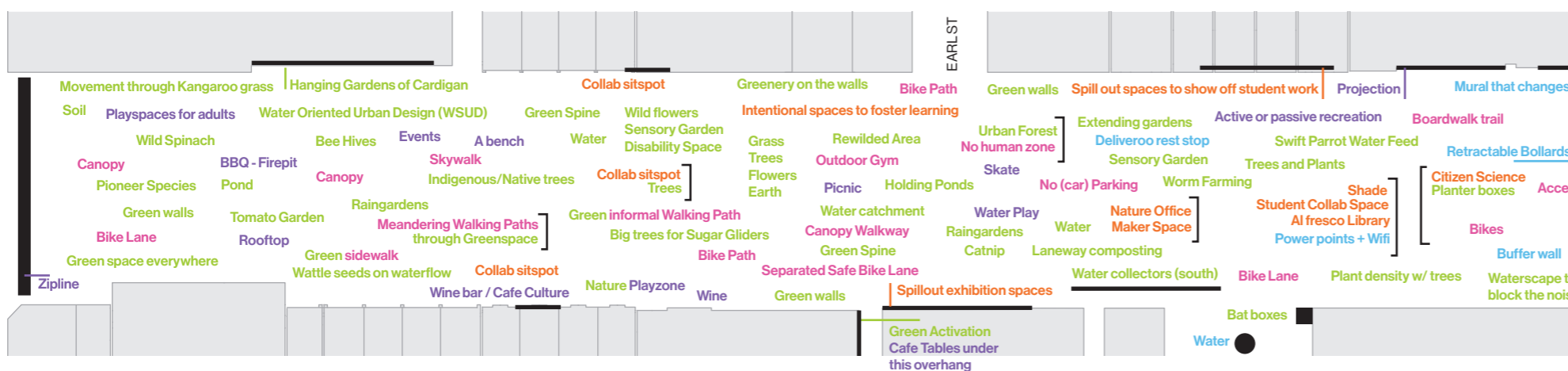
## Blobs



## Actions - Verbs

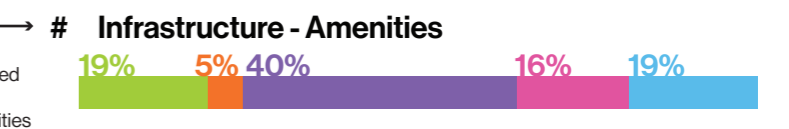
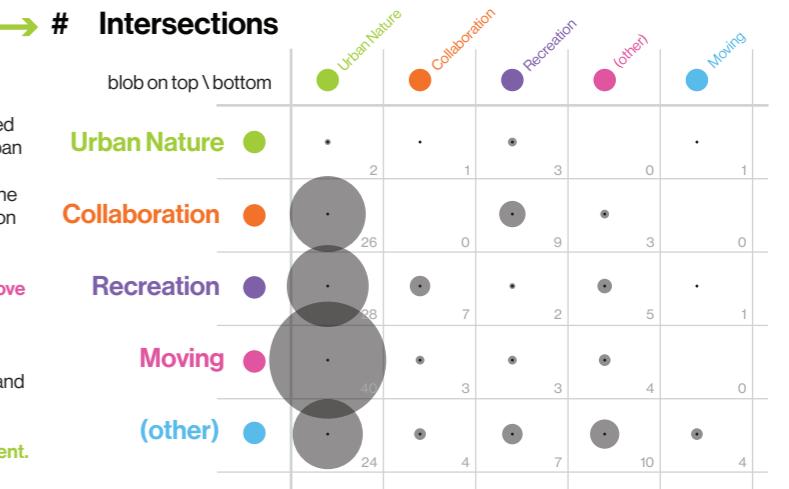
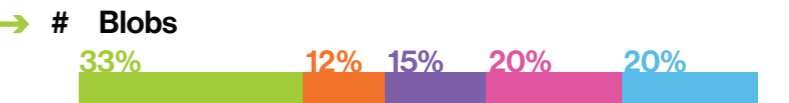
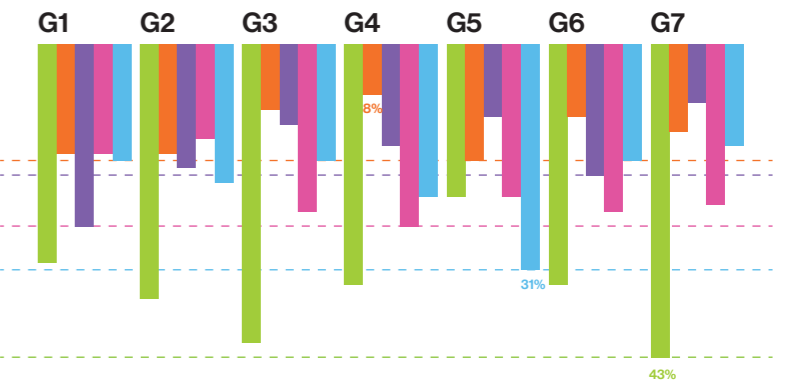


## Infrastructure - Amenities



## Qualities - Other

- Edible environment
- It smells great
- Close the street to all vehicular traffic and parking
- Nutrition/ Innovation
- Soil Health
- Anarchy in design (just a little)
- Slow lateral movement
- More green
- Informal transition between formal paths
- No Cars
- Possum friendly - controlled - diverse
- Skateable features
- Immerdes in nature, intimate experience
- Slow
- Bat flightpaths to food
- Conservation and Research
- Food must be showed
- Good smell
- Child Friendly, Child sized, Child input
- Opportunities for cultural heritage
- Flexible Moving
- Wellbeing
- Play / Fun
- The megaworm
- Sounds be delighted
- A quiet moment alone
- Slow / Fast movement
- Soil, no asphalt
- Sleeved and/or bury the carpark
- Community ("Friends of...")



The base blob used the most was "Urban Nature", with "Moving" (40) as the most popular action that overlapped:

People want to **move around in nature**.

They also want to **collaborate (26)** and have **recreation zones (28)** over a **natural environment**.

49% of the actions people want to do in public space, are things related to nature

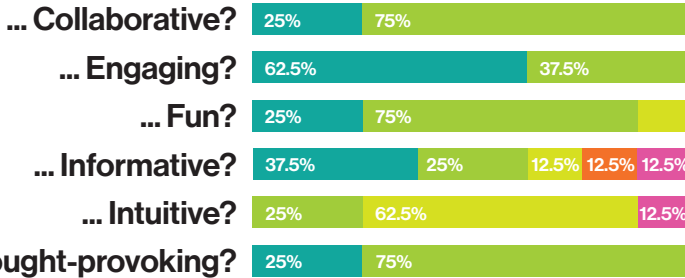
40% of physical structures mentioned were in relation to Recreational amenities

# Co-Lab for Cardigan - How did it go?

## Did you find Co-Lab for Cardigan...

8 respondents

■ strongly agree  
 ■ agree  
 ■ slightly agree  
 ■ neither  
 ■ slightly disagree  
 ■ disagree  
 ■ strongly disagree



## Did you feel your voice was represented?

### 100% respondents answered "Yes"

*"It was a fun group activity where everyone contributed to the project."*

*"Lots of space for expression, good prompts"*

*"My group was very open to hearing everyone's perspectives."*

*"Was able to share my ideas in a respectful and engaging team without any hesitation."*



## Did you learn anything new in the workshop?

### 75% respondents answered "Yes"

*"I witnessed an interesting methodology that was new for me (it was great to move, stand up, draw, use colors). I got to know the lab's activities and ongoing projects around the city, thanks to new questions on space/inhabiting/needs/dreams (that I typically don't approach with the same imaginative freedom we had during the workshop) I discovered things about myself that I wasn't aware of, and now I have a different perspective as I move around Melbourne (why this? why here? who did that? what are those for? can I jump on it?)."*

*"I learnt about a great process and tool for communicating ideas as a way to share a new vision for the Cardigan St project."*

*"Learned about the street around its surroundings."*

*"I learnt more about the challenges and high importance of a collaborative design process."*

*"To think about re-wilding and the tinier world."*

*"New approaches to urban design."*







Rampant studio, led by Dr. Brent Greene and Gary Fang, explored and questioned dominant cultural perceptions of the City of Melbourne's urban plant communities – including spontaneous, native and endemic species – and considered their potential for designing a linear urban park and novel ecosystem in Cardigan Street, Carlton.



### Scott Barr

Scott envisions a linear park, which has the ability to hold and direct water, catch sediment and support the growth of spontaneous/native plants. The topographic gestures and elevated pathway establish diverse view lines and experiences across the landscape, while highlighting the differences between the park's microclimatic conditions and plant communities.



### Pierce Hickman

Pierce's design is titled Grated Communities. This proposition explores the relationships between human occupancy and plant growth at Cardigan Street. It does so by introducing a protected vegetative area into the urban linear park, which grows both physically and metaphorically into the lives of the street users.

# Wilding the Campus

**Wilding the Campus**, led by Dr Maud Cassaignau, investigated how we may introduce wilding strategies within cities as alternative to conventional single-species strategies. How can whole ecosystems, with plants, animals, fungi, soil, water, urban microclimates respond to different types of existing urban fabric? How can they create habitats for endemic animals, while offering better walkability, moments of discovery and connection with nature for passer-bys.



## Craig Danvers

The Ecological Bridge proposal connects the Innovation Precinct's Cardigan Street with the other side of RMIT Campus for better ecological and pedestrian permeability. The vegetated bridge links with tree canopies and façade greening on either side of a busy street to allow possums and other ground creatures to extend their habitats.



## Ruisi Fu

Water Ecologies are created by harvesting rainwater from adjacent rooves and softly manipulating the natural topography to create wetland ecosystems. These aquatic habitats will form a fascinating new entrance point from the metro station into the Campus.



## Jingtao Huang

Growing Passages proposes to create permeability through the built fabric for animals and pedestrians. Connections, nooks and crannies, together with planting of appropriate pollination trees help extend the habitats, feeding and nesting opportunities of microbats and birds within the city.

# Wrap up

Our research shows :

- 1** There are people in the community who are keen for greening on Cardigan Street! And, addressing concerns such as parking and safety (of people and wildlife) will be key for any next steps.
- 2** Interactive nature events can have a profound effect on perceptions and understanding of urban nature. They can also lift people's spirits and inspire them to nurture the nature around them.
- 3** Collaborating using hands-on activities can help different voices to be heard, create a sense of community, and enable people to get creative with the complexity of open spaces.

What next? That's up to you.

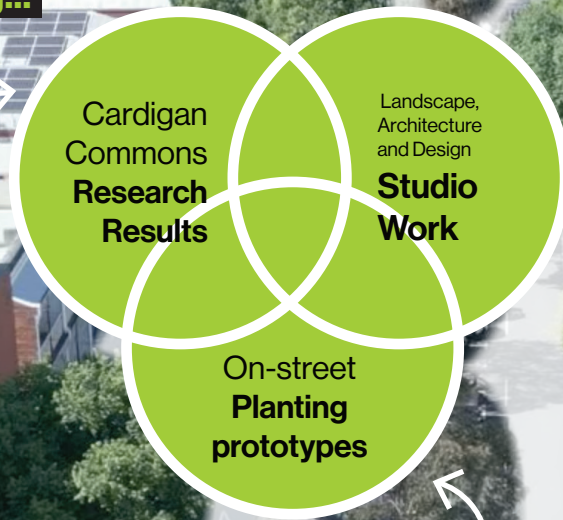
Whether you be a business owner or passer-by; academic, or local council; student, or resident, we hope you can use what we've found to make Cardigan Street, and the lives of the people that live, work, study, and visit there, better and brighter. That could be through official greening projects, or simply putting out a planter box for local pollinators. Maybe you want to host your own 'Wild Night' or use our 'Co-lab' toolkit to work with a community to imagine what a space could be.

**If you have a 'wild' dream – go for it!**



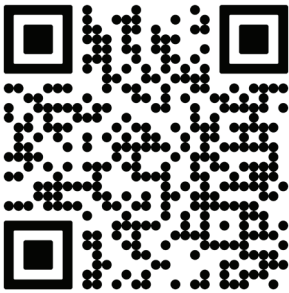
**This is what the community thinks about Urban Greening...**

**...this is what it could look like...**



**... and this is how we could start to make it happen.**

Cardigan Commons Website:



**A Hyper-Local Initiative to Connect  
Communities, Shape Place and  
Take a Radically Different  
Approach to Doing Research.**

[placelab.rmit.edu.au](http://placelab.rmit.edu.au)

[@placelabmit](https://twitter.com/placelabmit)

Supported through the Victorian Higher Education  
State Investment Fund (VHESIF)



RMIT PlaceLab Melbourne wishes to extend their appreciation for the assistance and knowledge generously provided by the individuals listed below:

All of our research survey respondents and workshop participants. And all of the trees, plants and small creatures living alongside us in the city who make it more wonderful

**Maud Cassaignau, Heike Rahmann, Brent Greene**  
(RMIT School of Architecture and Urban Design)  
and **Yu Han Goh** (Salad Dressing)

RMIT PlaceLab Melbourne Team:  
**Cherese Sonkkila, Paloma Bugedo, Luke Gebert**

RMIT PlaceLab team:  
**Kiri Delly, Brock Hogan, Frances Gordon, Dani Francisco**