

# Cardigan Commons

## CO-DESIGN TOOLKIT AND WORKSHOP GUIDELINES



## 1. Acknowledgement of country

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

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

## 2. RMIT Place Lab Initiative

RMIT PlaceLab is a new urban initiative connecting community, shaping place and taking a radically different approach to research.

Designed to free research from the campus and bring researchers street-side to connect with local government and groups, RMIT PlaceLab facilitates site-based research to support the co-creation of new ideas, partnerships, and systems that grow positive community impact.

Dynamic, actionable and accessible, RMIT PlaceLab research projects are bite-size and community- engaged, generating insights, ideas and solutions that can be implemented together with our government and place-making partners.

## 3. Cardigan Commons

### 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 community perspectives and hopes for the streetscape, barriers and concerns about the change, opportunities to shift perspectives, and collaborative ways to design a space.

The project engaged with local community groups and key stakeholders using surveys and workshops. The project culminated in a zine of the findings, a final exhibition showcasing the community's vision for the future of Cardigan Street, as well as on-street planting prototypes. Through these we hoped to help to create new visions of what Cardigan Street could become, and a community engaged in the process of its becoming.

### What are these?

- A space for discussion, problem-solving, collecting insights and diverse perspectives, and general expression of a group of people with the aim of producing a collaborative outcome.
- Workshops are a great opportunity to get local community and multiple voices involved, for making networks across our PlaceLab ecosystems and using our Research Studio spaces to showcase ancillary / aligned projects, especially for design studios - students & academics to present prototypes of evolving ideas.
- A space to showcase different expertise

### How do we want PlaceLab Workshops to feel?

- Welcomed  
That produces a sense of belonging.
- Playful  
A space to dream, no restrictions on the possibilities and opportunities, out of the ordinary, fun, without boundaries.
- Novel  
Memorable, unique, think of the particularities of each event.
- Safe  
Diverse and inclusive, different people can feel they belong, and they won't feel judged for thoughts and opinions.
- Accessible  
Not to be thought of as an academic exercise, no assumed knowledge required, considering communication design to make them understandable.
- Simple  
A simple agenda so that it can be open and freeing, intuitive and not onerous.
- Thought provoking  
That allows new ideas to emerge, critical.
- Context  
That there's a reality to it, it's grounded in something, impactful.



As part of RMIT PlaceLab's 'Cardigan Commons' Research Project, this Toolkit has been developed as a playful way of bringing different - often confronting - voices together to have their say on what they'd like to do in public spaces. The methodology includes co-design dynamics, prompts for facilitators and useful ways to systematise and 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 co-design methodologies often face.

### Objectives

- To join different community voices into 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

I want to create my own CoDesign Workshop, where should I start?

*Download Our Codesign Toolkit files!*

- > **Codesign Toolkit Zine Instructions**
- > **Blobs template**
- > **More than Human name tags**
- > **Prompts and Notes for facilitation**
- > **CoLab Run Order**
- > **Post evaluation survey**
- > **Co-Lab Data Analysis – Excel**
- > **Co-Lab Data Analysis- Illustrator**



## 6. Guidelines to organize a Co-Design Workshop

The following notes are a referential set of guidelines, considerations and questions when having your own Co-Design Workshop. This was our 'train of thought' when dreaming about 'Co-Lab':

- **Define Purpose**

Why are you doing this? Define your main (and secondary) objectives, as well as any question you seek to answer through this Research Activity.

When you feel lost in your project, always come back to this leading aim.

- **Define Outputs**

What do you want to generate/create? Here are some potential answers:

- The sense of contributing to something bigger than themselves.
- A specific outcome (a map, a diagram, an embroidery, a mural) that represents the collective effort of the workshop.
- Visual storytelling, graphic recording (phot/video) or a summary of what was discussed that people can take with them.
- A 'next step' or prompt for people to extend the story, theme, experience... or a fond farewell, inviting/encouraging people to return and make the engagement meaningful that can last through time.
- A future exhibition with results for community feedback.
- Consider a "goodie bag" – something physical they can take away as a fond farewell / thank you with a tactical purpose. It could be from a postcard with a stamp so participants can extend their learning/impact outside the workshops, to a pin to create engagement as a group. Be mindful of not generating rubbish through this merch.
- Governance/alliance to organise a community activation strategy (activity in public space) or other type of community engagement activity.

- **Link SDGs**

Considering the global challenges imposed by the climate crisis and socio-spatial inequalities, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide insights of strategic actions to take through the following link > [sdgs.un.org/goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals)

Consider these frameworks as ways of evaluating of impacts.

- **Constraints and Opportunities**

Understand your limitations of time and budget and see if these align with the outputs and objectives you are setting up.

- **Programme Prototype**

Define Dates and Schedules (consider different time slots to get max attendees).

Workshop the key Activities and durations. You can download 'Run Order' as a reference of Co-Lab. When settling the activities in your programme, make sure you define tasks and roles, which may fluctuate in the process, but it's good to set responsibilities under this scheme.

Ask yourself 'What is the best way to "set up the context"? How are you introducing the problematic, methodology that will be applied and output?' Clarity and transparency of 'Why we are gathered', general context and expectations are key for engaging community through time.

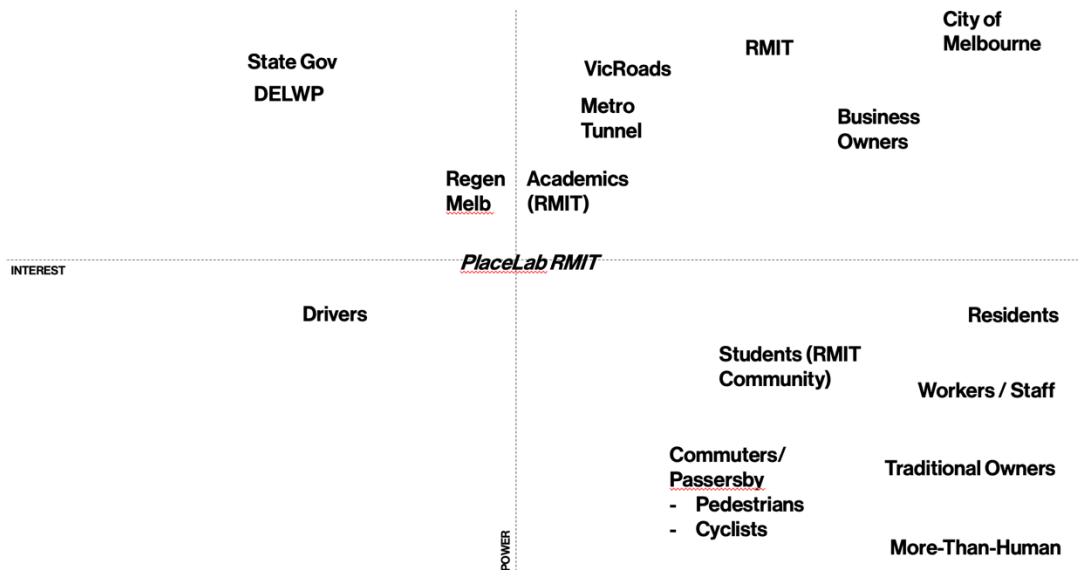
Now that you know what is the activity: what materials are needed? Build a shopping list including catering: food and water is important when getting a community together.

- **Data retrieval / Evaluation mechanisms**

What data do we want to retrieve? How are these mechanisms potentially building impactful information to communicate? Make sure these align with the general objectives, and that they consider your defined limitations and ethical concerns.

- **Participants**

Build a stakeholder map by positioning 'Interest' on an horizontal axis and 'Power' on the vertical one. Position in this map all the stakeholders you want to involve in the project / workshop, or that are relevant actors linked to a particular place. This is an example:



Define # of people. When you do this consider group building activities you've planned and the space restriction for number of attendees.

Define % of stakeholder involvement. This is key for ensuring inclusivity in your activity. As an example, you could define the following targeted audience:

- Community: 50%
  - Business owners
  - Residents
  - Non-RMIT city workers
  - Non-RMIT city students
  - Commuters / Recreational visitors
- Knowledge experts: 25%. (or "urban/environment professional"?)
  - Planning & Statutory planning
  - Rewilding / Ecology / Environment
  - Community engagement
  - And related experts
  - CoM
  - State government
- RMIT (academics and students and staff): 25%
  - academics from related fields (priority)
  - students

Now, that you've defined these boundaries regarding expected participation... who should be invited? Build a database with potential assistants to send out invitations.

As a general consideration, while you are in your recruitment journey, always ask yourselves 'Who is not in the table?'. Think about power structures when creating teams.

- **Recruitment**

How should participants be invited? This depends on each type of workshop and should have consideration that are very place-dependant. Sometimes an Eventbrite will do, but should it be private or open?

When there are limited spots and key stakeholders should attend, it is suggested to start by mailing potential assistants with the link to the Eventbrite to ensure their spots.

Nonetheless, not everyone has access to internet, skills or will to adhere to these mechanisms.

- You can start by creating a simple yet provoking invitation for mailing, minding the different audiences you are inviting.
- Create an Eventbrite. The customization tools are multiple, explore this tool! Consider creating QR code to this link.
- Think about the data you'd like to get from participants through the "order form". eg. "What sector do you represent?".

To include local community invitations should be tackled from multiple strategies.

- Posters,
- Drop letter,
- Door knocking ,
- And specially talk to community connectors and key partners (council, community centres, local business owners and workers) to have advise and strengthen the networks to involve inclusively the community.

- **Team in Space**

Think about how the space of the place you'll do the workshop could be best configured to pull off the activities you've envisioned. Think of different platforms (walls, whiteboards, tables) and how these could assist on your activities.

How will people move around and gather? Consider whether you require passive and/or active spaces, indoor and/or outdoor.

Establish how your team will work in this space (build a matrix to allocate people in roles ) Some roles to consider include: Welcome at Door, Registrations, Photos and Videos (or giving guidelines of your intention to the professionals in charge), Shopping for materials and catering, Observational notes, visual storytelling, MC, cleaning,

Other items to consider and depend on the activities, the agencies involved and rigourosity of the proposal:

- **Risk assessment and management**

- Dealing with conflict
- Catering and Allergies
- On street activities
- Sustainable practices (waste management)

- **Create Communication Strategy**

- How will you inform the outcomes with the assistants and others?
- Define Platforms, Key messages, Deliverables and Key dates

- **Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy**

- Send out emails to each participant thanking them for their time and valuable input along with the post event survey (file template included in toolkit)
- How to keep people engaged? Is there any message you'd like to give to the participants?



## **‘Co-Lab for Cardigan’ was our chance to test out the ‘Codesign Toolkit’.**

On the 20th and 21st of September 2023, PlaceLab Melbourne held a series of fun, interactive, and purposeful workshops that brought different voices together to creatively envision the future of Cardigan Street.

As part of our Research Project “Cardigan Commons”, ‘Co-Lab for Cardigan’ was about exploring the potential of Cardigan Street to transform into a more inclusive, collaborative and wild ‘greenscape’, with a focus on community perspectives and aspirations.

‘Co-Lab’ had the purpose of bringing together different voices with competing needs and interests around Cardigan Street’s public space. It aimed to unveil the challenges of designing in a limited area for multiple desires, and from this a relational issue stood out: “How do different types of stakeholders collaborate in the co-design of public space?”. It also aimed in collaboration with RMIT landscape architecture academics, to interrogate the role of street design from a rewilding lens, following our key research question: “What’s the street of your wildest dreams?”. In doing so, our intention was to create a consolidated map of Cardigan Street using our ‘Co-Lab Toolkit’ as well a participatory design methodology for creative community engagement.

### **So, Co-Lab! What happened?**

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.



Participants of Co-Lab on a guided grounding walkthrough Cardigan Street. Photos by Dijana Risteska.

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: green for 'Urban Nature', orange for 'Collaboration Zone', purple for 'Recreation Zone', pink for 'Moving' and blue to be used as a 'wild card'. This common coding across teams, had the purpose of spatially systematising the outcomes of the workshop.

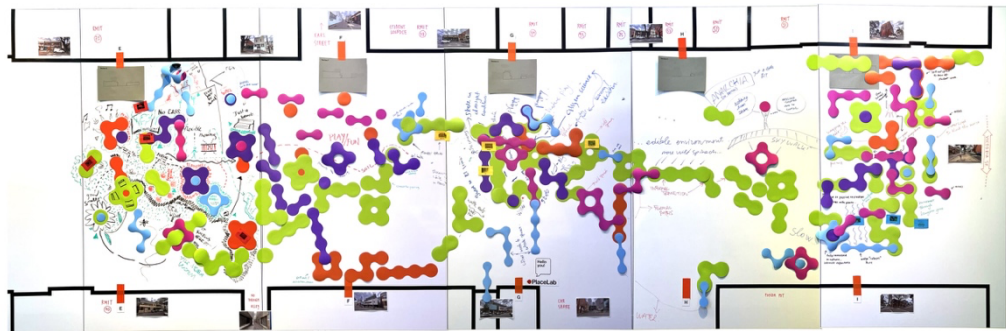


For a second iteration using the 'blobs', we adopted a unique perspective, taking on more-than-human personas assigned to each participant. We asked, "How should the street be designed from their perspective?". Each group was prompted to present the key features of their proposals in a two-minute presentation, 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.

While having the same set of tools and instructions, each of the groups had a different approach and visual language to addressing the exercises. This talks to the different world views, personalities and interests from the stakeholders gathered.

## 8. Guidelines to systematize data from Co-Lab

Over two days, 15 participants including representatives of the local community, RMIT academics, students and council, along with 7 facilitators, created the following image on our PlaceLab whiteboard, following the [Codesign Toolkit Zine Instructions](#):



Day 1

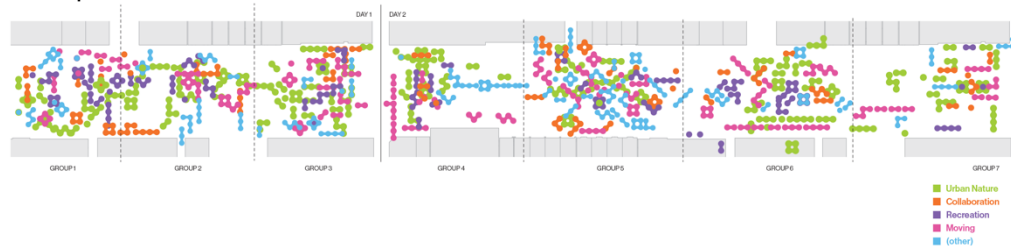


Day 2

### How did we analyse this image?

The 'blob' system helps communicate ideas and desires, without having the formal constraints from traditional design exercises. Nonetheless, this result is difficult to digest and translate into inputs for a street design attempt. The following notes are a step-through on how we managed to systematise and analyse this output.

Using [Illustrator](#), we divided the information in the whiteboard between blobs and texts. The following image represents the blob magnets, their colour, position and overlap.

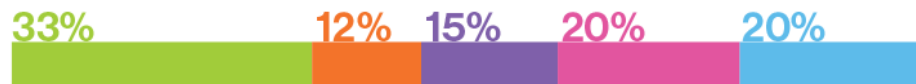


We built a matrix to identify the intensity of overlaps. The horizontal axis is the bottom blob and the vertical axis the blob that positioned above:





## # Blobs



## # Actions - Verbs



## # Infrastructure - Amenities



### Workshop Observations:

- In terms of mobility (pink blobs) every group linked these zones to either bicycle lanes and parking or pedestrian areas. None considered car lanes or car parking in their designs. There was a strong support to active mobility.
- Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD), Swimming, Paddling, Water play, Water collection, Raingarden, Pools, Urban Lake and other water oriented platforms, were repeated themes amongst groups. Along with a range of Nature Based Solutions, the presence of water was highly valued.
- When groups were prompted to connect their section and discuss between teams, the way they connected was through nature: 'Water', 'green spine', 'canopy', 'rain gardens', 'edible environments', 'soil health', 'pioneer species' and 'connecting greenery'.
- All the green blobs were used up quickly, which talks about a practical limitation of the methodology. The only group that did not use all their green blobs was because they decided to assign the 'Other' zones as water sensitive urban design, meaning that their blue magnets also represent 'urban nature'.

### What was participants perception?

Following Co-Lab, we sent out experience surveys to hear about participants perspectives. From the 15 participants we had 8 participants answer the survey, distributed through the email registered through Eventbrite.

### Did you feel your voice was heard / 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 and expanded:

" *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"*

## What moment(s) do you remember the most?

Did you have an "a-ha!" moment?...

" *I particularly liked having to interpret the meaning different coloured magnets and imagine what they could become when situated in proximity to each other."*

" *Yes definitely, it was good to know about every ones prospective on the street."*

" *Really loved the secret animal I n the nametag - great pivot to more-than-human thinking."*

" *The idea of ecosystems and plants and animals having agency in urban designs"*

" *re-wilding struck a chord - reinforced funnily enough today walking through the reopened exhibition gardens that are currently more like a meadow"*

" *I loved the experience of sitting on the grassy space and reflecting"*

" *The walk around was useful. To see a familiar place from a new perspective. It was great to see examples from other cities."*

" *seeing the difference between my group s board and the other two, in term of geometry/fluidity, tidy/messy organization of shapes and colors made me think a lot is this the same reaction studied in experiment of urban agriculture, where everyone loves the cherry tomatoes but no one like the (olfactive) mess of rotten compost in the middle of the streets? or when we say we would like natural food but our agricultural technologies are all designed for corn rows standing straight like soldiers... just to say: are we ready for the mess? We seek solace in stories about minimalism-get-rid-of-what-cause-you-discomfort only because we can't tolerate more fluid (and unpredictable) environments and relationships. How can we (all) cope (well) with a bit more disorder (by disorder, I mean having broader margins for unplanned actions, more gray areas, more deregulated zones, so that various subjects can express themselves, nb: gray but not at the mercy of the*



*best/powerful/fastest bidder.) I am still changing my mind on this, but now I think more about weedy parterres, meeting animals when it gets dark, and how long would I be able to walk without socks in the CBD. Maybe I will start my personal list of disordered activities (or other ways to invite my disordered thoughts outside - my head, my discipline, my office, my network) A-HA!"*

## Other comments, recommendations, or feedback about the event

- " *One small improvement from my perspective would have been a simple 5 mins in the section of Cardigan Street assigned to imagine with the new team before getting back inside - the team that knew the area well (spot uni end) seemed to develop more layers to their plan."*
- " *I personally found the plan created on the whiteboard pretty challenging to get my head around with the different colours and the ways were supposed to represent the interactions of the elements in the design. I would have preferred to simply draw a picture and annotate."*
- " *Two areas to focus on for next time: first, have a much clearer answer for 'what is this for and what will happen without input'. Second, work hard on recruitment - this was a bit of an academic echo chamber that didn't really represent the range of users."*
- " *I don't think you reached many local residents. Sessions should be held outside of business hours to reach people who work during the day. I was frustrated by not understanding what scope RMIT (or any other entity) had to make the changes discussed. Why were we discussing this section of Cardigan St (presumably because it contains a lot of RMIT buildings?) and what would happen to our ideas? Does RMIT have the power & resources to implement anything?"*
- " *more time would have been great for the exercises; all the organizers and facilitators were nice; an amazing version of the workshop would be outside (more time in the street); the exercise with the non humans was very interesting (another version of the workshop could be a whole session of role playing, being a non human in different parts of the city - I am always skeptical around humans cognitive possibilities but ART can cover many gaps in unimaginable ways)."*

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## **This is the story of how our Codesign Toolkit was developed and tested out!**

Potentially, it could serve as a precedent for a future community engagement strategy aimed at envisioning the future of Cardigan Street.