



# reworlding city north: play as a modality for collective futuring

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the future play lab works with local government and industry partners connecting speculative design, creative placemaking, extended realities and urban play to explore new ways of being in the world.

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### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay respect to their Ancestors and Elders, past, present, and emerging.

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# about the lab

**the future play lab works with local government and industry partners connecting speculative design, creative placemaking, extended realities and urban play to explore new ways of being in the world.**

The RMIT future play lab is home to a diverse community of researchers, students, industry leaders, and policymakers focussed on the social, cultural, and economic opportunities of urban play.

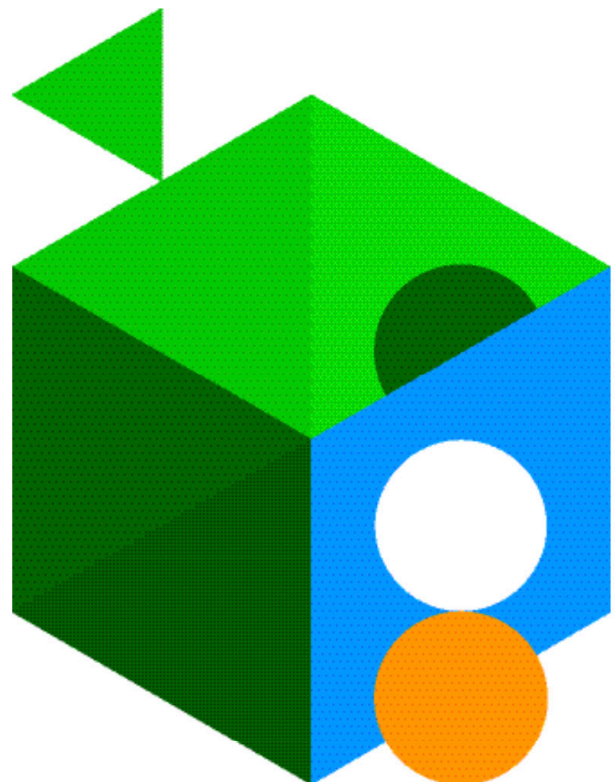
The lab was founded by Dr Troy Innocent in a disused School of Design studio space in post-lockdown Melbourne with a vision to connect speculative design, creative placemaking, and varied forms of urban play.

The lab is now the place for researchers and industry to bring creative experimentation into the urban landscape, and to nurture Melbourne's best emerging play designers.

The future play lab invites you to explore the Innocent's unique 'reworlding' methodology and its impact on urban design policy in Melbourne, Australia.

Over the past four years, the future play lab has developed and delivered over thirty projects in public spaces establishing methods of reworlding in diverse contexts and communities.

Using examples from the lab's projects and interviews with affiliated researchers, educators and play designers, this report will outline how the work of the lab directly translates into strategies for teaching and learning, play design methods, policy and strategies for Melbourne's future development.



# introduction

**As climate pressures intensify, cities must explore new ways for communities to engage with long-term transformation, and feel a sense of agency and hope for their futures. Bringing communities together to reimagine place can create opportunities to envision alternative futures, and strengthen civic imagination.**

The climate crisis is creating unprecedented social and environmental pressures, often accompanied by fear, uncertainty, and a sense of paralysis. Amid this challenge, imagining regenerative futures becomes vital - not only as a way to envision sustainable cities but as a practice for cultivating hope, agency, and collective action. Engaging with alternative scenarios encourages communities to confront uncertainty creatively and consider pathways toward equitable, resilient, and ecologically thriving futures.

This report brings together key insights from a two-day, in-person urban live-action role-play (LARP) event held on Cardigan Street, Carlton, designed to explore how neighbourhoods and communities might collectively imagine regenerative futures. 80 players attended the event - they were a diverse cohort of students, creatives, professionals, and families. We interviewed a sample of 55 players, whose reflections are highlighted and analysed in this report.

The event was structured around two key components: first, the transformation of Cardigan Street into a civic square and urban commons for experiential learning; and second, the use of urban LARP to engage players in imagining Naarm Melbourne in 2050. Players explored challenges such as sustainability, equity, climate adaptation, and community resilience through collaborative problem-solving and role-play. They were also immersed in Boonwurrung language learning workshops, and walking tours through an ecological streetscape filled with native species.

Findings reveal that immersive play serves as a powerful modality for collective future-building. Participants reported a heightened sense of agency, social connections, and increased awareness of complex urban and environmental systems. The playful, participatory format temporarily dissolved social silos, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to collaborate creatively and envision shared futures. The event also fostered culturally grounded engagement, and a deeper connection to place.

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## partners and collaborators

This project was supported by the City of Melbourne, RMIT City North Social Innovation project, Regen Melbourne, and Melbourne International Games Week. Through their support, we were able to transform the street into a space for experimentation and creativity.

The game itself was designed by Troy Innocent in collaboration with N'arweet Carolyn Briggs AM, who brought Boonwurrung language and knowledge to the project, grounding the site in its cultural and historical context. Working closely with N'arweet was community linguist Alison Soutar, who hosted language learning sessions, and co-created an audio story grounded in Boonwurrung language and knowledge.

The streetscape for the game was co-designed by the team with Nina Sharpe (Regen Melbourne) and Wendy Steele (Planetary Civics Inquiry) to create the setting for a future regenerative neighbourhood. The lab also thanks artist JESWRI created Boonwurrung language signs, which were displayed across the street.

Assisting in transforming the street was the Yalukit Willam Reserve, who brought native plants and material to transform the city street into a natural landscape. We thank ecologist Gio Fitzpatrick for his support here - Gio held ecological walks throughout this streetscape, sharing his knowledge with the players.

The future play lab thanks all of our collaborators and project partners for their integral role in transforming the street into an urban playground.





# about the event

**Cardigan St. was closed for two days, and reimagined as an urban playground of the future. Creatives, academics, artists, and industry partners came together to revitalise the street, transforming it into a space primed for players to enter, explore, and develop together**

**30 creatives** collaborated to design the neighbourhood environment that ultimately accommodated around **80 active players**, as well as more than **3,000 passersby** who moved through the street, paused to observe, or engage with the event. The event operated as both a structured LARP and an open public activation. A wide range of factors - some connected to the game's narrative and mechanics, others emerging from logistical, spatial, and community considerations - were intentionally built into the event's design.

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## street entertainment

Music and performance were curated to build an atmosphere that felt celebratory and creative, inviting visitors to move through the space with curiosity and imagination. Outlined below are the forms of entertainment present over the weekend:

### NPCs

Ten non-playable characters (NPCs) appeared in costume as their 2050 personas - for example, the 'post-human nomad' shown below. As the NPCs travelled through the crowd, each 'future citizen' entering the event received a distinct card, which included spaces for stamps that could be collected by taking part in activities or uncovering hidden elements embedded throughout the street. This encouraged ongoing movement and curiosity, drawing people deeper into the evolving narrative of the space.



### Spaces of connection

Native plants, water features, and vibrant flower beds reshaped the landscape, encouraging visitors to slow down, breathe, and reconnect with the street. Many details added to this transformation: crates, Boonwurrung language signage, flowing fabric canopies, and communal seating combined to create a lived-in environment that felt familiar and visionary.

Visitors could wander freely among plants, rest in shaded nooks, share food, play games, dance to music, and engage in spontaneous conversations with strangers and friends alike. Pop-up zones marked by bean bags, crates, and canopies encouraged lingering connection, fostering play, companionship, and community building.

In this way, Cardigan Street became more than an event; it became a prototype for a people-centred city where public space nurtures life. More information on the language and ecological transformation is provided in the following section.

### Live music

A lineup of local DJs - DJ PGZ, Rainbow Chan, anda zeroTnine - reshaped Cardigan Street into an immersive soundscape, filling the space with layered experimental electronic sets that set the tempo for the entire event. Pictured below is DJ zeroTnine.

### Food experiences

The Frugal Canteen offered free meals for players. Led by Helen Addison-Smith and Long Prawn, players enjoyed an eclectic menu ranging from chicken-and-chips “Bachelor’s Handbags”, vegan ramen, toasties, ‘ecological soups’, bánh mì, achcharu, and nasi bakar.

### Robot dog

Visitors were drawn to a robotic dog that roamed the street. Reflecting research from the RMIT Health Transformation Lab, Spot carried a small box filled with marbles, each representing the resource ‘hope,’ which it shared with attendees as it made its rounds. The robot offered a glimpse into the potential of future technologies and how they might become woven into experiences of street life.



# the game

**The urban LARP was held as part of RMIT's City north shared futures festival, 'a showcase and civic invitation to see how collaboration, creativity and care are shaping inclusive and regenerative futures' (RMIT 2025). As such, the game was designed to immerse participants in imagining and engaging in inclusive and sustainable civic futures.**

To place participants into a reality where this form of imaginative futuring is possible, there were nine forms of "place capital" - non playable characters (NPCs) - who roamed around the street, guiding participants through multiple perspectives and value systems in the space. These encompassed human, social, intellectual, cultural, experiential, natural, financial, economic, and constructed capital or values, mapping both tangible and intangible aspects of urban life. In-game, these values were represented as collectible cards, which informed the development of infrastructure like libraries, markets, and community centers.

The participants themselves could choose to join one of two primary factions: 'Bearbrass,' focused on upholding existing systems, and 'Symbios,' representatives a regenerative future. There was also a third non-playable faction, 'CityAI,' composed of NPCs modeling artificial intelligence in urban governance.

Once players picked a faction, they were all given a random number of marbles, which represented their 'hope' - the aim is to hold on to your hope throughout the game. Players enter the game by exploring cohabitation, facilitating democratic processes across factions, and navigating the climate emergency; sudden 'natural disasters', signposted by specific sound effects. This prompted immediate decision-making, requiring participants to juggle short-term responses with their current strategies and plans. Players could lose hope by failing to seek shelter from the weather events, or from 'doomscrolling' on their phones.

The following sections touch upon the key elements of the game; the players, objectives, and setting.

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## the players

The players came into the game with the freedom to choose their factions, and the roles they would play or embody on the day; some common roles were placekeepers, storytellers, healers, and builders. 80 registered players engaged in the game, with a small amount of passersby (<10) dropping in to play for short moments. Demographically, there was a relatively even distribution across age, gender, and career levels - there was a particularly large sample of university students, creatives, and mid-late career professionals. Of this group, 50 were interviewed.

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## game objectives

There were a few dimensions that the game was designed around. Below is a brief breakdown of each of these dimensions.

### **Nature and the more-than-human**

We live in an anthropocentric society, where cities, streets, and spaces are designed by and for the human. It is important to cultivate knowledge about local flora and fauna and how to care for them, so as to create a future where they are protected and provided with the resources to thrive. The game aims to build upon this knowledge through the inclusion of native plants and insects on the street, and via Gio Fitzgerald's informative ecological walks.

### **Agency over climate action and street action**

The ongoing climate crisis can and is causing significant climate anxiety, which can bottleneck or hinder both hope for a better future and significant climate action from emerging. What this can result in is a lack of agency over their future - a feeling of powerlessness over protecting the planet. This was certainly evident in findings from this event and previous events.

The game aims to foster a sense of agency by allowing players to build their neighbourhood on their own terms - no higher body limiting their voices, no bottlenecks. They are provided with physical resources (like spray paint and tarps) to change the street and create sustainable centers as they please. A second factor here is having 'hope' materialised and made tangible; heading into the game, players know they have hope to keep and maintain. This sets a positive tone, and frames the activities of the game around having hope.

### **Knowledge of Boonwurrung language and Indigenous epistemologies**

Indigenous ways of being and knowing have been practiced on this land for as long as it has been inhabited. These cultures are important, and are connected to place in a very intrinsic way. It is important for Australians to know about these knowledges, respect them, and keep their presence alive as we head into the future.

The game aims to inform players about this language and knowledge system. The street itself was remapped with Boonwurrung language, meaning that players had to learn these words to make their way around the street. Helping out here was linguist Alison Soutar, who held many language learning sessions to teach players how to pronounce and articulate these words. We were supported by and collaborated with N'arweet Carolyn Briggs AM, who provided guidance on adapting the yulendj barring framework for place-based knowledges.



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## the setting

In order to immerse participants into a new neighbourhood, Cardigan street had to undergo significant transformation. Changes were made across multiple dimensions, which are described below:

### **Natural material**

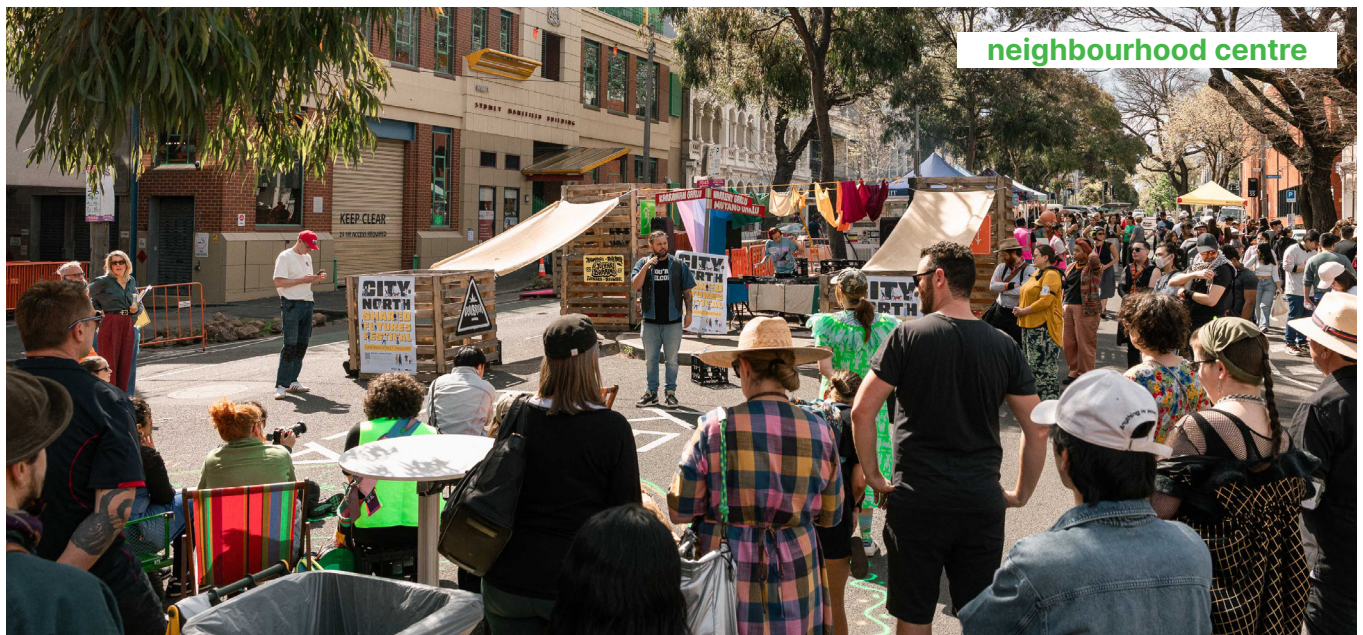
Yalukit Willam reserve helped to bring natural elements back onto the city street - logs, rocks, water, soil, and an array of native Indigenous plants were brought on site. The result of this was a green and buzzing urban environment, where mini dams flowed alongside the kerb, and plants attracted insects and wildlife that otherwise would not have lingered. Gio Fitzpatrick was present to walk people through this new environment.

## Urban infrastructure

Structures made of wood were stacked around the site, to create a feeling of being in a new and mini neighbourhood. Multiple structures had tapestries and tarps across them; the shading provided by these installations - alongside the seats placed along the street - made these structures ideal meeting spots.

## Signage

Local artist JESWRI designed Boonwurrung language signs, with words like 'muyang garlu', which translates to 'towards the silver wattle'. In this way, finding your way around the street required learning Boon Wurrung language, which linguist Alison Soutar advised on how to pronounce these words.



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## urban play

Our approach to urban play connected language and ecology. Working with Boonwurrung language and knowledges held by N'arweet Carolyn Briggs, community linguist Alison Soutar mapped these to phrases related to movement through place such as moving at, away or towards a landmark or direction. These movements were embedded into the game map by game designer Troy Innocent, connecting them to future scenarios and situations in the urban LARP encountered by players. In the world design, eight key locations were created with each landscaped by ecologist Gio Fitzgerald as micro-habitats that became the play materials of the game. Navigating this future world, in which Cardigan Street has become a regenerative neighbourhood, meant learning Boonwurrung language in relation to place through urban play and movement.

This place-based approach to the design of the urban LARP was grounded in 'yulendj barring', a framework mapping connections across Indigenous knowledges and posthuman methods developed through the Australian Posthuman Summer Lab. Recognising Australia's First Peoples as the first and foremost experts in connecting knowledge with place, the framework positions these knowledges in relation to the more recent turn to post-anthropocentrism by non-Indigenous peoples. In the context of Naarm Melbourne, a city founded less than two hundred years ago, the majority of the population are recent settlers or migrants making new connections to place.

Grounded in the perspective of reworlding, we explored four methods in design and delivery of the experience:

**being with:** Observations of Cardigan Street reveal a hard road surface filled with cars surrounded by buildings with most pedestrians moving through the street rather than spending time in the neighbourhood. Multisensory mappings focussed on layers underneath and above this surface challenge the perceived permanence of the current urban design, inspiring content in the game design connected to the map of language and ecology.

**walking with:** Both during design by the team and play by the participants, walking through past, present, and future Cardigan Street is critical. Walking with place rather than through place creates key shifts in experience: walking activates and enhances brain activity, increasing memory and attention; walking brings players into complex relation with one another, the street, the play materials, and language as they traverse the game map; and, put simply, walking grounds people in place.

**learning with:** Experiential and place-based learning approaches made a connection between language and ecology, with the intention to make both tangible and relatable to the past, present, and future of Cardigan Street. In the design language is connected to walking between landmarks, where knowledge of local ecology was shared. Moving toward the flower field, for example, meant crossing the street to arrive at a space filled with flowers, logs, and the occasional insect, filling two car parking spaces adjacent to the footpath.

**playing with:** Moving into a speculative and imaginative approach for 'futuring together', urban play connected these actions for participants through invitation to explore how we could live well together in Naarm Melbourne 2050. Playing outdoors, together, in relation to place offers a method for enacting the relational and reciprocal values of the yulendj barring framework, with the intention of creating invitations into new ways of being with Cardigan Street.

Reworlding City North presented an opportunity to test and explore these experimental methods with publics, supporting the broader goals of the project.



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# findings

Reworlding City North revealed the diverse ways participants experienced engagement with their environment, their communities, and ideas of the future. Reflections highlight the multidimensional impacts of immersive, playful, and participatory approaches, showing how such experiences can foster connections, understanding, and creativity at both individual and collective levels.

Part one focuses on personal and relational experiences, exploring how participants connected with their environment, community, and culture:

- connection to nature – how participants developed awareness of local ecologies and environmental systems
- sense of hope - how imagining alternative futures encouraged hope in the face of uncertainty
- sense of agency – how participants felt empowered to shape their environment and make meaningful choices within the game
- respect for Boonwurrung Language and knowledge - how engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems deepened cultural understanding and awareness of local histories
- connection to society – how players reflected on social structures and urban contexts
- connection to community – how collaboration, dialogue, and shared experiences fostered bonds

Part two explores how these in-game insights can inform broader civic practice and future-building. By reflecting on the ways play facilitated collaboration, problem-solving, and engagement with complex social and environmental issues, this section highlights the potential of participatory, immersive methods to translate individual and micro-level experiences into collective action at the civic level. It considers how imaginative, playful approaches can cultivate the knowledge, empathy, and agency needed to support community-led interventions, strengthen civic engagement, and foster regenerative urban futures.

This part is divided into two sections:

- Creating collective action at the street level
- Play as a method of ‘futures together’

# part one: participant experiences





## a connection to nature

participants articulated a strong desire for a more deliberate integration of nature into urban environments, emphasising that it is necessary to have meaningful, everyday encounters with the natural world.

Visions for a 'more amenable, more greener, more accessible, and more inclusive [future] for more than humans' extended beyond tokenistic greenery. They instead imagined cities structured around interconnected 'green corridors', 'pockets of gardens', 'waterfall walls', and biodiverse habitats that offer respite, beauty, and ecological function. As Niall shared:

*'With the dam, the little pond that's been created there, [I'd like] more of those little dams and water bodies. I want frogs in the city. I want platypuses. I just want the city to be rewilded. It's quiet and peaceful and you've got people just chatting. No grating, pumping noises. Just the occasional chime of a bicycle bell.'*

Like Niall, many players were refreshed by seeing nature on the street. Jasmine shared how 'we watched a small boy mesmerised by floating a clump of weeds across a rain filled pond of water. We had a go ourselves. An interaction with nature seemed so special in an urban landscape.'

However, players also engaged with the topic in a very high level and critical manner. Ideas of 'utopic' urban streets were frequently paired with concerns that

embedding nature into the rhythms of daily urban life is difficult. As Cindy shared 'nowadays [when] we try to make roads and there's something on it, we remove the things from it. Humans try to do what's more convenient, [but] maybe it takes more time and takes more effort but try to figure out a way to just live with nature'. The systemic challenges associated with implementing such transformations - particularly at the community level - were highlighted by Lydia:

*[There's] just so much knowledge needed to make this happen. And we need experts to really guide that process... those tours [were] almost like an initiation. It was just sort of permission to be involved in that knowledge sharing.*

Her insight that an 'initiation' into caring for nature is necessary was reflected by many players, who cited Gio Fitzgerald's ecological walk as very important. Many, like Jamie, shared that '[what] will stick the most are the local plants, all the knowledge from that and, the fact that I can actually go home and do that'.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that thoughtfully embedding nature within urban systems is not just an aesthetic improvement but a strategic intervention capable of enhancing urban livability, supporting biodiversity, and cultivating long-term environmental awareness. They underscore that these efforts must address social, educational, and infrastructural considerations to create urban futures in which nature is not peripheral but foundational.



## a sense of hope, a sense of agency

**participants encountered hope through having agency and community; the game provided a setting where collaboration and community-building were made tangible, which generally resulted in increased levels of hope**

The majority of players cited that though societal challenges - namely the accelerating climate crisis and embedded structural inequities in Western society - are still daunting, their hope for the future had increased significantly after the game.

Their engagement in collaborative activities throughout the experience allowed these large-scale issues to be approached from a grounded and relational perspective. One factor that appeared to influence hope heavily was community. As Nia explains:

*'It just feels like the people that I've been surrounded with, everyone thinks everything's going to go downhill, and it's like, people that think they can change it [but] they're just a few people. But this [experience] makes it seem like possible. There may be just a few people, but they care so much that they can carry that on to other people who don't know. Because I had no hope, I thought it's all going to go bad, because we can do as much as we want now [but] we're going to end up in the same place. But, this is a great, eye-opening experience. If most of the people were like this, we could change the [world] in the best way possible.'*

For Nia, it was meeting and working with people that influenced her sense of hope. The same is true for Liam, who shared that '[the game] does make me more hopeful. I'm always a strong believer in community and what they could do.'

There was also a sample of players, like Lydia, who cited that seeing the street change in response to their input brought about a higher sense of hope:

*'I think the game factor and how it actually works, just seeing it in action gave me hope and optimism [because] now I actually see it operationalised... and just seeing that shared project. You know, this number of people, were trying to make this work in creative ways'*

Fay also connected their sense of agency derived from the game to their general hope for the future - 'In 2050 I'll be hopeful [because] of this project. Hopefully we make the changes that we need to make now to inform 2050 being cleaner and safer and more inclusive'.

Taken together, these reflections reveal how the game made ideas about agency, change, and collective responsibility feel more concrete, actionable, and able to be viewed through the lens of hope. Rather than remaining abstract concepts discussed at a distance, they became embodied through the act of participating, collaborating, and witnessing others do the same; ultimately building morale.



## a respect for Boonwurrung language and knowledge

**a chance to engage with Boonwurrung language and knowledge systems was cited as necessary, valued, and significant for fostering meaningful connection to Country.**

Players indicated that the integration of Boonwurrung language into public spaces is meaningful and empowering, offering a tangible connection to land, culture, and history. They stressed the importance for the language to be respected, and not let it get 'lost to history', as Regina expressed. As Sage described, 'it's really important and [I hope] it can be integrated in ways that not only keep the language alive, but allow for it to adapt as we go forward into 2050 and beyond'.

Like Sage, speaking the language and learning how it worked was a highlight for most players. Kyle shared a particularly insightful reflection:

*'Communicating and thinking in a different language automatically builds in concepts of empathy and imagination. Because it's inherently cross-cultural. And the other thing is that, unlike English, Boonwurrung is a language that comes from this place. So I think there is a physical embodiment that sits in language. I think we think about language as like syntax and something in a dictionary, but it's actually deeply embedded in where it's come from, and so it is really hard to imagine a different future for this place [outside of] this language'*

Kyle observed that the presence and use of the language can cultivate deeper cultural understanding, empathy, and imaginative engagement, and recognised its place in our future as intrinsically linked.

Whilst players demonstrated a strong respect and appreciation for the language, they identified challenges related to the accessibility of this knowledge, and the need for more chances to learn and engage. As Lydia shared:

*'I think that most people just sort of sit back and wait to be told [to engage], rather than, feeling they can even just investigate it on their own'*

Similarly, Kyle expressed that it is difficult for people to learn about and interact with these knowledge systems, 'because it's not really part of our white education system'. Sarah also spoke about this issue, expressing her desire for our education system to change. She theorised ways to take action in the 'interim' period, like having street signs in Boonwurrung alongside a tool 'like on Google where you press the button and then it verbalises how to pronounce Boonwurrung words'.

These findings indicate a strong desire among players to access, learn from, and meaningfully engage with Boonwurrung knowledge in everyday life. They also recognise the limitations of existing educational structures, and articulate a clear ambition to see these transformed to become more inclusive.



## a connection to society

**the conversations from participants revealed the game's capacity to provoke thought about social constructs and complex societal issues related to capitalism, socialism, posthumanism, AI, and methods of co-creating sustainable futures collectively**

Whilst playful in its intent, the game also inadvertently functioned as a social experiment - what happens when a community is formed and placed in a neighbourhood, and how do they set up their micro-society?

We found that participants began connecting their play experience to current social issues, but also to the issues of an imagined, future form of society. They engaged in thought experiments of their own, and asked themselves questions about topics they thought to be pertinent to the formation of a future that was inclusive, safe, and prosperous.

One issue that frequently emerged was AI. It was an issue that was top of mind, with City AI causing havoc on the street. However, many players were balanced in their assessment of technology in our future. Aya, who described herself as "pro AI", also shared that "I know people who try to use AI for everything, for searching, even for therapy. I don't think that's a good thing".

Another issue that players cited was capitalism. This emerged in conversations about integrating nature into urban design, collective action at the street level, and contributing to a more eco-friendly way of living.

Sage, for example, shared that:

*'If you have the structures that we have right now where people are working in offices and they go get their coffee at 9am and they get their lunch at 2pm, we [need to find] ways to remove pavement and have natural walking spaces so that people are connected to their environment, or encourage people to disseminate seeds while walking around'*

Like Sage, many people spoke about issues like 'capitalistic models of living' and how to overhaul that in pursuit of a sustainable future. Others spoke about issues like the 'binaries of being human', or human 'dominance over ecology'. Tom reflected on some of these issues in relation to his own neighbourhood:

*'At the moment it's there's no avenue for free recreation spaces in the suburbs. There's a whole lot of areas wherer you can't just be around nature or people, it's usually just cars. I want cities to be less centered around spaces you have to pay...there's no third space [for us]'*

These reflections show situating participants in a playful micro-society encouraged them to confront questions about equity, sustainability, and community-building in a critical, creative, and personally meaningful manner. They engaged in ethical reasoning and creative foresight that are essential for shaping inclusive and resilient communities in the real world.



## a connection to community

**participants emphasised the value of bringing people together, fostering a sense of community, breaking down social siloes, and enabling meaningful conversations that rarely emerge in everyday life across diverse groups.**

The LARP attracted a diverse audience of students, gamers, academics, professionals, and creatives from an age range of 20-60. As Sylvia recalls, a highlight for her was being able to 'speak to a lot of people that I wouldn't have been able to speak to otherwise'. Nia had a similar experience. She reflected on how the game has increased her sense of positivity for the future because she met a community she 'didn't even really think existed, people who really care'.

Our conversation with Nia revealed that this experience was the first time she has significantly interacted with other social groups like gamers and creatives, who she is 'not used to' and presumed to have had not much in common with. By splitting players into two factions with different beliefs and values, this idea of engaging with people who are fundamentally different was made pronounced. Julie spoke to this, and questioned 'how do you bridge that [gap] between the creatives and the people who are not necessarily interested in that?'

In practice, the game challenged these divides, showing players that connecting across different backgrounds wasn't just possible - it was necessary. Once the climate events hit, players realised they were all was impacted in the same way, regardless of identity.

Players began to recognise their interdependence. Early on, as Sarah recalled, there were moments of polarisation and mistrust, with some players 'undermining each other' or seeking conflict. But when the storms intensified and the AI threats accelerated, participants began to pool their strengths and perspectives, which Sarah described as 'complementary rather than contradictory'. Sage similarly noted that the mounting pressures forced players to 'put that stuff aside and work together because otherwise things will go so wrong for everyone'.

Players realised their connectedness through the shared goal of building a safe space to live, and this became a point of fulfillment. As Jasmine shared, 'we loved the feeling that everyone present would be willing to make spaces better for all.' A few participants felt personally proud of the role they played in building this community. Rhea used affirming language when she shared that 'I really enjoyed the community that I created'. Amy shared that she 'hold[s] [her]self proud' because of her role in building community.

Through these shared challenges, play allowed participants to experience the necessity of collaboration, revealing how collective agency emerges precisely when futures are understood as mutually intertwined.

# part two: broader reflections



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## creating collective action on a street level

Across participant reflections, a set of clear prerequisites emerged that underpin residents' capacity to exercise agency over street-level transformation. These conditions - spanning physical, temporal, and social dimensions - shape whether community members feel empowered to move from passive observers to active co-designers of their environment.

Many players cited the importance of having a physical place to gather; as Ryan noted, 'people just need to be able to meet, and then good things [can] come from that.' Participants described streets as typically 'traversing' spaces rather than places to linger, limiting opportunities for collective imagination and decision-making. As Sage noted, humans 'are pack animals' who require spaces to 'share stories and share food and take care of each other,' and without such spaces, communities cannot organically form. Introducing a town-square-like environment, even temporarily, enabled people to meet, converse, and recognise shared interests - conditions that directly supported collaborative problem-solving.

Further, the activation demonstrated that when people had time to meet and dwell together in a shared space, a sense of permission and ownership emerged. Sarah described a transition from initial hesitancy - 'I don't have permission to have an opinion' - to a collective shift on day two, when participants began to say:

*'This is our community. We're designing the system. How do we want the system to be? Oh, let's design it now. It was a totally different conversation.'*

This temporal dimension was crucial: agency surfaced only after individuals felt authorised, by the environment and by others, to contribute and join in. Many like Fay expressed a desire for more opportunities like this to emerge in the real world; spaces that are 'accessible [and] don't require money to be part of', which they cite as critical to 'assist[ing] people to come together and take more thoughtful actions with themselves and others'.



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## play as a method of future building

The medium of play proved central to enabling participants to enact alternative possibilities for the street. Players highlighted the need for a game that 'strategically offers prompts' to activate participation, as Jasmine articulated. She also explained how people need 'parameters for solving the problem, but without actually sort of giving them the solution or telling them what they need to do'. The activation's climate-event challenges made this balance tangible. Faced with shared obstacles, participants realised the necessity of coordinating effort, which fostered organic collaboration. This co-learning process was essential in developing a collective sense of capability.

Play also emerged as a bridge between abstract ideas of community agency and the experience of practising it. One passer-by, when asked about community agency over shaping futures, shared: 'I find it so difficult to conceptualise'. Yet players of the game were able to move from this space of conceptual difficulty to embodied experimentation, gaining a sense of agency through action. Lydia shared that experiencing 'the game factor, how it actually works, [and] seeing that in action' provided a level of optimism as to how communities might collectively navigate future challenges, revealing that future-thinking can be more accessible when people can rehearse it through play.

A few players also reflected on the ability of shared play to work as 'an empathy tool', as Sage described. They described how it turned 'difficult' topics like 'climate change [and] economic crashes' and created a 'safe space [where] you have communities, you have ways that you can affect the world, and you have hope'.

Another strength of the method was the roleplaying aspect. People took on a role of who they would be in 2050; some examples include a 'regenerative shaman [who] gives pep talks', a villager, gardener, lifesaver, and pioneer. We saw people truly inhabit their roles - moving, speaking, and problem-solving as their 2050 selves, allowing future identities to shape present actions. In this way, embodied rehearsal can make long-term possibilities feel personally meaningful and behaviourally actionable.

These insights reveal how play functions as a methodological tool for futuring: it lowers the emotional and cognitive barriers that typically surround complex or distressing issues, enabling participants to explore scenarios, test decisions, and practise collective response in a low-risk environment. Through play, futures that may feel abstract, overwhelming, or inaccessible become tangible, discussable, and experientially real.



# conclusion

**The players of Reworlding City North were immersed in two days of imaginative, collaborative, and creative future building. The results reveal that play can work as an effective medium to get people thinking about, acting upon, and working together to build a sustainable future**

By engaging participants in a micro-society, the LARP transformed complex societal challenges into tangible experiences, allowing players to explore equity, sustainability, community-building, and environmental stewardship in highly relational and embodied ways. Through the playful and collaborative format, social silos were temporarily suspended, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to work together and recognise their interconnectedness across differences. By facing simulated climate events and engaging in collective problem-solving, players experienced a profound sense of unity and fulfillment arising from their shared achievements.

The game also offered participants the opportunity to learn about native ecologies, Boonwurrung language, and Indigenous ways of being. By embedding these elements into both gameplay and street design, the LARP created an embodied method for acquiring new knowledge, deepening awareness, and cultivating an appreciation

for more-than-human and Indigenous epistemologies. Reflections from participants highlighted how immersive engagement in these areas strengthened connections to place, nature, and community.

Crucially, Reworlding City North demonstrated the importance of play as a modality for collective future-building. Play, in this context, is a mechanism for cultivating empathy, knowledge, and collaborative capacities essential for imagining and enacting inclusive and regenerative futures. By granting participants tangible agency - allowing them to physically alter the street and align it with their visions - the game empowered individuals to see themselves as active co-creators of their environment. Many expressed a desire for more opportunities to engage in this form of collective experimentation, recognising its potential to build agency and civic engagement at the street level.

Through this approach, the LARP illustrated that reworlding can be powerfully facilitated through playful, participatory methods. By situating participants as both actors and co-designers, the experience underscored how immersive play can bridge the gap between imagination and action.

# recommendations

**The project found that urban play offers unique methods connecting creative placemaking, strategic foresight, and community engagement that support social innovation. Based on the findings of the project, the following recommendations are proposed**

**Explore urban design and planning proposals for experiential and place-based learning in Cardigan Street.** Based on the engagement of participants in knowledge through outdoor play, it is recommended that future planning consider establishment of one or more outdoor learning and teaching environments at the site.

**Establish an ongoing community of practice activating Cardigan Street as a regenerative neighbourhood.** Building on the connection to community experienced by participants, it is recommended that ongoing support be provided for an interdisciplinary community of practice with a shared interest in regenerative futures at the site.

**Integrate learnings on social innovation into policy and governance of Cardigan Street going forward.**

Drawing upon connections to society and agency in urban governance reported by participants, it is recommended that a shared charter of place be established as a working group within the City North Social Innovation Precinct for the site.

**Develop place-based research methods for Indigenous knowledges on Cardigan Street through responsible practice.** Supported by the learning and engagement outcomes of participants with Boonwurrung language and knowledge, it is recommended that these be adopted and developed through the lens of responsible practice for curriculum connected to the site.

**Activate urban LARP as a signature method for creative placemaking for social innovation in Cardigan Street.**

Informed by feedback and experiences of participants in this project, it is recommended that urban LARP design be supported by industry partners engaged with creative placemaking working with the site.





