

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Organisation

future play lab.

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I direct the future play lab in RMIT University in Naarm Melbourne, one of the world's most liveable cities. Through urban play I work with the city as a material to reshape urban life to support the green transition to regenerative futures. We're group of twenty serious play designers from diverse cultures and disciplines who work together with the city as a playground. Most of our projects happen with communities and neighbourhoods in collaboration with local government and industry partners.

Urban play connects people and place with design and cities, making them vibrant and liveable, reflecting their creative, linguistic, cultural, social, and urban diversity. Our approach to experimental game design offers new ways to see and experience the world, gives people permission to participate, and is immersive and collaborative, inviting connection.

As cities face increasing social and environmental challenges, wellbeing is becoming a central pillar of urban policy and planning. Beyond infrastructure and services, the focus is shifting toward inclusion, equity and quality of life. Our work with urban play explores how good governance, sustainable strategies and innovative urban models can embed wellbeing into decision-making, creating cities that foster fairer communities and a better quality of life.

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. By way of example, we recently developed and delivered a two-day, in-person urban live-action role-play (LARP) event held in Carlton, Melbourne, 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.

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.

Our methods have also been commissioned for projects in the City of Yarra, City of Port Phillip, City of Stonnington, City of Maribyrnong, and City of Stonnington, offering urban play as an active form of engagement and participation for people with civic life.

Australia has a rich history and heritage in experimental game design that has consistently demonstrated economic and social impacts. This creative ecology makes our work possible. I write in support of innovative cultural policy that recognises the potential of games in all their forms to expand these positive impacts on culture and society.