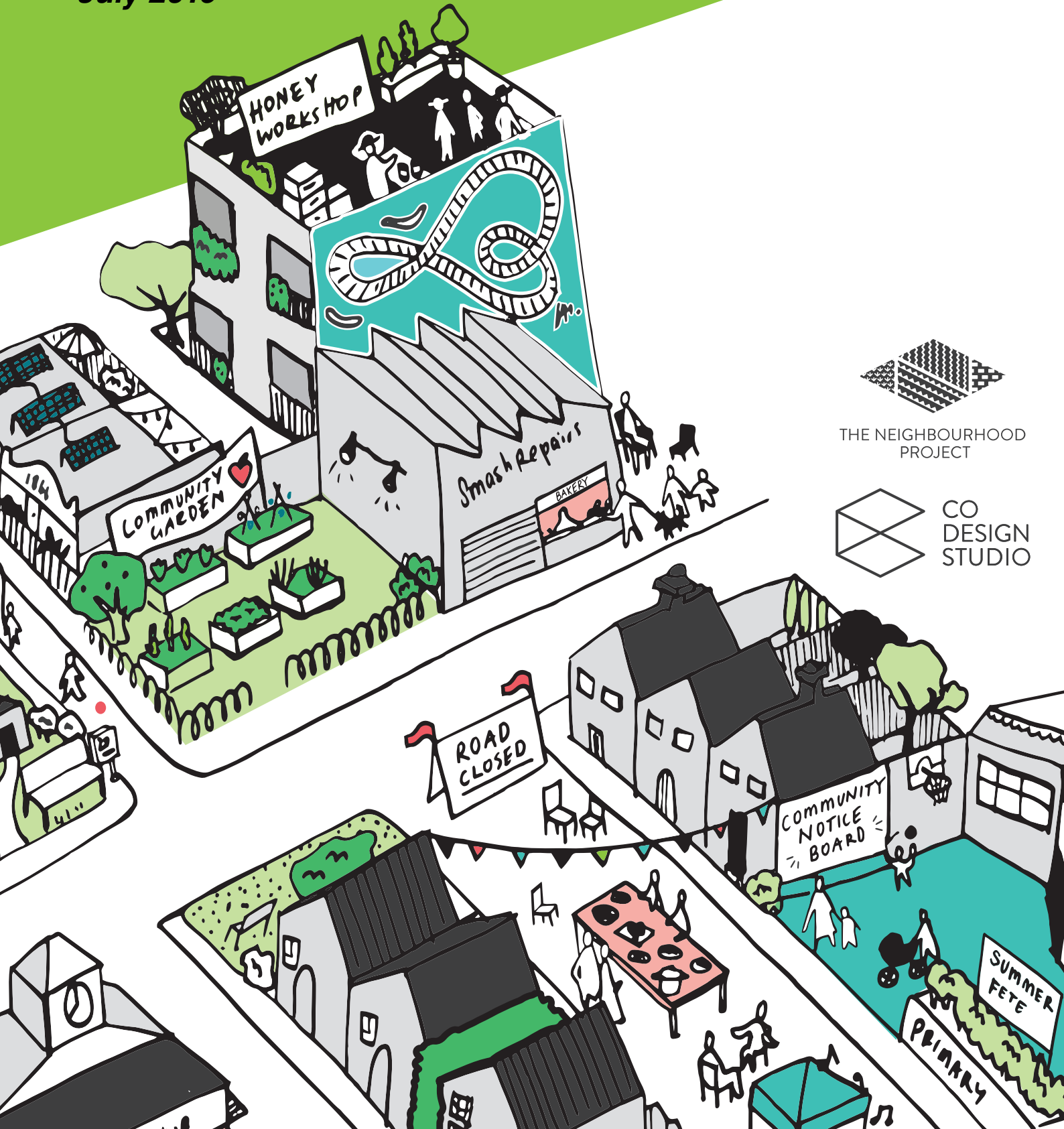


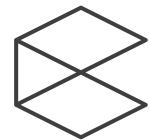
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT RESEARCH REPORT

BETTER LIVES THROUGH BETTER PLACES

July 2019



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
PROJECT



CO
DESIGN
STUDIO

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the methods, adaptations and key findings of The Neighbourhood Project as undertaken by Melbourne-based placemaking firm CoDesign Studio, from 2015-2019. Placemaking is a philosophy and a method for creating public places with enhanced social, cultural, environmental and economic value. Best-practice placemaking is collaborative and has the power to boost social cohesion, resilience, and wellbeing through human-centred place design, activation, and management. The present research was designed to field-test alternative approaches to placemaking as a means of bettering local places through collaboration between council and community in Melbourne, Australia. It was hypothesised that **enabling and empowering councils and locals to deliver small-scale prototyped place interventions and activations is a critical catalyst for establishing long-term systemic policy change, as well as delivering ongoing community benefits.** Three key drivers of change were identified, tested, and measured, revealing that positive self-sustaining outcomes hinge on actively engaging with all three: namely, the People, Process, Place (PPP) model.

Three years of investigative work saw CoDesign Studio conduct three rounds of testing, comprised of nine community groups, delivering fourteen distinct projects, in eight different councils; each facing a diverse cross-section of community needs and place challenges. This in turn impacted over 60,000 Australians who attended events, festivals, project days and installations run by the 25 participating community leaders. Significant boosts were recorded for neighbourhood pride, social connection, collaborative culture, positive land utilisation, and local trade. A total of \$125,000.00 (AUD) was designated as project seed funding with exceptional returns - Round 2 alone saw \$43,132.00 local project investment unlock \$582,200.00 worth of project value, additional funding, and activated social capital. The Neighbourhood Project demonstrated that locally-led projects by community, within an enabling environment from council, are a ready and reliable way to leverage underutilised land and unlock latent social capital to create a self-sustaining pathway towards more prosperous places, and better lives while tackling major social issues of social isolation, loneliness, environmental sustainability and health.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction..... 4

Methodology..... 6

Phase A: Framework validation..... 8

Phase B: Round 1..... 9

Phase C: Round 2..... 13

Phase D: Round 3..... 19

Discussion: Placemaking for place value..... 22

Conclusion..... 26

References..... 28



INTRODUCTION

By 2050, the world will be home to nine billion people and two-thirds of them will be living in cities, as predicted by the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). Already, an estimated 200,000 individuals are moving into city areas every day, driving rapid urban development globally (World Economic Forum, 2016).

Cities across the world are experiencing rapid growth, yet our citymaking systems are not equipped to respond in an expeditious way. The result is a series of concerning global trends towards social isolation (Howe, 2019), loneliness (Howe, 2019), lack of environmental sustainability (UN-Habitat, 2016) and stagnant health improvement (UN-Habitat, 2016).

Meanwhile, there is an inextricable connection between the places we live and our health, life-expectancy and well-being (World Health Organization, 2010). Already a measured 3.3% of global deaths have been linked to a person's access to public space, especially green space (World Health Organization, 2016).

The link between place and health is driving increasing concerns over how authorities can meet the ever-growing needs of swelling populations; and our mental, physical, environmental, and economic wellbeing depends upon it.

Unfortunately, the traditional approach to citymaking is inherently ill-equipped to address the accelerating demands of place in our cities. CoDesign Studio's experience has identified that top-down decision-makers have the greatest influence over how our housing, precincts and public spaces are shaped, designed, and revitalised. Urban planners, property developers, and government authorities have the power to direct the landscape of our cities without full comprehension of the impact their actions will have on local residents and community members. In fact, many jurisdictions have a complex structure of red-tape and process barriers that inhibits community members from having a say in how their local places are made, and makes taking local action difficult, even when they feel inspired to do so.

Consequently, this "top-down" process often creates upgraded or beautified 'hard-ware' of spaces, designed by "experts", without necessarily establishing effective local 'soft-ware', made up of local people, which includes the social fabric connected to that particular location. Only 35% of Australians trust their local council (Philipson, 2018), while a substantial two-thirds of Australians do not trust their neighbours (Sydney Morning Herald, 2005). Yet, research has taught us that a more connected and engaged community is more resilient in times of adversity (100 Resilient Cities, 2019).

Trillions of dollars are being invested in redeveloping and expanding our cities (The Nature Conservancy, 2017), and yet the intrinsically important goal of increasing the social, cultural, environmental, and economic capital of a place is being overlooked. The citymaking system needs a new approach, one that includes a "bottom-up" influence of local residents, traders, and community members.

Placemaking is one such response. Born from human-centred city design, tactical urbanism, grassroots movements, and activism dating back as early as the 1960's, placemaking has anecdotally shown that places prosper when their local community has a voice and influence over how their places are developed. The Neighbourhood Project has been designed by CoDesign Studio as a research project to substantiate this anecdotal evidence.

The present research intends to test a **practical program for fostering community-council connection when it comes to place creation, activation and decision-making**. The growing social and environmental needs of our cities necessitate a **methodology for effective locally-led placemaking**. This paper reports on a **replicable model for councils and communities in Australia to implement**. It is proposed that the program will effectively instigate system change in local areas to deliver ongoing place benefits to community. The researchers expect the program to produce more resilient communities, empowered in an ongoing fashion to deliver positive place impact through a collaborative method in their local environments.

METHODOLOGY

In 2015, CoDesign Studio was the recipient of a philanthropic grant from the Myer Foundation to improve neighbourhoods across Victoria through establishing Australia's largest community-led placemaking action-research program, *The Neighbourhood Project*.

The project was framed around three research questions:

1. Can short-term projects catalyse long-term change?
2. How can authorities best engage local citizens to solve local problems?
3. What is an effective method to fast-track systemic transition to community-led liveable cities?

To answer these questions, a three-pronged approach was developed:

1. Work with councils to evolve internal systems to enable locally-led projects by citizens
2. Build citizen capacity and mentor them to mobilise and solve local problems
3. Provide seed funding to help citizens turn their plans into actions and transform their local places

The research was scheduled to roll out across four phases, including multiple rounds of local projects to test alternate approaches and replicability (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Research Phases of The Neighbourhood Project, 2015-2019

Inspired by the start-up world, an agile approach was taken to the research design, whereby the specific methodology for each phase could be adjusted in order to respond quickly to learnings while maintaining the overall aim of scaling the research for greater impact year-on-year. In the end, two rounds of projects were conducted, with the third round being adapted to explore best-efficiency scaling alongside a deeper investigation into embedding council process.

Round 1 was primarily a council-focussed program, whereas the model was flipped on its head in Round 2, which saw communities take a decisive lead on projects. Round 3 was adjusted in response to learnings. In this final phase, the project moved away from directly delivering projects, and instead pursued opportunities to strengthen the impact of the research in two ways:

1. Expand depth through a Deep Dive investigation into council policy and frameworks at a council from Round 1 who were ready to embed change;
2. Expand breadth by developing a suite of tools and resources to be freely available globally that would continue to grow the community-led placemaking market and momentum.

Further to this flexible approach overall, a methodology of *agile placemaking* was built into each individual placemaking project. CoDesign Studio's approach of prototyping and testing iterations

within each project, allowed for project groups and council to learn and respond with a rapid feedback loop to deliver more targeted projects with greater impact, while also mitigating risk and avoiding any large investment of assets and finance up-front.

In this way, the program design was primed to maximise learnings for each council, community project, and for the research project as a whole.

PHASE A: FRAMEWORK VALIDATION

To create and measure resilient and thriving communities, we must first understand the key elements required in driving change. Initial desktop research, as well as targeted engagement with key stakeholders and place thought-leaders, was undertaken to validate the existing theoretical framework created by CoDesign Studio, known as People, Process, Place (PPP) (Figure 2).

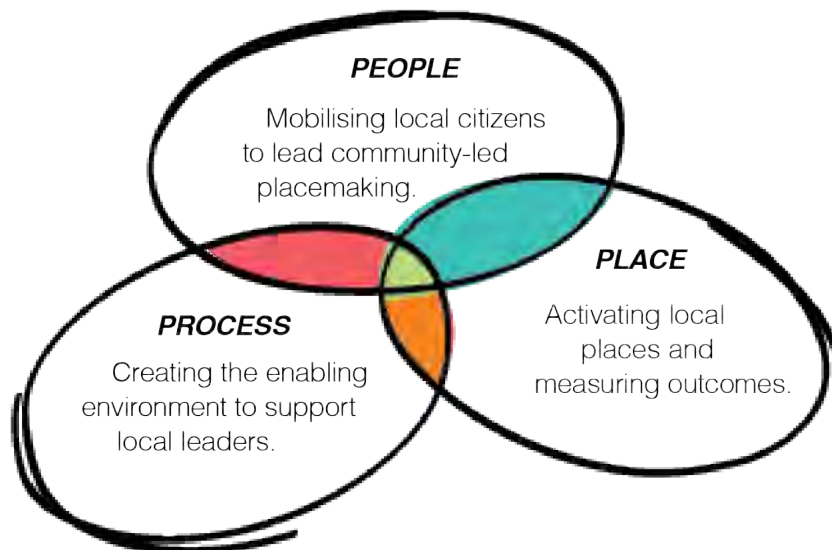


Figure 2: People, Process, Place model by CoDesign Studio

According to PPP, there are three active ingredients required to create lasting change in how a place is shaped, activated, and managed. Namely, the physical location (Place), the humans that use and influence the development of that location (People), and the way in which they are enabled or hindered in exercising that influence (Process).

Phase A of The Neighbourhood Project sourced and analysed local and global best practice case studies of placemaking and place change, analysing whether they could be effectively categorised into the pillars of PPP. Next, it was assessed which of the PPP elements were present in projects that had been shown to have long-lasting place benefits for community.

Best-practice projects were shown to leverage the power of all three ingredients, contributing to successful placemaking outcomes.

The outcome of Phase A was affirmative – People, Process and Place were upheld as effective drivers of place change, leading to more resilient and thriving communities. **This validated the three pillars as the core measures to be incorporated into the design and implementation of placemaking projects in Phase B of The Neighbourhood Project.**

PHASE B: ROUND 1 PROJECTS

Round 1 of The Neighbourhood Project was the first of two rounds that delivered real-world placemaking projects. The three-pronged approach of the program aimed to:

1. Evolve internal system change at council;
2. Build citizen capacity to deliver projects; and
3. Provide seed funding.

This round saw CoDesign Studio work directly with councils and enable them to empower their own citizens to deliver local placemaking projects. This approach was taken to test two key assumptions:

- > Assumption 1: Council process is a key enabler or barrier to community-led placemaking
- > Assumption 2: There are active community members seeking to implement projects in their local area and Assumption 1 prevents the realisation of these projects.

An extensive Expression of Interest process was conducted, after which three participating councils were selected: City of Cardinia, City of Whitehorse, and Hobsons Bay Council. These councils then sought community participants from their neighbourhoods to deliver a series of events and installations in underutilised spaces on public land. These included place activation projects, beautification projects and community event projects.

It was theorised that the small-scale local activations run by local citizens with seed funding from The Neighbourhood Project, would then highlight barriers and red-tape that could be reviewed and improved at a council level in order to make community-led placemaking easier and more accessible, for both council and community, in the future.

ROUND 1 PROGRAM DESIGN

The program itself consisted of training, workshops and expert mentorship delivered to council and community participants, enabling them to develop and deliver projects with provided seed funding. For the purposes of The Neighbourhood Project, a project could be classified as community-led placemaking if it met the following three criteria:

1. The placemaking project is implemented by community members;
2. A space became better as a result;
3. The project helped improve social cohesion and perceptions of the neighbourhood.

CoDesign Studio developed a six-step methodology for delivering community-led placemaking (Figure 3). Councils and community leaders were then inducted and trained in how to deliver local projects according to this process.

Success of the projects was measured according to the PPP framework which was validated during Phase A. These pillars were benchmarked and measured at various intervals including before, during, and after placemaking projects were delivered. Melbourne-based social impact consultancy,

Think Impact, was engaged as an independent assessor to assist with designing the mechanisms for measuring these pillars, as well as providing a report on key findings.

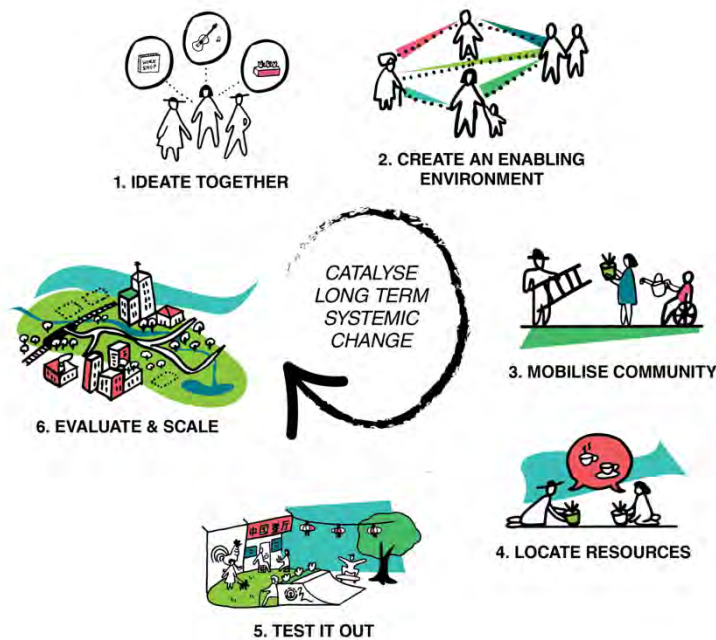


Figure 3: The Neighbourhood Project Methodology

ROUND 1 RESULTS

In all three geographic regions, across all three pillars of PPP, there was a positive impact or improvement triggered by the application of The Neighbourhood Project six-step program for community-led placemaking.

The two assumptions were tested and affirmed, demonstrating that there are active community members seeking to implement projects in their local area and that council process is a key enabler or barrier to the realisation of these projects. Councils showed a measured increase in their knowledge and skills to implement community-led placemaking, as well as a greater willingness and desire to do so.

A total of eight projects were delivered in Round 1 through a twelve-month managed program run by CoDesign Studio with the three participating council groups. These were:

- > *City of Cardinia* - Community Arts Project, Cardinia Lakes Movie Night
- > *City of Whitehorse* - Greening the Mall, Town Hall Front Lawn Festival, Community Art Project
- > *Hobsons Bay Council* - Brooklyn Movie Night, Pop-Up Dog Park, Laneway Art Project

Key outcome indicators were developed to track the impact caused by each of People, Process, Place. Base data was primarily sourced using online and face-to-face surveys conducted with

council, community leaders, and event attendees. Change was measured on a 10-point scale where 1=strongly disagree and 10=strongly agree.

In Round 1, **People outcomes** increased on the whole by an average of 12.6%. Two particular indicators were Activation (mean percentage change up 6.8%, as measured by a willingness to engage with others and number of connections to people) and Participation (mean percentage change up 41.9% as measured by increased community participation, enhanced council relationships, and a positive experience).

Process change was up 8% as an average across all councils. Process was measured across the domains of Capability (increased skills and increased knowledge, up 21.4%), Systems (better policy, embedded systems, and inclusion in formal planning, up 16.9%), and Culture (up 16.6% when measuring changed nature of community engagement, increased responsiveness to community, increased recognition of success, and increased advocacy and leadership for community-led placemaking at council). It is important to note that one council saw a decrease for the domain of embedded systems (Whitehorse, 0.9 median points lower at final survey, a decrease of 13.2%). This was the only recorded decrease in any domain for this round. Feedback in the reflection workshop indicated that the council acknowledged where their process could be improved. It was proposed that the lack of embedded system change at this council, as well as a lower than expected impact on embedded process overall, could have been because projects were either not entirely community-led (with council taking ownership of the project), or the project was a one-off event without a system in place to allow the community group to review, repeat, and scale the project themselves.

Place change was measured using a variety of inputs included visual images and time lapses as qualitative measures, as well as site audits and utilisation statistics, and also surveys with event attendees to gauge their connection to the space. These elements were classified into the domains of Implementation (e.g. physical improvements, activation occurred), Utilisation (e.g. increased community interactions, increased utilisation), and Perceptions of Neighbourhood (e.g. more welcoming, increased neighbourhood pride).

Four key statements were quantified through surveys with event attendees when they visited the new spaces created by their fellow citizens and council.

- > Proud: "This place makes me feel proud of my neighbourhood"
- > Potential: "This project has made me see potential new uses for this space"
- > Connection: "Coming here makes me feel more connected to my local community"
- > New ties: "Coming here has helped me meet new people from the local community"

The results showed that, rounded to the nearest median point, the average ranking was 9 on a 10-point scale, where the highest possible ranking was 10=strongly agree.

PHASE C: ROUND 2 PROJECTS

Building on the lessons and reflections of Round 1, a second round of real-world placemaking projects were delivered in Phase C of The Neighbourhood Project.

The first round had provided supportive evidence for the assumptions and approach being used to answer the research questions, however, it was theorised that greater long-term system change, plus self-sustaining community benefits, could be unlocked if the original model was turned upside down. Instead of working directly with councils to deliver community-led projects, it was proposed that the managed program should be delivered by working directly with community members seeking to lead projects. The program would be altered to deliver capacity-building and mentorship directly to selected community groups, and assist them to work with their own councils, effectively flipping the model on its head.

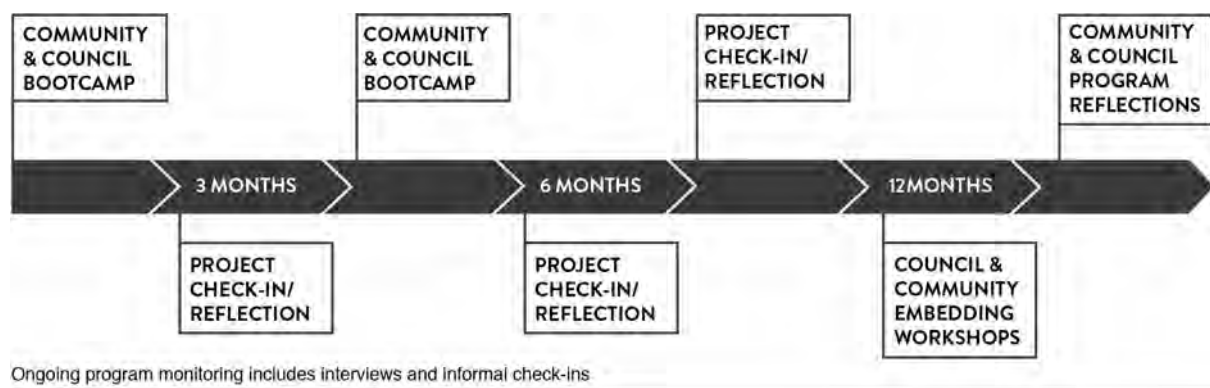


Figure 4: Round 2 program timeline

In Round 2, the Expression of Interest process received 91 applications from citizens across the state of Victoria, of which six were selected as participants of The Neighbourhood Project.

It was maintained that the small-scale local activations run by local citizens, with seed funding from The Neighbourhood Project, would then highlight barriers and red-tape that could be reviewed and improved at a council level in order to make community-led placemaking easier and more accessible in the future. The key difference between Round 1 and Round 2, is that the community leaders now had more agency to lead and greater access to support and resources.

ROUND 2 PROGRAM DESIGN

Key learnings from Round 1 shaped the program design for Round 2 in four key areas: Community Ownership, Reach and Involvement, Embedding Knowledge, and Community Insurance.

It was demonstrated in Round 1 that council was able to implement a number of successful community initiatives by reviewing their own internal processes regarding placemaking. However,

the fact that the first round was structured with council-instigated projects, appeared to reinforce the traditional structure of council being top-down place influencers, even when the projects were implemented by community member working groups.

Community Ownership

The council-instigated approach of Round 1 was centred around establishing community 'buy-in' as opposed to enabling community 'ownership' of projects. As a result, Round 2 of the program focuses on an asset-based community development approach that prioritises projects that are both community-led and community-initiated.

This impacted the program design by calling for applicants directly from the community. This pivot also allowed the program to efficiently address the following process challenges identified in Round 1:

- > Time spent with Council in project inception
- > Time spent gaining community interest and investment in a project idea
- > Strengthening community ownership to enable a lasting legacy post-project
- > Increasing community confidence to start a community-led project

Reach & Involvement

Round 1 identified that place activation inspires community members to explore ways to improve their neighbourhood, but that they first need to feel they have the *social license to act*. Providing opportunities for community leaders to share their ideas and gain public support helps generate ground swell and build confidence in project indicators.

The scale of community reach and involvement in Round 1 was somewhat ad hoc. In some instances, such as Brooklyn Dog Park, there was a broad reach and involvement of community in the design and implementation of the projects, however for other projects this beneficial reach was limited. It was thought that the reason for this could be attributed to a lower license to act due to the projects being council-instigated and still somewhat "top-down".

By contrast, Round 2 was set up in such a way for community leaders to be empowered to engage laterally with their fellow citizens and broader community themselves. The program redesign equipped them with the skills to mobilise their own wider community and involve them in the project process.

Embedding Knowledge

Truly embedding system change takes time, beyond the twelve-months of Round 1. Therefore, resourcing was designated during Round 2 to allow for research staff to remain in contact with participants from the first round in an advisory capacity. This provided the added value of creating a

pathway for first round participants to share their own gains and learnings with the newly participating councils of Round 2.

Community Insurance

Research across Phase A and Phase B highlighted the barrier for placemaking that is insurance. In Australia, councils require public liability insurance in order to deliver activities on public land, and this can be difficult to navigate for informal community groups or incorporated groups without insurance.

For example, some councils provide options for community groups to purchase insurance through council however conditions for this vary across the state of Victoria. Having a standardised insurance scheme across councils for community groups to access, which is also practical and affordable, was indicated as an enabling factor that could be explored.

Shifting to a community focussed program in Round 2 further necessitated this change. Consequently, CoDesign Studio engaged with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) to explore insurance options for community groups and build this knowledge into the managed program delivery.

IMPACT ON PEOPLE, PROCESS, PLACE

Round 2 measured the impact of projects on the basis of People, Process, Place, maintaining consistency with Round 1. Base data was again primarily sourced using online and face-to-face surveys conducted with council, community leaders, and event attendees, as well as site audits and place documentation. For surveys, responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. Additionally, community group leaders in this round kept video diaries of their experience providing rich qualitative insights into the challenges, achievements, and impact of the managed program.

Survey questions were similar to those presented during Round 1, with some slight changes. The key refinement came in terms of how these questions were deemed to best reflect PPP. Internal knowledge had grown, and the new program was community-focussed, not council-focussed. The following changes were made.

For the pillar of **People** the focus was on the community project leaders. The previous People indicators of Activation and Participation were further split into measures of Agency (motivated, confident, influence), Connection (to locals, to networks), Capability (skilled to act, access to resources), and Mobility (depth of involvement, willingness to mobilise others). Meanwhile, **Process** maintained its focus on council people and pathways, adding the category of Supportive, to the existing components of Capability, Culture, and Systems.

The categorisation of **Place** domains also shifted, they were renamed more accurately and greater detail was added with the following labels: Physical Place to measure amenities, positive feelings of

place and utilisation (previously Implementation), Cohesion measured safety, local connections and belonging (previously Utilisation), and Pride measured neighbourhood pride and well as wellbeing (Perceptions).

ROUND 2 RESULTS

It was maintained that the small-scale local activations run by local citizens with seed funding from The Neighbourhood Project, would then highlight barriers and red-tape that could be reviewed and improved at a council level in order to make community-led placemaking easier and more accessible for both council and community in the future. The key difference between Round 1 and Round 2, is that the community leaders now had more agency to lead and greater access to support and resources.

Case studies on individual projects can be found in *Neighbourhoods Made By Neighbours: Case studies from Round 2 of The Neighbourhood Project* (CoDesign Studio, 2019a). For highlighted statistics on project size, participants, unlocked social capital see *The Neighbourhood Project: Outcomes & impact at a glance* (CoDesign Studio, 2019b). The project groups and their respective councils were as follows:

- > Fawner Food Bowls - *Moreland City Council*
- > Edithvale Collection - *Kingston City Council*
- > Williams Landing Community Garden - *Wyndham City Council*
- > Point Cook Pop-Up Park - *Wyndham City Council*
- > Strathmore, Let's Make A Park - *Moonee Valley Council*
- > Thomastown Walk 'N Talk - *Whittlesea City Council*

This project reports predominantly on the first five groups listed that fully completed the program. Thomastown Walk 'N Talk completed the first part of the program, including the delivery of a successful pop-up event, however they did not continue with the program in full. The aim of this community-led project was to work collaboratively with residents and the Thomastown Neighbourhood House to discover ways to better connect residents with the areas rich local history and activate large parcels of underutilised park land.

The resulting Walk 'N Talk Thomastown project was a historical walking tour through the natural reserve. A pop-up morning tea was used to test a walking trail which navigated key community services and was marked by story flags detailing the history of the area from the earliest Indigenous Wurundjeri, through to the significant migrant growth of the past 50 years from all over the world. The local organisation did not progress to full completion with The Neighbourhood Project program however, they continue to deliver neighbourhood-based programs to its rapidly growing and diversifying community.

People outcomes increased globally across Round 2 of the study by an average of 22.2%. Greatest gains were reported by the three previously non-existent groups of Edithvale, Strathmore, and

Fawkner. The already incorporated groups of Point Cook and Williams Landing saw no significant quantitative change overall (down 1%, and up 2% respectively), both reporting slight decreases in agency, while seeing gains in connection and capability. It should be noted, however, that the average weighted distribution of the baseline data of the agency category was 5 for Point Cook and 4.7 for Williams Landing (out of a possible 5) on the Likert scale, meaning that the group leaders were already reporting near maximum levels of perceived agency in their neighbourhoods. Similarly, Williams Landing decreased slightly on mobility, yet the baseline weighted distribution average score was already very high at 4.5 at the commencement of the project. It is also worth noting that the response rate was comparatively low for this section, meaning the significance of this reduction is lower.

Importantly, The Neighbourhood Project has demonstrated that a diverse range of leaders are able to deliver successful projects. Anecdotally, there is a notion in industry that 'community-focussed' projects are mostly run by certain demographics, often cast as female and retirees. The demographic make-up of leaders in Round 2 highlighted that positive outcomes were delivered regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, professional background, employment status, or education level.

Significantly, **Process** change occurred at a council level. Even though the Round 2 model was reversed to work directly with community leaders rather than council staffers, a positive 7% increase was recorded for process indicators overall, a rate of change that was relatively steady compared to Round 1's increase of 8%. While this does demonstrate that projects serve as an effective catalyst for fast-tracking change, and while it is a positive shift in the right direction, post-project check ins at the 12- and 18-month marks have shown that long lasting process change at a council level is still difficult to maintain. Phase D reflected on this result accordingly in the pursuit of finding deeper ways to embed change at a council level in a long-lasting way in order to continue to deliver long-term benefits to the community.

In Round 2, Process was also measured by considering the community's perception of council process change. Community leaders were asked to respond to two statements and rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale to gain greater insights into the long-term impact of projects on council process from the community perspective. These were: "My council actively supports projects and activities driven by the community" and "My council is responsive to the community." In comparing the baseline data with the final responses, respondents who agreed or strongly agreed shifted from 47% to 67% for council actively supporting projects, and 27% to 44% for council being responsive to community; that is, they improved by 42.5% and 62.9% respectively. It should be noted, however, that where there was no responses of strongly disagree at baseline, yet there was one response of this rating for both statements at the output. One interpretation of this, especially when compared with qualitative exit interviews, is that community-led placemaking provides a collisionable project whereby community and council must be contact and collaboration, and while this does not categorically always result in a positive experience for all group members, it does maintain its purpose of using short-term projects to highlight process issues and barriers between council and community.

To this end, council members themselves faced barriers and experienced difficulties within their own organisation during the program. The following issues were highlighted:

- > The need for internal communication from the beginning of the project and throughout its duration to coordinate the expertise and needs of various teams
- > Clarity of protocols for community members communicating with council team members to reduce duplication of effort (on both sides) and inconsistent information
- > The need for approval from multiple points within council (Think Impact Report, 2019)

An enabling environment at council level, including readiness for change, accessible process and an attitude of support, remained critical in getting community-led projects off the ground. Interestingly, the one project that did not complete the program also identified the most challenges in community-council collaboration and communication. This identified that although 'getting to yes' is a key stage from a council process perspective, in some instances, council is required to say 'no' if a project and its leadership team is not operating in a desired manner. In this instance, it was not council processes that hindered project eventuation, but the role of an external selection panel. A key lesson learnt from this experience is ensuring that Council is on board with the project from the outset and has an opportunity to play an active role in project selection.

Place outcomes improved across Round 2 with surveys indicating an average improvement of 82% (CoDesign Studio,2019b). According to the 2019 project review by social impact consultancy Think Impact, "The data overwhelmingly demonstrates positive changes for the physical place and the social cohesion and pride that it enables."

Surveys were conducted with community members (n=695) who attended the project events held at each of the six sites, including Thomastown, during the program. The results strongly indicate positive place value and improvement with large proportions of respondents rating that they either agreed or strongly agreed with statements designed to measure each of the domains of Place. The average percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed were as follows: Physical Place - more friendly (86.2%), more positively used (87.2%); Cohesion - more likely to spend time (82.2%), have met new people (69.7%), feel more safe (66.3%); Pride - feel more proud of my neighbourhood (88.3%).

PHASE D: ROUND 3

In the three months that followed the completion of Round 2, several key findings emerged that led the researchers to believe that **council process in Australia warranted further direct investigation**.

Firstly, discussion with Round 1 participants about their progress with the embedding process, revealed that many staffers were facing challenges at the 12-18 months mark after project delivery. Reasons for this included staff turn-over and a reduced commitment to placemaking from an executive level.

Meanwhile, during Round 2 the level of 'buy-in' from council was not as significant as the first round. The nature of councils being approached after community projects were selected, was having a converse affect when compared with Round 1 which saw councils apply to be involved and therefore make an early commitment to this way of working, especially an attitude of readiness to change.

Furthermore, Round 2 was seeing outstanding results for community and local places thanks to the community-run projects, yet council still played an integral role in creating the enabling environment for placemaking.

While reflecting on these learnings, CoDesign Studio, with the support of Municipal Association of Victoria, reached out to a number of Melbourne Metropolitan Councils to test a third variation of projects delivered through The Neighbourhood Project. Round 3 at the time was proposed to be council-instigated as in Round 1, only this time councils were to run their own Expression of Interest process to find community-instigated projects. It was suggested that this approach would allow for greater ownership from community over projects, however would allow council to maintain a high-level of insight to identify their own internal policy gaps and red-tape that may have been hindering communities from feeling they had license to act.

Another key difference in this round, was that the seed funding component was removed and no longer provided by The Neighbourhood Project, the onus of funding the program sat predominantly with councils, including the provision of grants to community groups. This was proposed to be a means of scaling the impact of The Neighbourhood Project program beyond the need for philanthropic funding.

However Round 3 of the project failed to come to fruition. The seed funding component in previous rounds had triggered a scenario where council CEO's were willing to sign off on expenditure outside of tightly proscribed procurement policies and lengthy annual budgeting processes. This resulted in a lack of interest from council. Those that did respond were facing a distinct lack of funding available amidst already extensive council commitments.

This led The Neighbourhood Project to conclude that:

- > Councils were happy to pay for training and upskilling staff in community-led placemaking however were not as willing to commit to the project delivery aspect of the model at this time;
- > Seed funding is an essential element for a community-led project to get off the ground; and,
- > Placemaking remains undervalued and is generally perceived as a 'nice-to-have' in local council as opposed to a 'must-have'.

Consequently, Round 3 was redesigned to consider the question, **'how can we set council on a path to long-term cultural change including policy development and cross-department collaboration in support of placemaking?'**

ROUND 3 PROGRAM DESIGN

A Deep Dive program was designed and offered to the eight councils who had already participated in The Neighbourhood Project. Of those eight participants, Cardinia Shire Council (Round 1) was successful in joining the new Round 3, an investigative framework development project. Readiness for change and funding approvals allow them to join in a matched funding capacity.

Through consultation, workshops, and tailored trainings, the program aimed to harness their lessons learned to date while embedding community-led placemaking in a way that would outlast executive culture shifts and staff turnover, delivering longer term benefits for their local citizens to be able to deliver projects in their district.

The main output was to develop the *Cardinia Community-led Placemaking Handbook*, a document with two key purposes: 1. Inform internal policy and process at council to be primed and accessible for community-led placemaking; and 2. Provide a 'how-to guide' for local community members who are eager to lead a community-led placemaking project in their neighbourhood.

Internally at Cardinia, a cross-department working group was established to facilitate the design and implementation of the Handbook. This plan was underpinned by lessons learnt from participating in Round 1 of the program, with additional knowledge contributed by CoDesign Studio, gained through the coordination of The Neighbourhood Project. The assumption was that having a policy in place at council will make it easier to advocate and educate other council members on the importance of community-led placemaking as well as addressing the high turnover of staff that was identified as a key challenge post participation in Round 1 of The Neighbourhood Project.

CoDesign is currently working closely with Cardinia Shire Council in the development of the Community-led Placemaking Handbook. The Deep Dive program is predicted to be completed by November 2019, with further learnings from this process intended to be shared thereafter.

SCALING FOR IMPACT

Scaling the program for impact was an important element of Phase D of The Neighbourhood Project. With the conclusion of project rounds, came time for reflection on how the researchers can continue to scale the findings for greatest social impact, not only here in Australia, but also globally.

In response, a suite of publications have been developed, specifically designed to equip both council and community to deliver projects. The resources also provide important insights for industry players and thought-leaders on this evidence-based approach to community-led placemaking and how they too can be a part of the solution to the growing need for a collaborative response to citymaking.

The series includes:

- > Neighbourhoods Made by Neighbours: A guide to community-led placemaking (CoDesign Studio, 2019c)
- > Neighbourhoods Made by Neighbours: Case Studios from Round 2 of The Neighbourhood Project (CoDesign Studio, 2019a)
- > Locally-led Neighbourhoods: A community-led placemaking manual (CoDesign Studio, 2019d)
- > The Neighbourhood Project: Research report (this document) (CoDesign Studio, 2019e)
- > The Neighbourhood Project: Outcomes and impact at a glance (CoDesign Studio, 2019b)

Additionally, digital platforms continue to be a cost-efficient way of scaling the reach of placemaking and grow the movement further; building more capacity, and delivering greater social impact around the world. To this end, the researchers highlighted opportunities during Phase D for leveraging technology to innovate new digital tools for placemakers globally.

Specifically, the researchers decided to address the fundamental elements that were critical for empowering a community-led project to get off the ground. Four key resourcing needs were highlighted. Given an enabling environment from council, given social license to act within the community, and given council readiness for change, a project still requires the following inputs to create a project:

1. **Inspiration:** a project idea and motivation
2. **Assets:** money and physical resources
3. **Time:** volunteerism or stipended
4. **Capability:** knowledge & skill

Accordingly, CoDesign Studio has prototyped and piloted new digital tools to address these requirements wherever they are not already available free of charge to community members worldwide.

Resultantly, alongside the publication series, any person with a web browser and an internet connection can access Ideate with CoDesign Studio, an ideation tool for inspiring community members, government staff or property and industry developers to uncover ideas specific to their

location, interests and their community needs. Upon launch the tool will be available at www.ideate.codesignstudio.com.au (August 2019).

DISCUSSION: PLACEMAKING FOR PLACE VALUE

Ease phase of the project provided validation for the PPP model as key drivers of place change. When this model of community-led placemaking is undertaken, improvements can be seen for all indicators. The reason this matters, is that placemaking unlocks improved place value for direct impact on people's lives for the better. "Place matters because people matter" according to CoDesign Studio's ethos. The quantitative measures of The Neighbourhood Project illustrate the vital impact this has on our societal fabric, connection, resilience, and wellbeing.

A great deal of qualitative data was gathered over the two rounds, through means of video diaries, reflection workshops, participant interviews, council interviews, and project attendee interviews. Many of the statements collected paint a picture of how community-led placemaking directly contributed to the four key outputs of placemaking; that is, improvements to social, cultural, environmental, and financial value of a place.

SOCIAL VALUE

Great places are made when people are given the opportunity to engage and influence the places they live. The process of delivering a placemaking project plus the improved space that results, both contribute to opportunity creation for residents to meet, connect, and actively build the social fabric of their neighbourhoods. Here are a selection of comments to illustrate the social capacity-building that occurred through The Neighbourhood Project.

- > "We hadn't met anyone since we moved in, but we just formed a band for the carols last week, and we're meeting up for Christmas dinner on Tuesday." - Brooklyn resident (Round 1)
- > "Enjoying the opportunity to learn something new and meet new people." - Box Hill Resident (Round 1)
- > "I didn't realise there were people in the community who need our support. I just met a single mum with five kids who doesn't have anyone to help her out. Now that we have met I can look out for her." - Cardinia Lakes resident (Round 1)

In addition to the results reported earlier on the pillars of People, Process, and Place, which each have indicators related to the social fabric, connection, capability, and cohesion of a place, these statements demonstrate the positive social value delivered through community-led placemaking.

CULTURAL VALUE

Trends in the built environment industry are consistently moving towards place branding, character and identity as important factors contributing to lifestyle, community resilience, property valuations, and guiding new communities to maturation.

Reflections on Round 2 of The Neighbourhood Project provide qualitative insight into the contributions made by the program to identifying, activating, and appreciating local cultural value including pride in the local identity, heritage, and vibrancy of a place. These include:

- > “[The new space] encourages community connectedness; Pride in your community.” - Williams Landing community garden user (Round 2)
- > “We are creating a place of pride for Edithvale by activating the shops & Beeson’s reserve to attract the right traders and build long-lasting local friends!” - Edithvale leadership team member(Round 2)
- > “Along the walking route, several placards would tell the story of Thomastown’s Aboriginal, migrant, refugee and asylum seeker history from past to present and aspired future.” - Thomastown successful pop-up trial of walking trail (Round 2)
- > “It’s amazing and makes me so proud to be a Point Cook resident!” - Point Cook pop-up park attendee (Round 2)

When under development using traditional top-down models of place design and decision-making, the planned vision is often not achieved when the local community fabric is not activated. This includes when the lifestyle that is marketed does not match the actual identity and character of a place, and when the local heritage is not acknowledged, appreciated or preserved. Round 2 of The Neighbourhood Project shows that community-led placemaking could be used as a cost-effective and low-risk program that helps to bridge this gap and make for authentic place identity.

ENVIRONMENTAL VALUE

Community-led placemaking actively contributes to the environmental value of a place. This can take on many forms including beautification, urban greening, and working towards environmentally sustainable practices. Many projects in The Neighbourhood Project included elements that worked towards this goal from art installations, garden planting, resource-sharing, upcycling, food plan development, and skills sharing. Importantly, the program provided an avenue for community members to access and revitalise underutilised public land that could then be used for ongoing activities to actively contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents and the planet.

- > “There is no where in Strathmore for young people to hang that doesn’t cost money or even access green space. We wanted to build a park for young people by young people.” - Strathmore leadership team member (Round 2)
- > “Thanks for organising it [family fun day]! It was a great day for the kids and lovely to meet other Fawknerites” - Fawkner Food Bowls event attendee (Round 2)

In Australia, councils can face the issue of not having the budget to pay for ongoing maintenance and upkeep of new green spaces, which can be a deciding factor in whether a paved or concrete place upgrade is designed instead of a green one. Thanks to the community buy-in and activation that occurs through community-led placemaking, places are activated with programming for upkeep that is delivered by volunteers and community members. Resultantly, working with a community-led project can provide a pathway for greener options where the burden of the upkeep sits with the local community. For instance, the program of The Neighbourhood Program as delivered in Williams Landing during Round 2, has now been upheld as 'best-practice' by the broader state government agency program in the region, the Edithvale Collective process was incorporated into infrastructure programs along in the region, Moonee Valley City Council adopted the Strathmore leadership group into their walkable neighbourhood program, and Fawkner Food Bowls were worked into the Moreland City Council's future food and health plan.

When spaces are developed with the community the resultant places are healthier for them, and cheaper for council, and all the while continues to contribute to the resilience of the social fabric of that neighbourhood in a way that actively transforms places into more environmentally enhancing spaces.

FINANCIAL VALUE

This paper reports on two key areas of financial value that measurably increased as a direct consequence of the community projects: 1. Local economy benefits; and 2. Return on investment (ROI) of seed funding.

Firstly, community-led placemaking projects deliver financial benefits to local areas when activations, interventions, and programmed projects are delivered. Site analysis during Round 2 revealed that activated, vibrant and accessible places drew in a greater number of community visitors. Moreover, these visitors spent a greater number of minutes in the vicinity and reported that they were more likely to visit the location again. Each of these factors can provide a significant boost to the local economy when there are local shops and trading areas in the impact zone.

For instance, the Point Cook Pop-Up Park attracted an estimated 50,000 visitors throughout their seven-week installation, this produced a 65% increase in site usage, which in turn revealed a 27 minute increase in time spent by each visitor in the shopping precinct. Similarly, for local traders of the Edithvale Collective, 'weekly visits to the shops' increased from 30% to 44% in their local community, while 'more than monthly visits' boosted from 50% to 65%; increasing by a measure of 47% and 30% respectively.

Secondly, all five groups which completed the program unlocked significant project value as a direct result of the program. In this analysis, unlocked value has been calculated based on three key categories: 1. Additional funding from in-kind contributions and additional donations; 2. Social capital activated, calculated as the estimated total volunteer hours worked by the core community leaders by the minimum wage in Australia as at 1 July 2018 with minimum casual loading added

(\$18.93 x 1.25 = \$23.66) ; and 3. Known ongoing funding attained during the scope of The Neighbourhood Project's Round 2 tenure.

ROUND 2	Seed Funding	Additional funding	Unlocked social capital*	Additional ongoing funding
Fawkner	9460	2280	20823	44000
Point Cook	10000	66334	24609	200000
Edithvale	9590	3000	31045	0
Strathmore	4082	5000	17037	0
Williams Landing	10000	7000	7572	153500
	43132	83614	101086	397500
			Subtotal Unlocked	582200

Figure 5: Financial breakdown of Round 2 on seed funding

*Denotes estimated total volunteer hours reported by leaders, by average minimum wage

In total, \$43,132.00 (AUD) in seed funding was distributed to the five projects that completed the program. Community leaders received funding after the pitches, project plans, and proposed budgets were reviewed and approved by the researchers and council. In a substantial return on investment (ROI), \$582,200.00 in added value was achieved by the program in Round 2 (See Figure 5).

The financial value depicts a basic ROI of over 1350% from seed funding to project value. Notwithstanding that this figure does not take into account the cost of program delivery that was born by the philanthropic research funding to develop and deliver the Round 2 program, there is still a substantial indication that empowered local groups can unlock significant financial value in projects using this method.

Moreover, many of the projects have continued in an ongoing and self-sustaining capacity beyond the scope of Round 2 of the program, well into the time of writing this report in 2019. It can be noted observationally that valuable social capital has continued to be delivered through volunteerism, crowdfunding, and further donations.

CONCLUSION

The Neighbourhood Project has provided substantial evidence for **community-led placemaking** as an effective and efficient means of triggering the three key drivers of change: People, Process, and Place. The program enabled councils and communities to deliver projects for public space improvements with greater social, cultural, environmental, and economic value, while also delivering boosts to the social fabric, resilience and vibrancy of local neighbourhoods.

The project was framed around three research questions. The first, “can short-term projects catalyse long-term change?” was positively affirmed. The second and third, “How can authorities best engage local citizens to solve local problems?” and, “what is an effective method to fast-track systemic transition to community-led liveable cities?”, were responded to by refining and replicating the **community-led placemaking model** as a catalyst for positive change towards a collaborative and inclusive way of working that sets local communities and neighbourhoods on a path to resilience.

The researchers worked with councils to evolve internal systems to enable locally-led projects by citizens, building citizen capacity and mentor them to mobilise and solve local problems, including the provision of seed funding to help citizens turn their plans into actions and transform their places.

When compared to Round 1, there was a greater level of project ownership on the part of the community members in Round 2. This in turn, increased the likelihood of projects to continue on and exist beyond The Neighbourhood Project program with great improvements on People indicators. This ongoing delivery and newly established groups, continues to deliver ongoing Place benefits. All the while, the initial series of pop-ups and small-scale activations served their great purpose of identifying process barriers and red tape. Round 3 showed that when there was a willingness and readiness for change at council level, a deep dive could occur as an active response to the highlighted barriers in order to find a reliable and long-term means of embedding system change. Although beyond the scope of this research paper, it is expected that this embedded change will then lead to a great number of community-led projects, which in turn deliver benefits to Place and Process, and the upward cycle of change repeats again; ever refining, ever delivering more ongoing benefits to community members in their neighbourhoods.

Rapid urbanisation continues to present new challenges for our cities including worrying trends towards social isolation, loneliness, environmental instability, and poor health. These issues are not only relevant to our current 21st century context but are expected to continue to grow as our reliance on technology increases. In a world that is more connected than ever, we are concurrently becoming more isolated due to a reduction in face-to-face interactions.

With place being a key determinant of our health, wealth and happiness, we are in great need of methods that cultivate a return to localism and drive positive system change when it comes to how our places are designed, activated, and managed.

The present paper concludes that the process of community-led placemaking is an effective and efficient means of maximising positive social impact as directly connected to place.

REFERENCES

- 100 Resilient Cities. (2019). *The City Resilience Framework*. Retrieved from <http://100resilientcities.org/resources/#section-1>
- CoDesign Studio. (2019a). *Neighbourhoods Made by Neighbours: Case studies from Round 2 of The Neighbourhood Project*, Melbourne, Australia
- CoDesign Studio. (2019b). *The Neighbourhood Project: Outcomes & impact at a glance*, Melbourne, Australia
- CoDesign Studio. (2019c). *Neighbourhoods Made by Neighbours: A guide to community-led placemaking*, Melbourne, Australia
- CoDesign Studio. (2019d). *Locally-led Neighbourhoods: A community-led placemaking manual*, Melbourne, Australia
- CoDesign Studio. (2019d). *The Neighbourhood Project: Research report*, Melbourne, Australia
- Howe, N. (2019, May 03). *Millennials And The Loneliness Epidemic*. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2019/05/03/millennials-and-the-loneliness-epidemic/#497956337676>
- Philipson, G. (2018, July 16). *Australians' trust in government at an all-time low*. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <https://www.governmentnews.com.au/australians-trust-government-time-low/>
- Sydney Morning Herald. (2005, October 30). *It's a matter of trust: But we don't even like our neighbours*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/national/its-a-matter-of-trust-but-we-dont-even-like-our-neighbours-20051030-gdmcgn.html>
- The Economist. (2015, April 04). *Space and the city*. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2015/04/04/space-and-the-city>
- The Nature Conservancy. (2017, August 31). *The Coming Rise Of Urban Infrastructure: Turning Infrastructure Green*. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-insights/perspectives/the-coming-rise-of-urban-infrastructure-turning-infrastructure-green/>
- Think Impact Report. (2019, January). *The Neighbourhood Project: Round 2 project review*, Melbourne, Australia
- United Nations. (2015, July 29). *World population projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050* | UN DESA Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/population/2015-report.html>

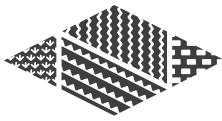
UN-Habitat. (2016) *World Cities Report 2016 From Habitat II to Habitat III: Twenty Years of Urban Development*. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <http://wcr.unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Chapter5-WCR-2016.pdf>

UN-Habitat. (2016) *World Cities Report 2016 Environmental Sustainability*. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <http://wcr.unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Chapter5-WCR-2016.pdf>

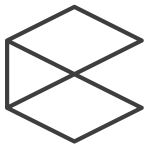
World Economic Forum. (2016). *Shaping the Future of Construction A Breakthrough in Mindset and Technology*. Industry Agenda Report. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Shaping_the_Future_of_Construction_full_report_.pdf

World Health Organization. (2010, December 01). *The determinants of health*. Health Impact Assessment. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <https://www.who.int/hia/evidence/doh/en/>

World Health Organization. (2016, August 04). *Urban green spaces*. Retrieved July 29, 2019, from <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/cities/health-risks/urban-green-space/en/>



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
PROJECT



CO
DESIGN
STUDIO

Melbourne

422a Brunswick St, Fitzroy, VIC 3065

Brisbane

109 Constance St, Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006

t + 61 3 9417 0020

e info@codesignstudio.com.au

