

RP3011

URBAN EXPERIMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

Research Question

The objectives of the research for this PhD thesis is to understand the role of urban experiments in sustainability transitions through the following questions:

What theory of change informs the activation of urban experiments?

What are the direct impacts of urban experiments from the participants' perspective?

What are the governance challenges of urban experiments?

How do urban experiments co-shape policy responses from industry and government?

Methodology

This research uses an action-oriented model of grassroots innovation that combines appreciative inquiry, asset-based community development and human-centred design for social innovation.

Data was collected from most significant change interviews to analyse the direct impacts of niche experiments in low carbon living from the perspective of participants in the Urban Living Lab, Livewell Yarra. Transformative Social Innovation Theory was used in the context of co-shaping policy responses to transformative urbanism.

Results (225 words)

Three different modes of urban experimentation are being investigated via case studies:

1. Livewell Yarra, a university-led Urban Living Lab that brought together researchers from Curtin University, a local government partner and community participants to trial niche experiments in low carbon living. The project was geographically located in the City of Yarra, a small inner urban area in Melbourne, and took place from June to November 2015. It used action research based on normative objectives to encourage the transition to more sustainable lifestyles.



Image 1: Livewell Yarra transition team

2. The Future Economies Lab, a city-led series of two public engagement workshops for the City of Melbourne's 'Future Melbourne 2026' collaborative planning project that used 'Vision Mapping', a process that combined collaborative mapping, strategic foresight, appreciative inquiry and human-centred design to imagine changes to Melbourne's economy over the coming decade. Participants included a mix of the public and invited stakeholders from industry, government and the community in Melbourne.

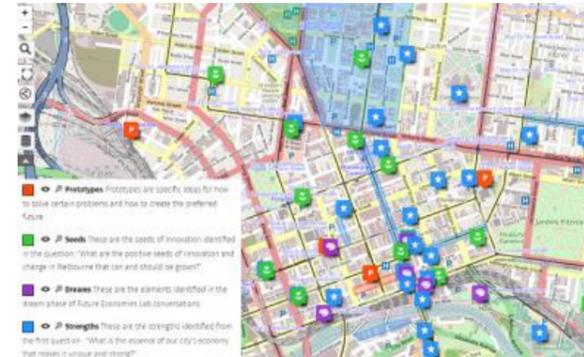


Image 2: Future Economies Lab Vision Map

3. The Sharing Cities Network, a civil society-led social innovation that was created to inspire community advocates to self-organise across 50 cities globally and run MapJams (asset mapping) and ShareFests (sharing festivals) to make community assets more visible, offer policy solutions to local governments and re-frame the sharing economy's narrative transformative urban change.



Image 3: Yarra Sharing Cities MapJam

Conclusions

Social learning and empowerment

Early results indicate that experiments in urban living labs create opportunities for social learning and empowerment, but also raise issues of leadership and ownership of transition governance. The

early findings suggest that Livewell Yarra could have benefited from clearer agenda setting and continuous monitoring to feedback results.

Anticipated impacts

This research will provide industry, research and government with a model and case studies of how urban transition experiments can be deployed in local communities.

It will develop a collaborative approach to governing sustainability transitions based on multi-stakeholder engagement between academia, local government civil society and community actors.

Key statement

City governments and civil society can work together to empower citizens and other stakeholders to run urban experiments and have a more active and self-directed role in city-making to support sustainability transitions.

Further information

<https://livewell.net.au/>

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