



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

**Melbourne Centre
for Cities**

CONNECTING CITIES

Strategy 2023-2025

2022 Version

about this document

This document outlines the strategic vision, commitments, and collective identity of the Melbourne Centre for Cities. It is envisioned to be a live repository of our viewpoint and character as an academic community, grounded in a specialism in urban governance. It is a product of conversations between diverse Centre voices, as well as a wider centre community across Australia and the globe, designed to set our course to 2025, but will be iteratively reviewed on an annual basis as our Centre community evolves.

The Centre wishes to thank its graduate researchers, fellows, honorary and visitor members as well as its associates for the input in the production of this document in 2022. The Centre would like to acknowledge its management committee, as well as the 'Strategy 2025' Team that have contributed to the delivery of the document: Dianty Ningrum, Anna Edwards, Zahra Assarkaniki, Kate Murray, and Michele Acuto.

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The Centre would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the unceded land on which it is situated and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and to their families. The University of Melbourne's Parkville Campus is situated on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples.

We acknowledge the peoples of the Kulin Nation that stretches across many other University campuses where we work and conduct research, as well as the Traditional Custodians of other lands upon which we travel and collaborate. We encourage you to reflect on your relationship with the lands, sky, nature and waterways not only in Australia but also on the lands of Indigenous peoples across the world.



Our Commitments

The Melbourne Centre for Cities acknowledges we are visitors on unceded Aboriginal land. The Centre is committed to **striving towards just and equitable nations for all people**. We extend this commitment internationally as we engage on other Indigenous lands across the world. We aim to do so by working explicitly with Indigenous voices on and around campus, and overseas.

Our approach seeks to provide agency for Indigenous voices to be respectfully reflected in our work. By collaborating with Indigenous colleagues and scholarship, we aim to take an action based on **a positive approach that facilitates and celebrates the resilience of Indigenous cultures**.

Through our work we commit to ongoing dialogue with Indigenous voices and First Nations traditions at home and abroad.

In doing so, we abide by a set of principles, being to:

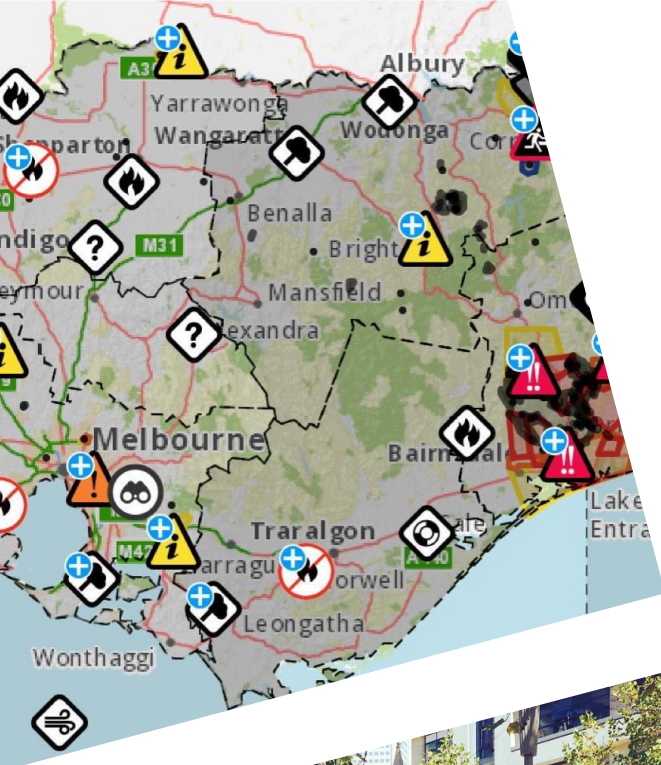
- Provide opportunities for **reciprocal knowledge exchange** and meaningful capacity building
- Listen and embrace, through approaches that are about “grounding” and **“taking it in”**
- Provide opportunities centred on **partnerships for collective leadership**
- **Sit in the uncomfortable** while asking, and answering, tough questions.



A group of Centre staff at our annual retreat in the Yarra Valley, on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung land.

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Cities on the Frontline

Why do we need a Centre for Cities?

Home to much of humanity | Cities are where 68% of the world's population will live by 2050. Close to 5bn are already calling urban settlements home today, and 2bn are set to join them over the next two decades, with 70% of the world's economy already flowing through cities.

Crossroads of inequalities but also gateways for inclusion | 25% of the world's urban population live in informal settlements, with nearly 2bn in inadequate shelter and at least 150m homeless. One in five international migrants live in just 20 cities globally.

On the vanguard of environmental crises | Cities are responsible for 75% of global CO2 emissions, the sites where 78% of the world's energy is consumed and where 70% of waste is produced. Three in five cities worldwide are exposed to high risk of natural disasters.

Theatres of the pandemic | Over 90% of reported COVID-19 cases have taken place in urban settlements, and cities have been the key nodes in the global spread of the virus. Cities have borne the brunt of the pandemic and often spearheaded the implementation of its responses.

Stepping up to global action | Cities are stepping up to global challenges. Hundreds of city networks connect thousands of cities through exchanges as tangible proof of global leadership, with tens of thousands of urban climate actions being rolled out by local governments across the planet.

Top: a snapshot of the VicEmergency app emergency information and warnings system that confronted many Melbournians through world-record pandemic lockdowns, bushfires taking to the global newlines, and devastating floods challenging us directly over the past years; Bottom: asylum seekers demonstration at Melbourne Central

a global urban identity

In an interconnected but disrupted world, cities are where much of the planet's future will be defined.

How city dwellers and urban decision-makers put in place effective solutions to address global challenges is crucial to ensuring greater resilience and a sustained capacity to thrive in a warming, unequal and crowded planet.

Building on this premise, with a distinct 'urban' identity focused on the future of cities from an international viewpoint, the Melbourne Centre for Cities addresses critical questions of urban governance. It does so to ensure city leadership is driven by sound evidence, proactive in tackling pressing societal problems, and cosmopolitan in its approach

Our Public Purpose

The Melbourne Centre for Cities hosts a community of interdisciplinary urban researchers with a particular interest in the governance of cities.

Our public purpose is to mobilise knowledge that supports cities to be thriving, resilient and inclusive urban environments. At a time of deep disruptions affecting cities, we work explicitly at the nexus of contemporary global challenges, urban governance, and experimental modes of urban investigation.

The Centre strives to:

- develop **responsible city leadership** and urban governance institutions **grounded in sound evidence**.
- act as **a partnership incubator**, by nurturing a professional and publicly focused hub for collaboration with external partners.
- address pressing questions that **link the governance of cities with contemporary societal challenges**, including those uncharted in urban scholarship.
- promote **reflection and introspection**, not only on the topic of urban governance, but on how urban knowledge is produced and mobilised.

We do not draw lines between theory and practice in urban research, subscribing to a view that core to our purpose is in fact animating a public and inclusive discussion on how advancing city leadership through partnerships can advance urban studies more broadly.

Our Expertise

DIGITAL CHANGE

Unpacking how urban life is shifting as technology reshapes cities and urban challenges

URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Stepping up city action in the wake of a climate crisis

URBAN POLICY

Engaging with how city leadership is changing around the world

CITY NETWORKS

Cities are stepping up their diplomacy at the 'top table' of global affairs

URBAN NIGHT LIFE

Understanding cities at night, and how they work across 24-hour economies

URBAN NATURE

Supporting how urban biodiversity contributes to thriving cities

URBAN EQUALITY

Building fairer cities, and empowering diverse city leadership voices

URBAN KNOWLEDGE

Putting urban data, expertise and knowledge institutions at the heart of urban governance



a snapshot of our expertise in action

SUSTAINABILITY: What knowledge do cities need to step up their climate action?

The Centre plays a key convening role in the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy *Innovate4Cities* Initiative, putting cities in the driver's seat of innovation.

NIGHTLIFE: The 'Night Shift'

We need to design 24-hour cities fit for those that maintain them. Funded by the Australian Research Council, the Centre works to enhance night-time thinking in urban planning, design and policy, with an eye on night shift workers.

POLICY: Do cities need 'young mayors'?

Centre work is supporting the Foundation for Young Australians to back young people who want to take a role in city leadership, rolling out a national 'young mayors' pilot building on international experiences.

NATURE: An atlas of urban biodiversity

Decision makers seeking to enhance urban nature is a lack of consistent, comprehensive and integrated biodiversity data in cities. To tackle this, our joint Science-Built Environment team is developing an atlas of urban biodiversity for Australian cities.

EQUALITY: From evidence to action, cities fit for young people:

The Centre team has been supporting Swiss philanthropy Fondation Botnar to develop an evidence building and learning framework that contributes the wellbeing of young people in secondary cities of the Global South.

DIGITAL: Gig cities: how bare digital trends reshaping our cities and homes?

The rapid rise of digital on-demand mobile work is recasting livelihoods in cities. We are investigating the diverse impacts of the 'gig economy' on urban economies, design, work practices, households and wider communities.

KNOWLEDGE: The value of 'urban observatories'

Working with UN-Habitat, peer centres across the Global South, and University College London, we have delivered the first global review of how these institutions have stepped up evidence-based responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

NETWORKS: Enhancing cities' foreign policy and climate diplomacy

Our City Diplomacy Melbourne Masterclass, supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), is an exchange and capacity-building program focused on strengthening the influence of cities in tackling climate change by enhancing city diplomacy.



CONNECTING CITIES

The Centre's strategic goals 2023-2025

To put our public purpose into practice, the Centre's strategic approach is one that emphasises quality and depth of partnerships, international outreach, and our support for the next generation of city leaders. Seeking to 'connect cities' as our core strategic statement, we advocate for an evidence-based and inclusively-minded understanding of the frontline role of cities when it comes to global urban challenges.

We do so across five key goals for our work toward 2025.

1. Tackle pressing urban challenges by providing ground-breaking and **actionable research**, as well as training and advice to major actors shaping urban governance
2. Increase **attention to the importance of cities** and urban issues locally, nationally and internationally
3. Drive the **development of a new generation of city leaders**, in practice and academia, that is cosmopolitan, internationally engaged and appreciative of evidence-based decision-making
4. Deliver **practice-ready education** in urban governance with an international emphasis
5. **Proactively engage** with urban governance institutions, city research peers, and city networks to develop cutting edge research.



The Centre as partnership incubator

Partnering is the animating principle of the Melbourne Centre for Cities. It pervades our activities as a distinctive feature of our approach to research and education. Partnership is embedded in our spirit of co-design and collaboration featuring in our initiatives. We aim not only to examine, but **work with city leadership**, and the progressive potential it can unlock.

We are, by design, a centre for cities – co-produced with, in service of, and in **active engagement** with, city leadership.

This is reflected in collaboration with the extensive array of city leadership stakeholders involved in shaping urban governance in the private sector, philanthropy, civil society, and the multilateral sector.

an insight into how we collaborate

Partnering with the City of Melbourne

Situated at the heart of thriving global city, we do more than working *on* Melbourne. The Centre works in close partnership with the City of Melbourne, as our host local government, on common themes like sustainability, economic vitality, and innovation. This is an innovative city-university collaboration grounded by mutual investment and commitments, that engages with a variety of units and sections of the City and spans a variety of domains of policy from climate, to resilience and inclusion. Seeking to bridge the mere 2.3km that separates our office and Town Hall, our partnership is about **a joint commitment to enhancing Melbourne's resilience, inclusivity and leadership**, mobilizing data and expertise at both ends of that short tram ride and building common capacity.

We do so with by for instance hosting a sizeable co-commitment by University and City in funding the path-breaking knowledge collaboration represented by the **City of Melbourne Chair** of Urban Resilience and Innovation. The Chair is a program co-designed to jointly foster research and training in the field of city resilience. As of 2022, other key areas of engagement involve the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Melbourne, supporting **Australia's first Voluntary Local Review** of the SDGs, or collaborations on the night-time economy, the safety of women, trans and gender diverse people via **Project Night Justice**, community engagement or urban greening and biodiversity – to name but a few.

Collectively, these initiatives seek to improve how scholarly expertise is enacted in decision-making, with an eye at linking scholarly excellence with practical policy needs of the City, and its residents, which we call home.



Top to bottom: the City of Melbourne Voluntary Local Review of the SDGs; workshoping sustainability and resilience with key businesses in the City of Melbourne; a City-hosted MPavilion "excellent City Series" debate on designing for equity in Melbourne; and an SDGs implementation workshop.

Our international viewpoint

The Melbourne Centre for Cities takes an explicitly international viewpoint in its practices, from research to capacity building, that springs from our geopolitical positioning and reaches out to a broad community of urban knowledge institutions.

We are located at a strategically crossroads of **Asia and the Pacific**, adjacent to some of the world's most rapidly urbanising regions and pressing global urban challenges from sea level rise and natural hazards, to migration and geopolitics. We are placed within sites of deep cultural connectivity across and beyond the Asia-Pacific, engaging with highly international student and centre staff bodies and a growing alumni community.

As part of this wider movement of global urban research, the Centre focuses intentionally on urban governance at and across multiple scales from local to global. It purposefully seeks to expand the networks of collaboration that interweave urban knowledge exchange internationally. Conscious that **urbanisation is a shared experience across a wide variety of diverse realities globally**, we seek to engage, represent and build space for the voices, experiences and challenges of diverse types of urban settlements, from 'global cities' to suburban realities and towns, via intermediary hubs and emerging urban hubs from around the world.



Empowering emerging voices

Our commitment to **emerging voices in urban governance** is at the heart of how the Centre operates as a community of city scholars.

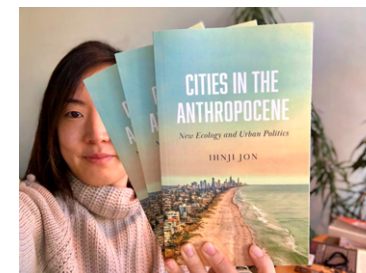
We pride ourselves on being **a nurturing space** for trailblazing interdisciplinary new generations of urban research working as fellows, graduate researchers, and collaborators in a welcoming and inclusive space.

Horizons: the Centre's Doctoral Academy

The "Horizons" doctoral program is a 6-month program for PhD researchers designed to support the internationalisation of emerging urban scholars at a time of deep global disruption and disconnection. Horizons' main goal is to engage in international career-building, countering relative isolation resulting from geographical inequalities and limited international mobility.

The doctoral program seeks to:

1. Expand graduate researchers' understanding of the modes, possibilities and challenges of international engagement in cities research.
2. Reflect, with experts and senior voices on the changing landscape of key international career development processes for graduate researchers
3. Build an inclusive community of practice and exchange that goes beyond one-directional training and expands the support system available for cities researchers to 'think internationally'.



The E2A Team in Delhi in support of Fondation Botnar's program on youth empowerment; The Public Space Picnics series travelled across campus for a series of walking talks to better grasp the politics and history of the buildings around us; Centre honorary lecturer Ihnji Jon and her new *Cities in the Anthropocene*; the 2022 *Horizons* cohort with guest mentors.

Education and capacity building

The Centre is committed to supporting the next generation of city leaders in academia and beyond through a suite of innovative educational programs.

Key to our education suite is our capacity building activities that mobilise internationally-recognised evidence from our research programs into continuing education for emerging city leaders.

Masters education in urban governance delivered through the Centre's core faculties of Architecture, Science and Arts

Academy training for PhD researchers and project-engaged PhD scholarships

Bespoke teaching-research **'studio' programs** co-designed with our partners focusing on innovative methods

Executive and **professional training** in urban governance linking city leaders to world class research expertise.

Our **'Horizons' Doctoral**

The Studio N project provides a teaching-research nexus between applied research, city-university partnership and graduate education, focused on managing cities at night.




Our organisation

We are set up as a cross-campus university centre for research and training of the University of Melbourne. We are formally hosted at the heart of the Parkville campus by the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, working in close partnership with the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science. The Centre's positioning bridges by design diverse areas of urban investigation from STEM-based analytics through to the Humanities, and is designed to bolster 'cities' as an interdisciplinary endeavour.

Our management team, staff, doctoral researchers and projects portfolio reflect this diversity. We facilitate and amplify these connections by working with partners both outside academia and with a diverse array peer research centres overseas.

The Centre is led by a management committee formed by cross-faculty representation and coordinated on a day-to-day basis by a Director and administrative team. A diverse board of experts and core centre partners further helps us to navigate the complexities of operating in a fast changing academic and urban policy environment.



The Baldwin Spencer Building at the heart of the University Parkville campus is our main physical home, purpose retrofitted to host a friendly, green and accessible base for a Centre with staff and partners spread out across faculties, cities and indeed continents.

A snippet of institutional history

The Centre was launched formally by the University of Melbourne in August 2021 as cross-campus centre for research and training set across the three Faculties of Architecture, Arts and Science.

Yet it has deeper roots going back to at least 2018, and the legacies of these initiatives, and the many that worked to allow them to thrive in Melbourne and internationally, is an essential component of our identity. Building on the lessons and generous engagement by peer centres overseas, the Centre project was originally incubated in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning as the 'Connected Cities Lab' between 2018 and 2020, with the City of Melbourne Chair in Urban Resilience starting even earlier, in 2017 and a Future Cities Cluster at the University since 2015 in the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute.

The Centre inherits and builds on this rich interdisciplinary heritage and looks forward to fostering further partnerships and collaborations with this three-year plan.



the then-Lab team and faculty associates
at the 10th World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi in 2020

Our People

The Melbourne Centre for Cities is home to a busy community of researchers. Its core team is comprised of a group of ‘fellows’ appointed by the Centre or working formally with it in its parent faculties at the University, and a growing community of doctoral researchers supervised by Centre fellows or taking part in our doctoral academy. This team is completed by a diverse mix of ‘associates’ across campus, as well as a mix of visitors and honorary appointments both based domestically and collaborating from overseas.



a 2022 snapshot of our people

Centre management committee

Michele Acuto (Centre Director); **Alison Young** (Arts); **David Bissell** (Science); **Cathy Oke** (ABP); **Sarah Bell** (City of Melbourne Chair); **Alexei Trundle** (ABP).

2022 Centre Fellows and Administration

Anna Kosovac; Anna Edwards[^]; Benedicta Rousseau; Benjamin Hegarty; Bianca Fileborn; Brianna Carroll; Daniel Pejic[^]; Derlie Mateo-Babiano; Diane Hu; Dianty Ningrum; Enzo Lara Hamilton; Georgia Garrard; Jennie Day; Jen Dam; Ika Trijsburg; John Hajek; John Stone; Julie Miao; Kajsa Lundberg[^]; Kate Murray; Kazi Fattah; Kylie Soanes; Louise Johnson; Lieve Donnellan; Marita Doak; Marley Holloway-Clarke; Max Holleran; Rebekah Plueckhahn; Melanie Lowe; Merrick Morley[^]; Paola Rossi; Peter Rush; Renee Miller-Yeaman; Rewa Marathe[^]; Sam Miles; Stephanie Butcher; Zahra Assarkhaniki[^].
([^]also a doctoral researcher)

2022 Centre Doctoral Researchers and Horizons* cohort

Alana Scully; Amber Howard*; Amelia Leavesley*; Anastasia Gramatakos; Angela Chen*; Caitlin Morrissey; Elisabetta Crovara; Emily Ross; Emma McRae; Hannah Fairlamb; Hannah McNichol; Hristijan Poposvki; Ian Rafael Ramirez*; Katherine Horsfall*; Jana Perkovic; Joanna Stubbs; Lei Hou*; Loren Adams*; Maxine Chan*; Paul Hanley*; Sam Holleran; Shiva Nouri*; Sombol Mokhles; Sophie Devine; Subharthe Samanbdra*; Tim Barber*; Uly Faoziyah.

2022 Centre Visitors and Honorary staff

Andreina Seijas; Clinton Moore; Kris Hartley; Ihnji Jon; Jessie Briggs; Joyati Das; Lars Coenen; Maya Costa Pinto; Michał Gzik; Pablo Fuentenebro; Sarah Barns; Roger Burrows; Sebastian Fastenrath

2022 Centre advisory board

Julie Wells, Michael Wesley, Mark Hagreaves, Julie Willis (University of Melbourne); Catherine Brown (LMCF), Winston Chow (SMU), Riyanti Djalante (ASEAN), Rachel Huxley (C40 Cities), Alison Leighton (City of Melbourne), Tony Pipa (Brookings), Aromar Revi (IIHS), Malcolm Smith (Arup), Molly Whelan (FYA).



The Centre hosts, as of December 2022, 31 fellows, 26 graduate researchers and 15 visitors and honorary fellows, along with 25 associates from across campus.



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