

Melbourne Centre for Cities

2025
Annual
Report



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE





Melbourne Centre for Cities acknowledges that we operate on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

We recognise that Traditional Custodians of the lands we work and study across the globe, have understood the interconnectedness of land, water, wind and sky for thousands of years, wisdom that remains essential to our work on cities.

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This research report has been developed by the Melbourne Centre for Cities at the University of Melbourne. It is intended to inform research, policy and public discussions on the present and future of cities. The authors have sought to ensure the accuracy of the material in this document, but they, the Centre and the University of Melbourne will not be liable for any loss or damage incurred through the use of this report.

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Cover image: By Dr Sabina Andron, Sunset on Kitintale skatepark in Kampala, Uganda

From the Director

As I reflect on 2025, I'm filled with pride for what the Melbourne Centre for Cities has achieved. This has been a year of remarkable productivity, strategic evolution, and deepening impact—strengthening our position as a leading voice in urban research and practice, both locally and globally. We embarked on an ambitious journey to sharpen our focus and amplify our impact. Through intensive workshops, we examined the value proposition of our work—past, present, and future. This led to a significant structural evolution: reorganising our activities into five core programs that now anchor our work. The Urban Innovation Accelerator, Urban Analytics for Future Cities, Cross-Discipline City Leaders Education, Incubating Early and Emerging Careers, and our City of Melbourne Strategic Research Partnership provide a coherent framework for tackling complex urban challenges.

Individual excellence has been exceptional. Dr Sabina Andron's Discovery Early Career Researcher Award validates our commitment to supporting emerging scholars. Our flagship ARC-funded Night Shift project—led by Deputy Director Professor Alison Young, former Director Professor Michele Acuto, Dr Anna Edwards, and Jesse Mentha—concluded its remarkable journey with a victory lap of impact, reshaping how Australia and the world understands and governs the night-time economy.



We celebrated successful PhD completions whilst bidding fond but sad farewells to Centre stalwarts, and welcoming brilliant new Centre members.



Our partnerships have expanded significantly. We became founding members of the Global Alliance on Sustainable Urban Societies and presented at the inaugural Bloomberg Harvard Centre for Cities Urban Research Conference. We were named Knowledge Partner for Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize network, whilst our collaboration with the Global Covenant of Mayors—particularly through Innovate4Cities—has positioned us at the forefront of global urban climate action.

The Centre continues to develop strong local, national and International partnerships and recognition, including my selection as a lead author for the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities, all embedding our Centre within critical global conversations.

Looking ahead to our Centre review, I'm confident in what we've built. We're actively shaping how cities respond to our era's defining challenges.

Cathy Oke

Associate Professor Cathy Oke OAM
Director, Melbourne Centre for Cities

2025 Centre Projects & Activities

- City Diplomacy
- Reconnecting with Urban Waterways
- Night Shift
- Innovate4Cities
- Public Sector Capabilities Index
- Deciphering Quality: Material lives within postcolonial urban transformation
- City of Melbourne Chair of Urban Resilience & Innovation
- Re-imagining Streets with Green Infrastructure
- Climate Talks
- Justice in the Streets?: Responding to Public Homelessness and Public Protest (Spatial Justice)
- The Retrofit Lab
- Urban-Act: Integrated Urban Climate Action for low-carbon & resilient cities
- Urban Surfaces
- Horizons Doctoral Academy
- Global Research Network on Climate-Induced
- Displacement, Resettlement, Adaptation, and Resilience for Cities
- Digital Estate for Zero-Carbon Building Portfolio: Decisive Information Requirements
- Floating wetlands for wildlife habitat
- Pacific National Adaptation Planning – Regional Climate Impact, Vulnerability and Risk Assessment Project
- Playbook for Urban Biodiversity
- IPCC Special Report Climate Change and Cities - Lead Author
- Communities, kava, court orders: Ways of possessing the Pacific city
- Pacific Resilience in a Warming, Urban World: Planning Adaptation Pathways for Informal Cities
- Digital Nomads
- Indigenous Youth lead R+I of & for urban energy transition
- Urban Nature
- 2024 Cities and International Engagement Survey
- Climate Bites

28

Projects & Activities

5

Reports

68

Centre Members

20+

Grants Submitted

22

Events Hosted

7

Scholarly Op Eds

11

Podcast Episodes

26

Peer-Reviewed
Articles

4

Books and
Special Issues

Centre Snapshot

The Centre creates significant impact in urban research by linking local initiatives with national and international governance frameworks.

We measure our record of impact through partnerships, collaborations, training programs, outputs, and events.

Grants are those submitted with a Centre person as the lead CI, noting these are predominantly fellows connected with our host faculty, the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning.



Above: The Retrofit Exhibition Launch

Centre Community

Centre Fellows, Assistants and Officers

Ash Alam, Sabina Andron, Sarah Bell, Imogen Carr, Anna Edwards, Mila Jennings, Anwyn Hocking, Pengyi Huang, Andrew Irvin, Enzo Lara-Hamilton, Lutfun Nahar Lata, Jesse Mentha, Amelia Leavesley, Cathy Oke, Rebekah Plueckhahn, Daniel Pejic, Melissa Pineda Pinto, Kylie Soanes, Alexei Trundle, Renee Miller-Yeaman, Alison Young

Graduate Researchers

Denise Ryan, Loren Adams, Uly Faoziyah, Amelia Leavesley, Chethna Ben, Sophie Devine, Merrick Morley, Mickhaella Ermita, James Hazel Maher, Anna Edwards (completed), Daniel Peijic (completed), Samuel Holleran (completed), Yiwei Zhou (visiting), Khilda Wildana Nur (visiting)

Professional Staff

Marita Doak, Paola Rossi, Scott Limbrick, Maria Pia Dunne

Visiting Fellows

Kenji Nakayama, Zoe Park, Charlotte Stijnen, Pakamas Thinphanga, Alessio Kolioulis, Claire Hoolohan, Rasmus Nørgaard, Joeli Varo, Tom Ward, Cecilia Brazioli, Karen Chapple, Zubair Khalid

Centre Honoraries

Michele Acuto, Roger Burrows, Sebastian Fastenrath, Brendan Gleeson, Pablo Fuentenebro Alonso, Louise Johnson

Centre Associates

Amy Hahs, Anna Kosovac, Bianca Fileborn, Derlie Mateo-Babiano, Hannah Robertson, Jennie Day, John Hajek, Judy Bush, Julie Miao, Kirsten Parris, Nicholas Williams, Sareh Moosavi, Sebastian Antoine Salay, Serene Ho

The Centre hosts a vibrant, multidisciplinary urban studies community, with much of its research and engagement co-designed alongside external partners and collaborators.

Throughout 2025, the Centre has supported a cohort of 60 Centre Fellows and Graduate Researchers, guided by a Strategic Leadership Group of 16 members (including an operations team of 3 professional staff and 13 academic staff). This core team is further supported by 4 Active Honorary academic staff and 12 Visiting Fellows, including several international visitors.

The Centre continues to engage widely across the University, connecting with Centre Associates from the Faculties of Arts, Law, Architecture, Building and Planning, Science and Faculty of Engineering and IT, as well as contributing actively to the Melbourne Biodiversity Institute and Melbourne Climate Futures.

This year, Dr Sabina Andron, Postdoctoral Fellow in Cities and Urbanism, was the recipient of a Discovery Early Career Research Award (DECRA) by the Australian Research Council. This will support her project, "Visual governance in the city: rethinking graffiti and public images".

Research Impact

Our core programs focus on accelerating urban research and policy innovation through targeted projects and initiatives that provide key resources, expert advice, and robust analytics, while supporting the education and development of current and future leaders. These programs are informed by our themes and values, with a focus on sustainability, equity, diversity and connectivity, as well as on local and international engagement and collaboration.

Research Clusters

Our Research Clusters are part of our Urban Innovation Accelerator core program. This program tackles the urban polycrisis – the complex, interconnected challenges shaping cities today. These range from climate change and inequality to technological disruption, biodiversity loss, eroding trust and global instability. As global challenges converge in urban contexts, they amplify both risks and opportunities for transformation. Our cross-Centre, cross-disciplinary work, responding to these issues, is led by a set of evolving research clusters.

In 2025 these are:

Inhabiting the Urban

Led by Dr Rebekah Plueckhahn and Dr Melissa Pineda Pinto, this cluster examines lived experiences shaping cities in the Global South, focusing on rapid urban transformation, for-profit development, and urban inequalities. Key themes include housing, labour, spatial justice, residential participation, and urban materialities, with attention to Indigenous knowledge, incremental urban shaping, technological innovation, and climate adaptation.

In 2025, the cluster convened research roundtable discussions and follow-up meetings, and drafted a positioning paper on 'Precarity through the conceptual frame of Emptiness'. Looking ahead, the cluster plans to host international visitors, build international collaborations, and hold workshops to develop targeted grant proposals building on the Project on a Page and Positioning Paper.

Urban Biodiversity

Led by Dr Kylie Soanes, the Urban Biodiversity Research Cluster works to enhance cities' capacity to support and protect biodiversity. Researchers from Science and Architecture, Building and Planning develop solutions to urban conservation challenges, emphasising partnerships with industry and government to inform policy and practice. The cluster also builds capacity among practitioners and communities to transform city spaces for both biodiversity and people.

In 2025, the cluster strengthened cross-faculty representation and disciplinary scope across BioScience, MDHS, SAFES, and ABP, and submitted multiple Melbourne Biodiversity Institute seed and sapling grants. Looking ahead, the cluster plans to contribute to Map of the Month through MDAP, update and revamp the Threatened Species in Cities map in partnership with storytelling platform Maptivate, and explore further opportunities for impactful research translation.

Social and Visual Justice in the City

Led by Dr Sabina Andron, Associate Professor Bianca Fileborn, and Dr Lutfun Nahar Lata, this cluster investigates spatial and social justice and inclusion through ethnographic, visual, and experiential methods. It focuses on the rights of disadvantaged urban citizens, gig economy work, urban citizenship, and safety and inclusion in public spaces.

In 2025, the cluster co-hosted a joint symposium with ANZSOC on 'Spatiality, Justice, Gender, and Sexualities: Exploring Intersections' and convened multiple panel sessions focused on 'Urban Visual Dialogues', including presentations from visiting PhD researchers Cecilia Brazili and Tom Ward, and a public panel featuring a range of experts on graffiti and visual art.



Above: Participants in the Australia-China Local Government Exchange 2025

Research Clusters

21st Century City Leadership

Led by Dr Dan Pejic and Professor Dan Hill, this cluster examines how local governments engage internationally and the impact of city diplomacy on climate, migration, urban branding, finance, and talent attraction.

In 2025, the cluster completed the Australia-China Local Government Exchange cohort and delivered interactive sessions at the Municipal Association of Victoria Annual Conference on 21st-century skills and dynamic capabilities for local governments. The team also presented research at the Bloomberg Harvard Center for Cities Urban Research Conference (November 2025) and hosted a delegation of 40 young professionals as part of Singapore's EDGE program.

Key publications included a chapter by Dr Pejic in the CIDOB monograph *City Diplomacy in a Fragmented World* and completion of *City Agency and Global Governance: A Study of Migration City Diplomacy* (forthcoming March 2026). The cluster also contributed to a City Diplomacy Lab policy brief with Eurocities and the University of Lausanne, conducted global survey research on maintaining international partnerships amid shifting geopolitics, and developed the 'Global Engagement, Local Benefits' toolkit with Meridian International Center and Truman Center for National Policy.

Looking ahead, the cluster is developing a Public Sector Capabilities Index for dynamic capabilities with UCL, preparing the Future is Local Global Benchmarking report for MAV, strengthening partnerships with the Centre for Liveable Cities and NUS Singapore, and developing a Post-Professional programme alongside the City Leadership elective.



Above: Participants from the Breese Street workshop from the Re-Imagining Streets Project

Project Snapshots

Innovate4Cities

Innovate4Cities is a global initiative led by the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) in partnership with the Melbourne Centre for Cities, connecting science, policy, practice, and innovation to strengthen urban climate resilience.

In 2025, the Centre and GCoM launched the Climate Innovation Readiness Navigator (CIRN) pilot at Adaptation Futures 2025 in Christchurch. Delivered with Ironbark Sustainability, the pilot engaged cities across Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations, enabling rapid assessment of climate innovation readiness and accelerating cross-sector partnerships. The refined CIRN tool is now available for broader adoption across Oceania.

Cathy Oke participated in the 'From Practice to Science' workshop in Nairobi, co-organised by UN-Habitat and GCoM, bringing together African city practitioners and IPCC Special Report on Cities authors for science-practice exchange, including field visits to community-led climate adaptation projects. The Centre also contributed to the alpha launch of the Global Research and Action Agenda literature database to inform the IPCC SR Cities report.

Looking ahead, three University of Melbourne team members are serving as editors on the Innovate4Cities book, an Open Access publication featuring 84 authors documenting the evolution of the Global Research and Action Agenda for Cities and Climate Change Science, launching at the 2026 Innovate4Cities Conference in Nairobi (21-24 June).

Re-imagining Streets with Green Infrastructure

Led by Professor Sarah Bell and Dr Kylie Soanes and funded by Horticulture Innovation Australia, this project demonstrates how streets can be adapted to improve resilience to heatwaves, drought and flooding while enhancing liveability and biodiversity.

The project partners with local communities to co-design street greening retrofits, addressing barriers such as underground services and overhead powerlines.

In 2025, co-design workshops engaged residents in Breese Street, Brunswick (Merri-bek), Alfrieda Street, St Albans (Brimbank), and Wyndham, with participants helping develop shared visions for greener streets that inform both research and council planning.

Project Snapshots

Night Shift Project

Centre members Professor Alison Young, Dr Anna Edwards, and Jesse Mentha are part of the Night Shift project, researching the realities of night work to inform better urban policies. Australia's night-time economy contributes \$174 billion annually, yet cities remain designed for daytime with limited support for those working after dark.

In 2025, the team published research on night workers from Adelaide, Canberra and Melbourne, were featured on ABC News Breakfast, and hosted a public panel on the Governance of the 24-Hour City with the Lord Mayors of Adelaide and Melbourne, the NSW 24 Hour Economy Commissioner, and Arup. Dr Edwards published in The Mandarin on the morning economy, collaborated with Visa to deliver Australia's first Night-time Economy Index, presented at the AILA DARK Festival in Hobart, and contributed to four panels at the NEON Forum including the Community of Practice shaping NSW's first Night Worker Action Plan.

In partnership with UCL Bartlett, workshops in Sydney and Melbourne developed a manifesto for night-time research and teaching, with further collaboration planned for 2026. Dr Edwards also contributed to LinkedIn's Big Ideas for 2025, reaching over a million subscribers.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Cathy Oke was selected as a lead author for the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities, joining a group of over 90 global experts. Scheduled for release in March 2027, the report will bridge the latest scientific findings with practical, city-focused solutions to address the urgent challenges posed by climate change.

The first Lead Author Meeting took place in Osaka, Japan, in March, with a site visit also taking place in Tudor Muoroto, Kenya, and a plenary session at Adaptation Futures 2025 in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Climate Bites

Climate Bites is a student-driven video series bringing together young leaders from different faculties for interdisciplinary climate conversations.

Supported by the Graduate Student Association, Victorian College of the Arts, and Melbourne Centre for Cities, the pilot episode features university students from diverse disciplines sharing a meal and collaborating on complex climate challenges.

The project team is now seeking to expand Climate Bites into a full series showcasing cross-faculty collaboration and education initiatives at the University of Melbourne.

City Surfaces

Led by Dr Sabina Andron, multiple advanced creative and research-focused projects were advanced in 2025.

The Urban Surfaces Research Network received an Urban Studies Foundation Seminar Series Grant to support workshops in Melbourne, Nicosia and Uppsala exploring graffiti, urban governance, and surfaces as contested urban spaces, with the first workshop taking place in Melbourne in December 2025.

The SURFACITY residency at MPavilion Parkville engaged over 400 participants in participatory public art, including workshops, mark-making and walking tours, creating a collectively-authored installation that explored urban character, identity and culture. These projects highlight the Centre's commitment to innovative urban research and public engagement.

Below: Left, Centre Fellows, Alison Young, Jesse Mentha and Ash Alam at the RGS conference. Right: SURFACITY Installation at MPavillion



Education Programs

Through integrated education programs, including short courses and targeted undergraduate, graduate and post-professional subjects, we transform how urban professionals are trained by embedding them in cross-disciplinary teams addressing real-world challenges.

At the same time, organisations, governments and communities are empowered to use knowledge and research-based evidence to inform their decision making processes.

Horizons Doctoral Training Program

Horizons is an annual doctoral training program jointly hosted by the Melbourne Centre for Cities and RMIT University's Centre for Urban Research. Over six months, competitively selected PhD candidates from Melbourne-based universities develop skills for postdoctoral careers, building connections across disciplines, sectors and countries in urban studies. The program offers peer-learning opportunities and small group mentoring from high-profile academics and urbanists, focusing on expanding understanding of cross-disciplinary engagement in cities research, navigating career development processes, and building an inclusive community of practice for urban researchers.

In 2025, the cohort took part in masterclasses with esteemed urban scholars and practitioners, collaboratively developing content for an emerging urban scholars dialogue piece. Participants also engaged with activities across both Centres

Australia-China Local Government Exchange

The Australia-China Local Government Exchange is a specialist training program delivered by the Melbourne Centre for Cities, funded by the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations (NFACR).

Running from 2025-2027, it builds capacity in Australian local government professionals for risk-informed engagement with China through expert workshops in Australia, Hong Kong and Guangzhou, plus online modules. The program focuses on subnational diplomacy to address climate change action, urban sustainability, and city-to-city connections in trade and investment.

The 2025 cohort launched with a two-day workshop in Melbourne featuring expert speakers from the Australian Government and University of Melbourne, followed by online sessions and a week-long study visit to Hong Kong and Guangzhou in November.

Highlights included meetings with HKUST experts on climate-resilient infrastructure, discussions with Guangzhou Municipal Government on their international partnerships and transit electrification initiatives, and sessions with Australian Consuls-General on bilateral opportunities across Southern China.

Urban-Act Regional Training Programme

The Melbourne Centre for Cities are working closely with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia Pacific (ESCAP) to deliver the Urban-Act program, a multi-partner project to strengthen collaborative climate action in the Asia-Pacific across five programme countries: China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand.

Funded by Germany's International Climate Initiative (IKI), the focus is on enhancing the capacities of city governments to meaningfully engage in climate change dialogue, action, and implementation.

In 2025, the Melbourne Centre for Cities helped deliver a second dynamic virtual training course, equipping national, subnational and local government officials across Asia and the Pacific with the tools to tap into climate finance for cities.

This course demystifies the urban climate finance landscape and helps urban actors develop compelling, bankable project concepts that meet local needs as well as global climate and sustainable development goals.

Below: Participants in the Australia-China Local Government Exchange



Partnerships

The Melbourne Centre for Cities collaborates with leading urban research institutions, local governments, and international organisations to advance evidence-based urban policy and practice.

In November 2025, Director Cathy Oke presented at the inaugural **Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University** Urban Research Conference, sharing research on building municipal capacity through co-designed professional development programs. The paper, developed with colleagues from the Melbourne Centre for Cities and the Municipal Association of Victoria, examined how university-practitioner partnerships can address critical skill gaps in local government through peer-to-peer learning, action learning projects, and sustained engagement. The conference brought together 122 scholars from 15 countries and six continents to explore how local governments and universities can collaborate to develop and test innovative urban solutions.

In 2025 the Melbourne Centre for Cities also became a founding member of the **Global Alliance on Sustainable Urban Societies**, collaborating with the Urban Institute (Singapore Management University), Initiative on Cities (Boston University), Department of Geography and Environment (LSE), and School of Cities (University of Toronto).

The Alliance facilitates joint research and publications, co-hosted workshops and conferences, development of standardised urban data protocols, and faculty and student exchanges, with Melbourne contributing its cross-faculty approach, regional knowledge, and expertise in collaboration and community consultation.

Below: Signing Ceremony for the Global Alliance on Sustainable Urban Societies

The Melbourne Centre for Cities is an active member of **CIDRARC (Global Research Network on Climate-Induced Displacement, Resettlement, Adaptation, and Resilience for Cities)**, a research partnership hosted by the University of Toronto's School of Cities connecting international researchers and practitioners to understand climate displacement across urban contexts. The Centre presented initial Melbourne case study findings at a workshop in late 2024 and at the network's conference at Columbia University alongside leadership partners from Boston University, Autonomous University of Barcelona, and Karachi Urban Lab. The Centre is now seeking to renew the partnership into 2027 with a housing-focused research lens, engaging with RMIT to support the Australian case study.

The **City of Melbourne Chair in Urban Resilience and Innovation**, held by Professor Sarah Bell, is a research-practice collaboration driving joint projects centred on sustainability and resilience. The Chair's research has focused on The Retrofit Lab, supporting urban retrofit across buildings, infrastructure and landscapes, and Community Co-design, engaging residents in creating resilient cities through projects like Reimagining Streets With Green Infrastructure. The Chair position concludes in February 2026, with the Centre continuing in close strategic partnership with the City of Melbourne across numerous projects.

In 2025 the Centre was named as the **City of Melbourne's knowledge partner in the City Network for Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize**, a platform for LKYWCP alumni cities to connect, create and exchange knowledge on building liveable and sustainable cities. This network includes Bilbao, New York City, Suzhou, Medellín, Seoul, Vienna, Mexico City and other cities, with initiatives allowing member cities to engage in initiatives supporting best practices, collaborations to find solutions to common urban challenges, supporting and leveraging one another's knowledge efforts and networks.



Outreach and Engagement

Beyond research, we drive innovation through engagement and international collaboration, partnering with global networks, policymakers, industry, communities, and cultural institutions. Our initiatives, including symposiums, lectures, exhibitions, and workshops, connect research to communities and global audiences.

Media

The Centre’s research and thought leadership were featured prominently in national and international media outlets. In 2025, Centre fellows and researchers had notable features, appearances, opinion pieces and expert commentary appear across outlets including:

- ABC News (Online and Television)
- Monocle
- The Conversation
- Australian Geographic
- Pursuit
- The Mandarin
- The Canberra Times

Climate Talks Podcast

Climate Talks, co-produced by Melbourne Climate Futures and the Melbourne Centre for Cities, follows the journey to the annual United Nations Climate Change Conferences. Hosted by Professor Jackie Peel, Cathy Oke, and PhD Candidate Bek Markey-Towler, the podcast brings expert interviews and the latest COP news on topics including adaptation, mitigation, climate science, biodiversity, loss and damage, and international politics. Season 5 followed the journey to COP30 in Belém, Brazil, featuring 10 episodes with over 30 expert guests. Topics ranged from connecting climate science to the COPs and the politics of climate action, to youth engagement, biodiversity, energy transitions, and community connections. Guests included IPCC Chair Jim Skea, international legal experts, Indigenous knowledge holders, advocates and policy practitioners.

Newsletter and Direct Outreach

The Centre’s regular communication efforts via newsletters continue to show impressive results:

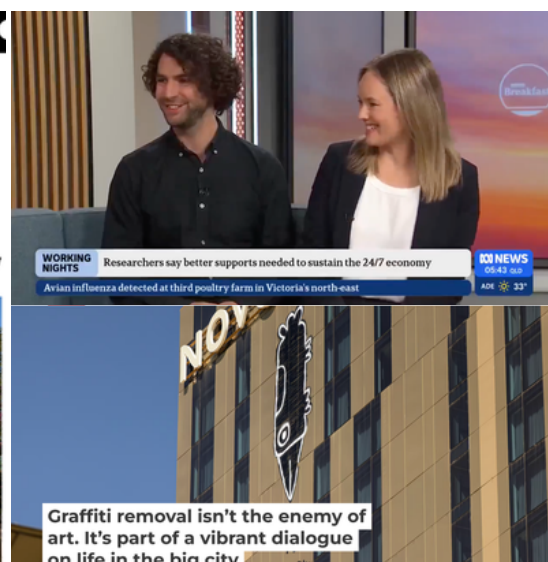
- 5 newsletters were sent out in 2025, reaching a subscriber base of 592 individuals.
- The Centre’s average open rate was 55.93%, significantly surpassing the industry standard by 23%.
- The click rate stood at 13.42%, exceeding the average by 10%.

This indicates that our audience remains highly engaged with the Centre’s updates, reinforcing our efforts to keep stakeholders informed about the Centre’s ongoing projects, research, and public contributions.

From January to December 2025, the Centre’s following on LinkedIn – our primary social media platform – grew from 2,629 to 3,515, a 34% increase (886 followers).

Members of the Centre have also been active on LinkedIn and other platforms, including TikTok and Instagram, communicating key research outputs in innovative ways, and reaching diverse and younger audiences. These efforts have extended the Centre’s influence far beyond traditional academic circles, ensuring that critical themes of social justice, sustainability, and climate action reach broad and diverse communities.

Below: A selection of media clips from 2025 (Australian Geographic, ABC News 24, The Conversation, ABC News Online

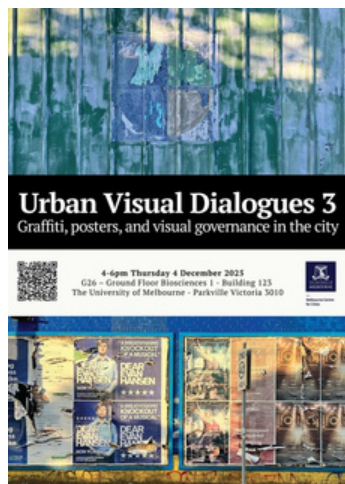


Outreach and Engagement

Urban Visual Justice / Urban Visual Dialogues Series

In 2025, the Centre hosted the Urban Visual Justice and Urban Visual Dialogues series, bringing together artists, academics, activists, municipal practitioners and commercial operators to examine how murals, graffiti, posters and street art shape urban spaces and influence governance, creativity and social justice. The series featured both Australian and International speakers, including visiting PhD researchers from the University of Milan and Uppsala and explored topics

such as the value of public images, the mural economy, and the contested nature of urban visual culture. Organised in conjunction with the Social and Visual Justice Research Cluster, the events fostered cross-disciplinary dialogue and reinforced the Centre's leadership in research on urban culture and justice.



The Retrofit Forum

Hosted by The Retrofit Lab at the University of Melbourne, the Retrofit Forum successfully brought together industry, government, and academia to accelerate sustainable retrofitting across Australia.

Across 2025, the Forum held 8 events, engaging more than 607 attendees and featuring 21 expert speakers addressing key challenges and innovations in the retrofit sector.

Held both in-person and online, the Forum strengthened collaboration across sectors and positioned itself as a key driver of Australia's retrofit innovation and policy discussions. Delivered by The Retrofit Lab in partnership with the Melbourne Centre for Cities, the 2025 Forum series has built momentum and capacity for national retrofit transformation.

Blueprints for Urban Resilience: Melbourne Centre for Cities 2025 Symposium and Workshop

The Melbourne Centre for Cities 2025 Symposium: Blueprints for Urban Resilience convened over 250 researchers, policymakers, and practitioners on 2 December at the University of Melbourne's Old Quad to address how cities can generate scalable, just, and evidence-based responses to intersecting global challenges including climate change, inequality, public health, and technological disruption.

The symposium opened with Stefan Hajkowicz (CSIRO) presenting on megatrends and cities, complemented by perspectives from Kelly Grigsby (CEO, Municipal Association of Victoria) and Dr Sabina Andron (Melbourne Centre for Cities), bridging local government and academic insights on how global forces are shaping urban contexts.

A cross-disciplinary Critical Issues Showcase highlighted urgent challenges and opportunities across biodiversity, climate, equity, Indigenous perspectives, industry, and youth, featuring representatives from Melbourne Biodiversity Institute, Arup, Indigenous Knowledge Institute, Melbourne Social Equity Institute, Melbourne Climate Futures, and the Youth Mayor of Bendigo.

Building on these discussions, participants engaged in an interactive workshop facilitated by Stefan Hajkowicz to generate cross-sectoral responses and collaborative research agendas.

The symposium concluded with reporting on priorities and project ideas to guide resilience work into 2026 and beyond, featuring our Research Cluster leads and moderated by Professor Alastair Sloan (Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Collaboration). Strong engagement throughout the Symposium reflected growing momentum for collaborative, cross-sectoral approaches to urban resilience.

Below: Left, SURFACITY at MPavilion Parkville. Right, Stefan Hajkowicz presenting at Blueprints for Urban Resilience



Outreach and Engagement

The Retrofit Exhibition

The Retrofit Exhibition, invited visitors to explore how cities can be upgraded and future-proofed for a changing climate. Centred on the question “The cities of the future have already been built – are they built to last?”, the exhibition examined how existing buildings, neighbourhoods, and infrastructures can be transformed to address climate change, housing affordability, and social inequality.

Running for six weeks from July to August 2025, the exhibition featured 14 public events, including panels, keynote talks, film screenings, and a ‘RetroFitness’ class, with more than 850 attendees in addition to visitors to the daily exhibition.

Interactive installations – such as a climate-safe room, adaptable building models, and a life-sized streetscape, showcased creative projects and initiatives from across Melbourne. The exhibition served as a call to action to retrofit homes, buildings, and streets for a vibrant, resilient urban future, while strengthening engagement between researchers, practitioners, and the public.

Conferences

Across 2025, researchers and fellows from the Centre presented and represented the Centre at a range of domestic and international conferences, including:

- Royal Geographical Society Conference 2025 (London)
- State of Australasian Cities Conference 2025 (Brisbane)
- Adaptation Futures 2025 (Christchurch)
- Institute of Australian Geographers Conference 2025 (Newcastle)
- MR2025: Mobility, Adaptation, and Wellbeing in a Changing Climate (New York City)
- Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University Urban Research Conference (Boston)
- Municipal Association of Victoria Annual Conference (Melbourne)
- NEON Forum 2025 (Sydney)

Visiting Fellows

In 2025, the Centre hosted 12 visiting fellows from a range of international partner institutions. These fellows included distinguished academics and practitioners who are leaders in the urban field, as well as emerging early career researchers. This diversity reflects the Centre’s commitment to education, supporting emerging careers, and attracting leading international voices to advance urban research and practice.

Several of our visiting fellows presented seminars, including Zubair Khalid (Associate Professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering at Lahore University of Management Sciences). During his visit he presented on how AI and data-driven methods can support more sustainable, resilient and equitable cities, and engaged with researchers across the Melbourne Centre for Cities, AURIN and the Transport, Health and Urban Systems Research Lab.

Claire Hoolahan (Senior Lecturer / Associate Professor in Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure at the University of Manchester and leader of the Accelerating Social Change theme at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research) delivered a seminar on social transformations for climate change, while Tom Ward and Cecilia Brazioli presented as part of the Urban Visual Dialogues series.

In November, we hosted Rasmus Nørgaard of Home.Earth as the 2025 Robert Garland Treseder Fellow at the University of Melbourne, supported by funding from the Treseder family. Through a forum and a public lecture, Rasmus explored how the residential property sector can respond to the intersecting challenges of climate change, housing affordability and inequality. His visit contributed to sector-wide dialogue on creating more liveable, inclusive and resilient communities.

Below: Left, Climate Safe Room at the Retrofit Exhibition. Right, Rasmus Nørgaard presenting on Sustainable Urban Real Estate Development

