

# 10 years

Life   
 in   
 Vacant  
Spaces 


**HURITANGA:  
10 YEARS OF  
TRANSFORMATIVE  
PLACE-MAKING**

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# FOREWORD

I have a vivid memory from about two months after the first of the devastating Canterbury earthquakes in 2010/2011. I was walking down a deserted Colombo Street surrounded by broken buildings and empty sites, when I saw a flash of colour and people with music on a vacant section. It was a crazy temporary public garden with live music, poetry readings, a bit of puppetry and circus, and film screenings of old New Zealand movies with live musical accompaniment. It was my first realisation that ordinary people doing stuff on an empty section could make a difference – and help to bring a broken city back to life.

I met with two of the organisers, Coralie Winn and Ryan Reynolds, at the Christchurch City Council a few months later. We were writing a recovery plan for the central city<sup>1</sup> and we had a chapter entitled 'Transitional City' about the kind of short term events and installations which might happen in the time between the disaster and rebuilding, and help to inform what was happening. We talked about the best way to support ordinary people to make transitional activities happen, and identified that the two main constraints were funding and knowledge, how do people maintain an income while they are organising transitional activities, and how can they get access to a piece of private land.

The Council put aside a transitional activities fund which has provided core funding for key transitional groups

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1 <https://ccc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/The-Council/Plans-Strategies-Policies-Bylaws/Plans/central-city/Draft-Central-City-Recovery-Plan.pdf>

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2 [LiVS] Life in Vacant Spaces; Christchurch City Council Report by Gap Filler Trust, August 2011.

3 <https://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/news/city-centre/9140968/Burning-of-art-will-release-Chch-stories>

4 Christchurch: The Transitional City Part IV (3rd edition), Freerange Press, 2013

including *Gap Filler* and *Greening the Rubble* for more than ten years. We also commissioned Coralie and Ryan to write a report on how the Council could address the knowledge gap – which became the *Life in Vacant Spaces*<sup>2</sup> report. This report identified a need for someone to identify and broker potential sites for transitional activities, and to help people to manage the legal and insurance requirements. To fill this role the Council established and funded the *Life in Vacant Spaces Charitable Trust* (LiVS) in 2012.

The programme of transitional activities grew beyond our wildest dreams. The *Festival of Transitional Architecture* (FESTA) brought students from Australia and New Zealand to create installations, and attracted tens of thousands of people back to Central Christchurch; the *Pallet Pavilion* and *The Commons* became community spaces for transitional events and projects; temporary streetscapes on Colombo Street and Oxford Terrace paved the way for permanent changes; a temporary park in Lyttelton was purchased and became *Albion Square*; *Cultivate Christchurch* started a network of urban farms that combine training and employment opportunities for youth at risk; the *Temple for Christchurch* was a temporary sculpture that filled half a city block with people writing heartfelt messages of hope humour and sadness on it before burning it<sup>3</sup>; and much more<sup>4</sup>.

The transitional programme in Christchurch received a Guangzhou Award for Urban Innovation in 2014, and a number of the temporary projects have become 'permanent' features including the *Cardboard Cathedral*, the *Dance-O-Mat*, and the *Arcades* on *The Commons*. Thriving businesses such as *Rollickin' Gelato* and *Kowhai Collective* started out on LiVS licences. More importantly the transitional activities have provided hope, life and

activity in a shattered city when the rebuild seemed to be taking forever.

LiVS has been the quiet partner bringing people together and supporting many of these projects providing advice, finding sites, and negotiating licences and insurances. This work has enabled hundreds of transitional projects to get over the line and protected both the participants and landowners.

After leaving the Council I joined the LiVS Trust in 2018 in order to give something back to the transitional community which had given so much to the city. As Christchurch returns to a new normal we have come to realise that cities are always changing, even though the pace may slow, and there is always a place for temporary activities that activate empty sites or buildings, and provide opportunities for people to make a difference in their city.

As a Trust we have grappled with how we can measure the value of our work. We have counted sites and activities, and estimated the dollar value of the temporary licences we administer, but somehow the cold hard numbers don't seem to show the value that we see in the faces of the people on our sites. It is with great delight that we have supported Kelly and her team to develop a more holistic and integrated framework for assessing the value of community projects, and to trial this on the LiVS portfolio.

### **Hugh Nicholson**

Chair, Life in Vacant Spaces Charitable Trust

# **INTRODUCTION LIFE IN VACANT SPACES**

## **10 YEARS OF LIFE IN VACANT SPACES**

This book celebrates a decade of Life in Vacant Spaces, affectionately known as LiVS, and the collection of over 700 projects that we have supported during this time. These projects have varied in shape, scale, location, aims, outputs, participants and people reached. Many who have experienced a LiVS project, may not even know we had any involvement.

LiVS is a charitable trust that brokers spaces for community groups, creative projects, social enterprises and start-ups. We connect owners of vacant land and buildings with people who have big ideas to fill those spaces.

The role doesn't stop there though; LiVS provides support from the very spark of an idea right through to deinstallation. We; provide agreements or insurance to de-risk the project for all involved; connect folk with other like-minded individuals or mentors, sponsors and other supporters; create spaces that enable projects through the provision of key infrastructure or basic upgrades; offer advice on project management, funding, event support and more; and generally find solutions to challenges folk didn't even know existed.

LiVS started in 2012, after a report commissioned by CCC and written by one of our enduring partners, Gap Filler. Since then, over 700 projects have been delivered with our support. For each and every one, we have stood in the

background proudly cheering on the project participants that deliver these exciting, innovative, creative or thought-provoking projects.

Approaching our 10 year anniversary we wanted to promote and celebrate OUR achievements of the last decade. However, we're not very good at talking about ourselves. But, we are really good at working with others. So we took the opportunity to collaborate with University of Canterbury to do some research.

The aim of this research was to determine some of the impacts, and the value our work has had on people, the city and our wellbeing. While there wasn't room to showcase each and every project in this book, we have used some of the research tools created to group projects and show the kinds of things we have done and what this achieved; these groups and how we measured the value will be explained in greater detail in the next sections. Where possible, we have shared some more of the exciting project details and spoken to project participants to capture their thoughts as well.

We hope you enjoy this book as much as you have enjoyed supporting, experiencing or delivering one of our projects. If you have yet to discover a LiVS project, we highly recommend you look one up. Or perhaps try your hand at creating your own – we're here to help if you do.

**I think LiVS is a really great enabler...LiVS works.**

**So there is a removing of barriers that happens when you work with Life in Vacant Spaces. They take care of the bureaucracy, the paperwork, the leg work of finding spaces and developing relationships with landlords.**

**They really create potentiality out of spaces which are otherwise just sitting unused. That's for a city where there is a lot of those spaces still.**

**That's so invaluable, really.**

PROJECT PARTICIPANT

# VALUING THE CITY WE WANT

## A COMMUNITY ECONOMY RETURN ON INVESTMENT MODEL

Over the past 10 years, LiVS has enabled hundreds of community-led projects in the city. These have provided many benefits to residents and visitors to Ōtautahi Christchurch. But how can organisations like LiVS assess their impact and measure the 'return' on their monetary and non-monetary investments into the city?

These questions are also being asked by the urban wellbeing research programme funded by Building Better Homes Towns and Cities. Now in its eighth year and second round, this programme pulls together a trans-disciplinary team to look at how cities are transitioning to urban wellbeing futures. As part of this programme, a small team have drawn on the concept of 'Community Economy Return on Investment', or CEROI, an idea developed by members of the Community Economies Institute<sup>1</sup>.

A CEROI intends to capture the monetary and non-monetary investment in a place or process, and the benefits that come from this investment. It attempts to generate shared values as a way of clarifying what is being invested in, and to frame the hoped-for returns. CEROI emphasises how investments made in one context or organisation might generate benefits that accrue to a broader community, rather than just improve performance. Using CEROI, groups like LiVS can represent their value in a more holistic way than just with dollar values.

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<sup>1</sup> Gibson-Graham, J.K., Cameron, J., & Healy, S. (2013). *Take back the economy: an ethical guide for transforming our communities*. University of Minnesota Press.

Many organisations all over the world are working to make better places for people in urban centres. Part of this is considering the interdependent relationships that allow people to survive well; and how surviving well is connected to acknowledging our relationships with other people and organisations, and with places and ecological processes. Community Economies researchers have distilled these thoughts down and arrived at some key questions they hope to address with their work.

The questions include:

- › How do we survive together well and equitably?
- › How can we consume sustainably?
- › How do we encounter others in ways that support mutual wellbeing?
- › How do we distribute surplus in order to enrich social and environmental health?
- › How do we care for the commons that sustain us all?
- › How do we invest in future generations?

Throughout the research project with LiVS, we sought to identify the ways that their projects have responded to these questions. And in doing so, how they have supported urban wellbeing and the kinds of outcomes or 'returns' that such 'investments' have enabled. In this book, we have not sought to quantify this value, but have used qualitative analyses to represent the investments and returns.

### Kelly Dombroski

Lead Researcher, CEROI Team

Huritanga Urban Wellbeing Programme

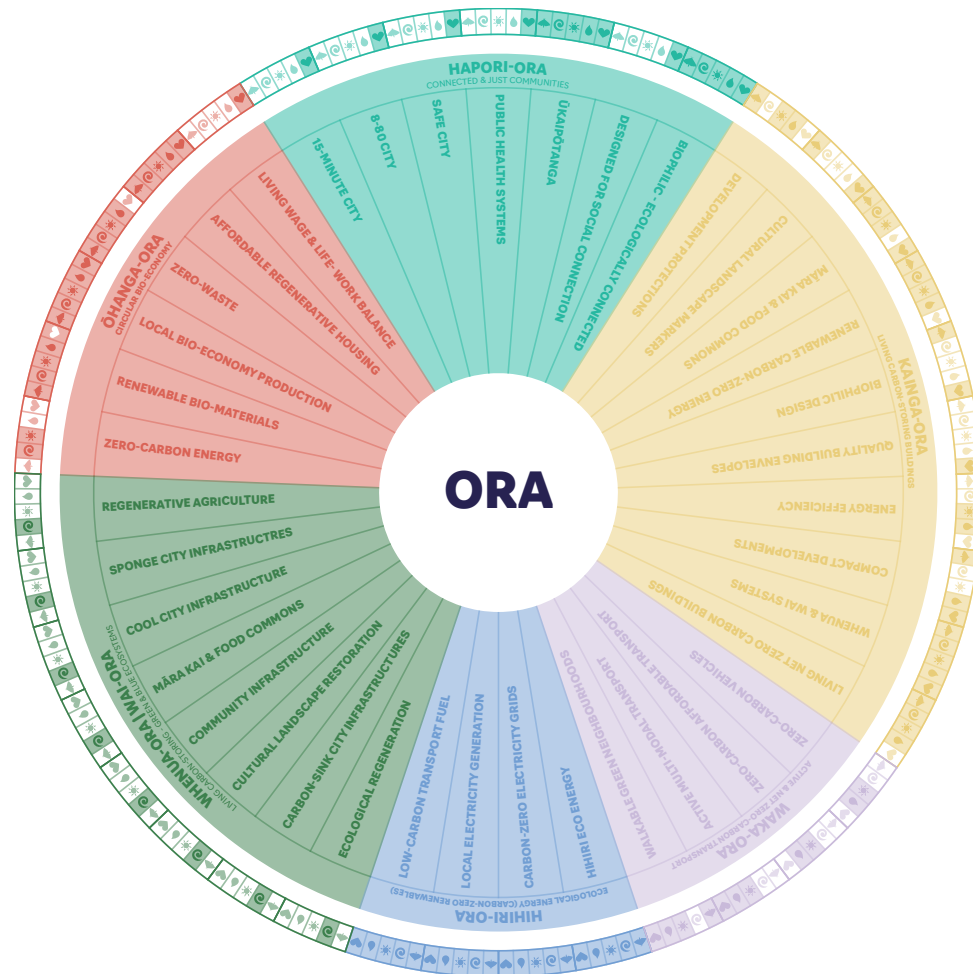
# VISUALISING RETURNS

## THE MAURI ORA URBAN WELLBEING COMPASS

As part of the project, we partnered with He Puna Ora | Urban Regenerative Action Lab at AUT to help visualise and assess the wellbeing 'returns'. AUT researcher, Amanda Yates (Ngāti Rangiwewehi, Ngāti Whakaue, Te Aitanga a Māhaki, Rongowhakaata) and team developed the basis for the tool we used; an urban wellbeing compass based on mauri ora. As a transformative action tool the compass aims to activate and enable social, cultural and ecological wellbeing.

In Te Ao Māori, mauri is understood as the life force inherent in all. It goes beyond Western understandings of animate and inanimate, and enables us to think of the life force of rivers, ecosystems, mountains, rocks or buildings alongside that of humans, animals, microbes, plants and more. These things can be in a state of mauri ora (holistic wellbeing), mauri noho (stasis) or mauri mate (decline and illness). As a thinking tool the compass emphasises wellbeing as a state of livingness that links human and nonhuman together as a connected whole.

The compass tool identifies how an urban place might navigate towards mauri ora and away from mauri mate. It can also be used to assess how well holistic urban wellbeing outcomes are being achieved.



- MAURI-ORA | ECO-DIVERSITY
- AO-RAWA-ORA | ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY
- RANGI-ORA | BALANCED TEMPERATURE
- WAI-ORA | BALANCED WATER CYCLE
- HAPORI-ORA | COMMUNITY WELLBEING

The current version of the compass considers six areas of mauri ora:

**Wai Ora |Whenua Ora**

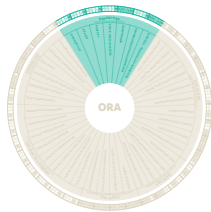
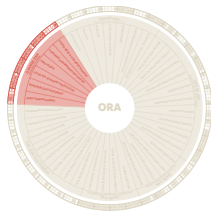
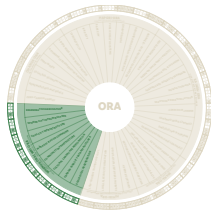
Living, carbon-storing blue and green ecosystems, including ecological regeneration, cultural landscape restoration, regenerative agriculture, mara kai and food commons, and community, carbon sink, cool city and ‘sponge city’ water infrastructures that protect and restore water and land based ecological wellbeing.

**Ōhanga Ora**

Circular bio-economy, including zero carbon energy, renewable bio-materials, local bio-economy production, zero waste, affordable regenerative housing, living wages and work-life balance.

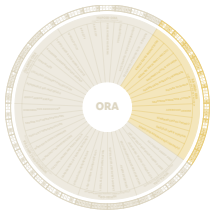
**Hapori Ora**

Connected and just communities, including accessible, safe, child-friendly, biophilic and ecologically connected city spaces with good public health systems and connection to cultural roots of mana whenua and diverse communities.



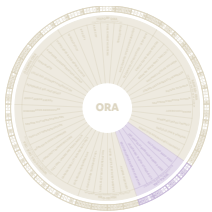
**Kainga Ora**

Living carbon storing healthy buildings, including compact developments with development protections, quality structures, renewable materials, carbon neutral and culturally relevant design.



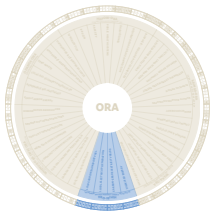
**Waka Ora**

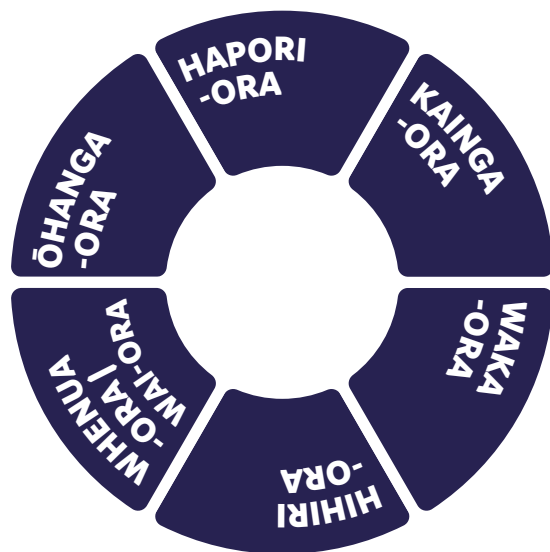
Active and net zero carbon transport, including walkable green neighbourhoods, active multi-modal transport, zero carbon affordable transport, zero carbon vehicles and safe active transport infrastructure.



**Hihiri Ora**

Ecological energy (using carbon zero renewables), including local electricity generation, low carbon transport fuels, carbon zero electricity grids and hihiri eco energies.





This book uses a simplified version of the Mauri Ora Urban Wellbeing Compass to visualise and name the aspects of holistic urban wellbeing that have been enhanced through the range of LiVS projects. Or, in other words, the 'wellbeing returns' on the investments made by LiVS projects.

At this time of complex ecological emergency, the idea of surviving well is a transformative ethic and aspiration. The wellbeing outcomes described in this book are ultimately transformative.

#### **Amanda Yates**

Principal Investigator

Huritanga Urban Wellbeing Programme

## **SURVIVING WELL**

*What do we really need to live healthy lives both materially and psychically? How do we take other people and the planet into account when determining what's necessary for a healthy life? How do we survive well?*

**JK Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy**

In times of intense social and environmental challenges, where inequality is rife, and where human expansion has irreversibly damaged our climate cycles and the Earth, it seems more appropriate to speak of seeking to 'survive well' than to 'flourish' or 'thrive'. It is not that flourishing or thriving are not worthy goals, but that the words ring hollow when humans flourish at the expense of non-humans, or when some groups of people flourish at the expense of others.

The concept of surviving well asks us to distinguish between necessity and sufficiency. While we have shied away from speaking of flourishing or thriving, bare survival (where species and ecosystem get only what they need to continue in coercive and terrible conditions) is not what we mean by surviving well.

Rather, surviving well implies sufficiency; where species and ecosystems, including humans and their environments, get what they need for surviving well together. Togetherness

entails effort to achieve justice, equality and ongoing sustainability not just in and between human communities but in wider more-than-human networks of labour, value and livelihood.

The CEROI approach asks us to think about how we can invest in what we *all* need to survive well, people and planet. This includes psychological needs, material needs, social needs, and what is needed for our ecological systems to reproduce, continue and support themselves and us.

Investments in surviving well can take many different forms. It can be as simple as choosing a living wage for staff and investing in their ability to survive well; or choosing an e-bike for your organisation and investing in a reduction in climate emissions so that all might survive well; it could mean using volunteer time to create spaces of social connection, thus investing in social wellbeing for many.



This section celebrates some of the LiVS-supported projects that invest in surviving well. The returns have been in terms of a more healthy and sustainable ‘circular’ wellbeing economy – ōhanga ora, and a more connected community – hapori ora.

**LiVS have changed lives.**

**Literally changed lives by their relatively small investment.**

PROJECT PARTICIPANT



Gap Filler was instrumental in setting up LiVS. In a report, commissioned by CCC, they outlined the benefits of an organisation with a specific 'site brokering' function. This report led to the establishment of Life in Vacant Spaces.

Gap Filler started out after the September 2010 earthquake, with a small community-built public space set up on a patch of dirt where two buildings had once stood. The concept was simple but profound: people needed somewhere to gather. The kitschy public park proved popular, and the stage was in use for two weeks with over thirty bands.

The organisation continues to create 'propositional' projects that challenge and enhance spaces in the city. They have led delivery of more than 200 public installations and facilitated countless others, many with the support of LiVS.

*A lot of our decision-making has been guided by that idea of trying to shift the sense of identity and possibility here, so that a wider range of people could see things in the urban fabric that reflect things that they care about, or could directly participate ...*



Super Street Arcade.  
Photo: Erica Austin

*.... if we created a movement and there were hundreds of people and organisations involved, then they couldn't take it away from us as easily, that kind of strength of decentralisation. I feel like that's been an important part of how we've approached our work in the city*

Ryan,  
**Gap Filler**



The Pallet Pavilion.  
Photo: Maja Moritz



Ash Keating, *Concrete Propositions*, in collaboration with Christchurch Art Gallery. Courtesy the artist and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne Australia. Photo: John Collie.

**We were young, we didn't have massive responsibility to think about survival kinds of things for our city, but we had the space to think about what could make it better.**

**We weren't bogged down, we just weren't bogged down by the actual human basic needs side of things, as such. People were doing that. People were taking water trucks out to the suburbs that didn't have water, and people were helping people with the housing and stuff like that. Whereas when we came into the place-making realm, it was in those bonus extras.**

PROJECT PARTICIPANT

# THE GREEN LAB



Alongside LiVS and Gap Filler, The Green Lab has been one of the City Council's core transitional partners. The Green Lab (previously Greening the Rubble) fosters human to nature connections by bringing greenery into urban environments. LiVS brokered many of the spaces that The Green Lab have used for their projects.

In the immediate post-quake years, they focused on temporary landscaping projects in the inner city, providing "something that wasn't rubble to look at". In more recent years, they have helped a variety of communities by setting up gardening and landscaping related to their kaupapa of fostering connection.

Currently, The Green Lab has a co-working space filled with indoor plants, called The Understorey. It works like the understorey in a forest, providing shelter for a diversity of people to connect and thrive.

*That sort of first group was a little bit guerrilla. They used to send seed bombs into the cordon zones and all sorts of things to literally green the rubble... a lot of it was just about providing something that wasn't rubble to look at.*



Understorey Tuarua.  
Photos: Federico Corradi

*We're interested in a deeper connection with local communities rather than exporting a model to other communities, which may or may not work ... We're very embedded in Ōtautahi...*

Khye,  
**The Green Lab**



Temple for Christchurch.  
Photos: Gaby Montejo

## TEMPLE FOR CHRISTCHURCH 2013.



An Art installation that encouraged contributors to write messages on the large-scale, temple-like construction before being burned at a community event. It contributed to the psychic wellbeing part of surviving well together. Organised by Hippathy Valentine. LiVS brokered the construction space in the Central City.

## WATCH THIS SPACE



Watch This Space is a charitable trust that empowers and celebrates street art in Ōtautahi Christchurch. This began with a free online street art map and has grown into tours, curation of work and soon, a new festival for the City.

Street art played a hugely important role in the transitional city. After the earthquake, street art served as public commentary on the shared experiences. As the rebuild got going, vacant concrete walls were transformed into incredible and inspiring works of art that captured attention worldwide.

LiVS have licenced dozens of spaces for murals over the last 10 years.

*That's one of the goals that we have, is creating a sustainable urban art ecosystem in the city, so that as a destination young people can grow up and go hey actually, you know what, I really love making art and I love making art in these types of places.*



Crossings, Dr Suits.  
Photo: Reuben Woods

*There's something empowering as well about having your art in a public space. You feel, as I say, that you've contributed, there's a stakeholder sense of pride.*

*There's a lot of important work in terms of shifting some of the perceptions that have been instilled ... also challenging the way that we conceive the value of art.*

Reuben,  
**Watch This Space**



Play Again?, Porta x Bols.  
Photo: Reuben Woods

# CARING FOR COMMONS

*How do we maintain, restore, and replenish the gifts of nature and intellect that all humans rely on to survive well? How do we care for our commons?*

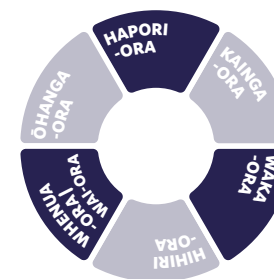
**JK Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy**

We all rely on natural and cultural commons to meet our everyday needs, although we don't often recognise it. Commons can include places that are shared by a community, or other resources that are accessible to a group of people.

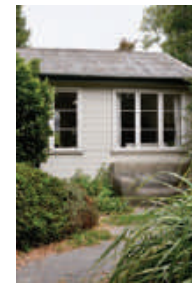
Communities using commons generally develop rules and relationships to care for them. They are generally not entirely open access, but can be. They need intentional care to prevent them becoming spaces that are degraded or that only benefit private individuals.

Investing in caring for commons can include things like putting a conservation covenant on a shared space, using a creative commons licence for a resource that could benefit many, opening up a privately owned space for common use. Many of the LiVS brokered projects help private landowners share their spaces for community use. The projects are developed, and more importantly maintained, through investments of time, energy and finances, for community use.

A commons has shared and wide access, use negotiated by a community, widely distributed benefits, care performed by community members and responsibility assumed by community members. It can have any form of ownership structure, as long as these other conditions are present.



The returns on investing in these commons are many – they can be seen in terms of enhanced living blue and green ecosystems (whenua ora | wai ora), in terms of more connected and just communities (hapori ora), and in terms of active neighbourhoods (waka ora).



Common Ground.  
Photos: Stephanie Defregger

## COMMON GROUND 2019.

A project in South Brighton where a row of shops used to be, now used as a pop-up café space, markets and other community events. LiVS brokered the space in 2018 and have supported the project since.



Hassals Lane.  
Photos: Stephanie Defregger

## HASSALS LANE 2019.

A project in Waltham that supports an alternative theatre group, community gardens and several artists. LiVS brokered the site in 2018 and continues to work with the community there.



## EAST X EAST



East x East (ExE) is an outdoor community space on red-zoned land. The name East x East reflects its location in the eastern suburb of Burwood at the eastern end of New Brighton Road. LiVS has held the licence for this land, from Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), since 2018.

LiVS curated and enabled a range of community projects, including a pump track, disc golf, community gardens, art installations, events and more. In the near future the land, alongside the rest of the Red Zone, will be handed over to the City Council.

*East x East was about reconnecting the community with the space. It aimed to give new, positive purpose to the area, offer homes to community groups and projects, and encourage new audiences to visit and explore. The hope was that some of the wounds left by the red-zoning process could be healed and the community could start imagining what might be possible in the red zone.*



Luca and Maisie with Tree Hill,  
East x East.  
Photo: Hannah Watkinson

*Things will change a lot in the future with the land, but at the same time, it's really grown into something that the community really loves, and so that is super-special.*

Hannah,  
**ExE Coordinator**



Disc Golf is a sport with rising popularity, which requires little investment to begin playing and is usually publicly accessible. It thus has a very different demographic from traditional golf.

The ExE course was designed so that the space can be used by serious disc golf players alongside amateurs and families.

Disc Golf was considered a key component of the East X East project because of the community it would reach and how it would encourage people to visit and explore the area. The Disc Golf course at ExE was installed by Vortica in 2019.

*LiVS originally contacted me about East x East, and said they had funding for a course. Basically, I couldn't burn rubber fast enough to get down here to start designing a course.*

*The process was smooth; they were very supportive. They gave me pretty much a free hand after they had given me the design for the area.*

Chris,  
**Vortica**



Disc Golf Course at East x East.  
Photos: Chris Davies

## REDZONE DRONE RACING



The Redzone Drone Racing Inc started out as a Facebook group of drone builders and programmers who used to organise meetups around the red zone to race. Eventually the group was able to secure a spot in ExE.

Drone racers steer custom-built racing drones through a purpose-built racing course. The course is made up of slalom-like gates and poles that are easily changeable. The pilots have a visual feed of the drone directly into goggles that they wear and use a remote control to guide their drone at high speeds around the course.

Since taking on a spot in East x East, the Redzone Drone Racing Inc have gone on to secure funding for technology, gates, and safety equipment. They have also hosted Beginner Days as well as National Championships in late 2021.

*Before we were in East X East we moved between a few other spots inside of the red zone. We had to change a few times before we got where we are now due to the red zone changing and noise.*

*If LiVS weren't here, we would still be karting all our gear around in the back of our cars and stuff, and trying to find other red zone spots.*

Nathan,  
**Redzone Drone Racing Inc**



Drone-Racing Event at ExE.  
Photo: Nathan van Slooten



Cashel Mall Locky Dock.  
Photo: Big Street Bikers



Avondale Community Gardens.  
Photo: Hannah Watkinson

**BIG STREET  
BIKERS**



**AVONDALE COMMUNITY  
GARDENS**



# ENCOUNTERING OTHERS

*What types of relationships do we have with the people and environments that enable us to survive well? How much do we know about those who live in distant places and provide the inputs that we use to meet our needs? How do we encounter others as we seek to survive well?*

**JK Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy**

Cities are often spaces we encounter with others. A CEROI approach to thinking about investing in ‘spaces of encounter’ encourages us to connect with others in ways that support their wellbeing as well as ours. Many of the projects that LiVS has supported enable supportive encounters with others.

People often encounter each other as they go about meeting their daily needs; activities like shopping, getting help from neighbours, having access to shared commons and through purposeful connections. But these face to face encounters have reduced with new digital encounters and online retail opportunities.

Some of the projects that LiVS has enabled infuse face to face encounter back into the city; including through dancing together in public, through food collectives that involved public preparation and shared consumption of food.



The kinds of investments that have supported these projects include time, energy, food, household goods, toiletries and more. We can see the returns on these in terms of enhanced spaces for community connection (hapori ora) and localised economic transactions (ōhanga ora).



Ars Acustica (2019)  
 Photo: Stuart Lloyd-Harris

### FREE THEATRE

An avant-garde theatre company (founded in 1979) that LiVS have supported with pop-up performance spaces as well as their home hub.



I think Life in Vacant Spaces is the kind of organisation that Christchurch would be in a very different position without.

It has supported and continues to support a lot of things that would otherwise be unrealised, and it has contributed to the city being an excellent place to live.

PROJECT PARTICIPANT



Jess Lynch was the owner of taco-based Food Truck, Mamacita's. She was one of a handful of regular food trucks based at The Commons (a LiVS licenced site) after the earthquakes that formed The Food Collective.

The Food Collective helped shape the evolving food scene in Christchurch post-quake and enabled other food trucks around the city. Whether it was live events held at the Pallet Pavilion or providing lunch for office workers returning to the city, there was always something to get involved with for Jess.

After running Mamacita's as a food truck for three years, Jess opened the Sun Dog Diner in Papanui Road, stepping into the new, permanent Christchurch. The business focuses on using local, recycled, handmade and energy efficient materials.



Mamacita's Truck.  
Photo: Jessica Lynch

*I was very interested in the idea of engaging the space and activating the space. So I started what we called the Food Collective there and was bringing on a little bit of a - we were trying to make a little hub there with some different food vendors and stuff like that.*

Jess,  
**Mamacitas**



FESTA 2016, We Have The Means.  
Photo: Jonny Knopp,  
Peanut Productions



## FESTA

The Festival of Transitional Architecture was a weekend long major event that encouraged people to enjoy and participate in the city differently, as well as encouraging creative thinking about the possibilities for architecture in the city of Ōtautahi Christchurch and elsewhere. LiVS brokered numerous spaces in support of FESTA.

## DANCE-O-MAT



The Dance-O-Mat combines a dancefloor with a washing machine that has been converted into a speaker system. Plug in a device or connect with Bluetooth, put your \$2 in and get 30 minutes of lighting, sound and good times.

The Dance-O-Mat responded to a lack of spaces for dance in post-quake Christchurch. It has been used by thousands of people, from all over the world, including Prince Charles and Camilla, and the King of the Netherlands!

LiVS brokered several of the sites that Dance-O-Mat has used in its many years. It is now a much beloved feature of Christchurch's landscape and has been replicated in a number of other cities with Gap Filler's support.

*We started socialising the idea of what became the Dance-O-Mat many years ago, and people sort of laughed and said well, no one in Christchurch will use it because it's too conservative here...*



Dance-O-Mat.  
Photo: Gap Filler

*...A week and a half after we'd removed it and had actually put it in storage for the winter, we went by and found two people dancing in the dirt listening to music on their phones, because the Dance-O-Mat had been there. That's the biggest success. We changed the way they thought about what it was okay to do in the city.*

Ryan,  
**Gap Filler**



Unity Garden.  
Photos: Hannah Watkinson  
and Rebecca Parnham

# UNITY GARDEN 2020.

LiVS brokered the space for Giving Seeds of Love to develop a garden after the Mosque attacks, in order to celebrate diversity and encourage the coming together of all people.





Art Chemist by Audrey Baldwin.  
 Photo: Janneth Gill



Angelah Rose modelling at  
 Lunchtime Sketch Club in the  
 BNZ Centre.  
 Photo: Jen Shields

**ART  
 CHEMIST**



**GLITTERBOX PURSUITS  
 WINTER WANDER**





ShoPop installation by Audrey Baldwin and Khye Hitchcock



Milk Fight. Photo: Ed Lust

SHOPOP



THE SOCIAL -  
MILK FIGHT





The Social - Street Residency

## THE SOCIAL - STREET RESIDENCY

A caravan residency: at least 6 visiting artists lived inside a retro caravan on an empty gravel site for a week each and made site specific works. All artists were from outside of Christchurch. Sites included: Agropolis Site on High St, the Convention Centre site on Peterborough St, the Unimed site at 165 Gloucester St.



Stuck performance by Audrey Baldwin and Julia Croucher

## UNIMED SITE PERFORMANCE

Stuck performance by Audrey Baldwin and Julia Croucher. "A performance piece involving consumption, construction and lots of chewing gum."



# INVESTING IN FUTURES

*How do we store and use our surplus and savings so that people and the planet are supported and sustained? How do we invest for the future?*

**JK Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy**

Investing in the wellbeing of our future generations and our planet seems an urgent task for this decade. LiVS has enabled a number of projects that directly invest in the futures of specific individuals changing the world, and in the wellbeing of Ōtautahi Christchurch.

While investments can be financial, they can also be time, energy, and creative and emotional input. These are investments that are not short term. These are investments in transforming our city and beyond. Here we include investments in making affordable and safe work spaces for artists and creatives, investments in local fresh food economies, and investments in the lives of young people who might go on to lead the next generation.

Investing involves creating and somehow retaining a ‘surplus’ to be invested. But this investment doesn’t have to just be invested in a single business with a financial return. The surpluses created through using private land for common use, for example, enable new transformative wellbeing initiatives to get off the ground with lower start up or ongoing costs. LiVS has a network of supportive property owners and managers who enable this investment in future generations to be made.



The returns on these investments include wellbeing enhancing buildings and places (kainga ora), healthy blue and green living ecosystems (whenua ora | wai ora) and more connected communities (hapori ora).



Salt Lane Studios is a co-working space for creatives in Christchurch. It started out as The Corner Store which hosted studio spaces for creatives, a gallery and Smokey T's. LiVS subsidized the costs of spaces for artists and creatives that were just starting out. This programme helped test and refine the idea for future iterations.

Eventually founder Hannah Watkinson established Salt Lane Studios in Tuam Street. LiVS again ran a programme that subsidized spaces, supported business workshops and grew capability on site.

Now, Salt Lane runs sustainably without LiVS input and supports over 20 creatives to work, connect and create.



Salt Lane Studios.  
Photos: Charlie Rose Creative

*To have a functioning practice, whether that's commercial or purely artistic, you need a few things. One of them is a place to make work, one of them is a support network, and one of them is a way to get that work out into the world. We focus on the first two. The third, inevitably, sometimes happens.*

Hannah,  
**Salt Lane Studios**



Salt Lane Studios.  
Photos: Charlie Rose Creative

**[We] would look very differently if it wasn't for the support of organisations specifically like Life in Vacant Spaces, who have been an absolute supporter for the last few years, in a real nuts and bolts way that has enabled us to grow and to develop and to see how far we can continue growing.**

PROJECT PARTICIPANT

## A LOCAL FOOD PROJECT



Alex Davies returned to New Zealand from the UK just after the earthquakes. He, along with a handful of other chefs, began cooking in the on-site earthen pizza oven at The Commons (a LiVS licenced site). Alex also contributed to a number of Gap Filler projects such as A Local Food Project and Soup.

His cooking nourished folks looking to return to the city when so many businesses were closed. He bought people together and used the opportunity to find his own style using local, organic, and sustainable foods. Alex went on to open other restaurants, such as Shop Eight in New Regent Street and his current restaurant Gatherings.

*...activating spaces like that, it essentially gave me confidence which I didn't necessarily have. It gave me an opportunity to push the boundaries with limited risk to myself, had I signed up to big lease with a greedy landlord. I might have been little less free in what I was doing. So it's definitely helped there for sure*



Alex at The Commons

*And then that exposed me to an audience as well, which in turn ended up resulting in me having a 50 percent share in a restaurant. After I finished at that place, I had the confidence to go on and on my own place.*

Alex,  
**A Local Food Project**



Kowhai Collective.  
Photos: Stephanie Defregger

## KOWHAI COLLECTIVE 2019.



Kowhai Collective were first supported as a Christmas pop-up in the Central City; they extended their agreement several times before moving to a new, permanent location.



Fiksate Gallery, Robert Seikon  
and Anastasia Papaleonidea;  
Joel Hart Exhibition.  
Photos: Charlie Rose Creative

## FIKSATE 2018.

LiVS supported Fiksate, now New Zealand's leading urban art gallery, with their first space in the Central City.





Cultivate Christchurch has inspired people all over the world with its grounded, place-attentive approach to youth wellbeing in a disaster recovery setting. It integrates youth employment training, social work, and skills development into the operations of an organic urban farming system.

The organisation supplies produce to local people via vege boxes, and to hospitality customers (while taking the restaurants' organic waste for composting via e-bike). The organisation works with youth in need of additional care beyond that which is accessible to them via family, government or otherwise in the community.

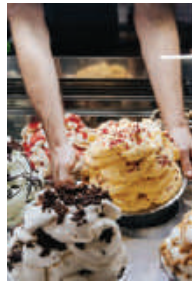
The site Cultivate Christchurch used for over six years was brokered by LiVS. The site was previously a residential site that is still privately owned and awaiting development. Cultivate, have recently moved on (after contributing over 900 tonnes of soil!) but continue to work with youth across a number of other urban farms around Christchurch.



Peterborough Street site,  
2018. Photo: Alison Watkins

*I've come to this place and it's good because I'm not focused on what's going up in my head or whatever. I'm just like on my hands, I'm here with the world now, I've got good people around me and I think that's what matters to me.*

Youth graduate,  
**Cultivate Christchurch**



Photos: Neat Places

## ROLICKIN' GELATO 2013.

LiVS brokered the space for the original Rollickin' trailer.



# CONSUMPTION & DISTRIBUTING SURPLUS

*What materials and energy do we use up in the process of surviving well? What do we consume?*

*What do we do with what is left over after we've met our survival needs? How do we make decisions about this excess? How do we distribute surplus?*

**JK Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy**

For urban wellbeing in Ōtautahi Christchurch and beyond, we need to make sure we are consuming sustainably, in ways that do not harm the possibility of future generations surviving well. We also need to think about how we distribute our surpluses to enrich social and environmental wellbeing.

Many of the projects LiVS has supported have enabled people to rethink their consumption habits, and to redistribute and repurpose things that might otherwise be considered waste. They have also encouraged people to give from their surplus time and resources to others in need or the community at large.

People have invested time and energy and creative know-how into a variety of projects that do this – from recycling and repurposing materials, to reducing the need to consume through providing local resources.

The returns on these investments include new communities of people with the know-how for repurposing and recycling – contributing to a circular community economy (ōhanga ora), access to sustainable transport (waka ora), caring and connected communities that share (hapori ora) among other things.





RAD Bikes began as a Gap Filler project in 2013, testing out the idea of a bicycle recycling and assisted DIY repairs centre. It became an independent organisation in 2015.

RAD is improving access to cycling, minimising waste and supporting community well-being. RAD provides access to bicycles, bike tools, parts and servicing advice. They reduce bike related waste and teach repair skills in a safe and welcoming environment for people to connect, learn new skills and help one another.

LiVS brokered the initial site for RAD and have supported them where possible since. RAD hosts club nights, after school workshops and recently opened a second indoor space in the Central City.

*It's pretty rare that things would get chucked in the dump. Really early on, we did a waste minimisation research project looking at everything we did. We just realised the biggest thing we can do is get more bikes out there.*

Jess,  
**RAD Bikes**



RAD Bikes.  
Photo: Isaac Spedding



The Christchurch Aunties was formed in 2017 by Heather Milne, Heather Locke, and Sarah Butterfield. The organisation started providing practical assistance for two women's refuges in Christchurch. They utilise social media to mobilise the wider community to donate needed items and funds for women leaving violent relationships.

Christchurch Aunties used a LiVS space on Hassalls Lane, (the old Seven Oaks school site) for storing donations. Their space became known as "The Aunties' Attic". This enabled them to move the donations out of their homes, to give some breathing space to the organisers and provide more space to support the scaling up of operations.

The Aunties now help four women's refuges, one transitional housing agency, and eight community organisations. They were supported by over 4,500 'Aunties' in 2021. Additional community organisations such as PIPS, Dress For Success, and Linwood Community Corner Trust benefit from the Aunties organisation.

*It started when I supported a woman who had moved down to Christchurch to escape a violent ex... So I started supporting - I started finding what she needed through my contacts.*



Photos: Heather Milne

*In the last couple of years it's grown to us supporting 15 organisations and there's a team of about 4,700 aunties around Christchurch.*

*...We're in the business of connecting...*

Heather,  
**Christchurch Aunties**



Sound Garden.  
Photo: Erica Austin

# SOUND GARDEN 2013.

A collaborative project that used recycled materials to create a musical garden.



With local food there's also the environmental aspect of lowering food miles, which is why I've always celebrated and endorsed the urban farming practices, because they're vital to our food security and to a sustainable kind of food system.

PROJECT PARTICIPANT



Meat Prize performance by  
Hana Aoake



Rekindle Workshop.  
Photo: Johannes Van Kan

# AGROPOLIS PERFORMANCES



# REKINDLE



# FINAL COMMENTS & THANKS

The amazing creative projects that have taken place over the years on our many LiVS sites continue to inspire us and many others. As Ōtautahi Christchurch moves forward into different social and ecological challenges, we feel confident that LiVS will continue to have a role in brokering the use of vacant spaces for transformative urban wellbeing projects.

Thank you for celebrating this milestone with us.

We also want to thank

- > **Our participants**  
without their great ideas there would be no need for LiVS.
- > **Our landowners**  
without their generous support there would be no spaces for use.
- > **Our funders, sponsors and other supporters**  
without their help LiVS would not have survived.
- > **Our partners**  
without their learnings and inspiration there would be no growth.
- > **Our Trust Board and team, past and present**  
without their work LiVS would not have flourished.

We firmly believe that the things needed to make Ōtautahi Christchurch vibrant and dynamic already exist within our city – and we are passionate about helping to create a city where anything can happen and anyone can give something a go.

We look forward to the next 10 years of Life in Vacant Spaces with you all.

**There is always going to be transitional space. Underutilised parts of the city. To have someone who is connecting those dots for communities and wonderful landlords or people who have the land, then that's a really valuable service...**

PROJECT PARTICIPANT

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**This book celebrates a decade of Life in Vacant Spaces, affectionately known as LiVS, and the collection of over 700 projects supported during this time.**

**LiVS is a charitable trust that brokers spaces for community groups, creative projects, social enterprises and start-ups. They connect owners of vacant land and buildings with people who have big ideas to fill those spaces.**

**Projects that they have supported include Gap Filler, Rollickin' Gelato, Cultivate Christchurch, RAD Bikes and more!**

Life  in   
 Vacant  
 Spaces 



National  
**SCIENCE**  
Challenges

