



Interview with [Kathy Holowko](http://kathyholowko.com.au/)¹

What is Wild City?

Wild City has been exhibited in the ArtPlay gallery as a collaborative sculpture that expresses children's thoughts and ideas about creating animal habitats in urban spaces and cities. The project provided an enjoyable experience for learning, making and creative expression through a series of workshops for children that were based on real environmental issues. In the workshops, I provided a miniature sculptural city, introduced children to ideas of human and animal architecture and showed hybrid examples of co-existence. The children drew, planted and constructed their ideas onto the mini city turning it into a lush green space that considered and included wild animals as citizens in urban spaces. The city became a hybrid of human and animal habitats. The children's work was curated into the final collaborative exhibition along with a video that captured descriptions of what they made and why it was important to them.

Who was involved and why?

The project involved around fifteen ecologists, rangers and researchers including City of Melbourne Rangers, an insect specialist, urban ecologists, a frog specialist, a bird conservationist, and an urban animal movement specialist. The specialists helped me to further my research in urban co-existence with animals and connect it to the specifics of Melbourne. Many of them actively participated in the workshops with children, delivering interesting talks on species that live in Melbourne or could be reintroduced to it by explaining the habitats they need to survive.

How did the children respond to what the ecologists, rangers and researchers offered?

The children were introduced to real issues around animal habitat and movement in cities and urban spaces, giving them an opportunity to think about positive and imaginative changes that could be made to these spaces. At the end of the session they could witness how the city had been reimagined as a green and lush habitat for humans and animals.

What did the specialists get from the project?

I was pleasantly surprised by the level of interest shown by the ecologists, rangers, conservationists and researchers. They were very excited to get involved in an artistic project and were committed to engaging with the children.

The children's voice and creativity was viewed by the experts as an interesting and important way to help implement their own conservation works and ideas to the community. The research day I had with the experts was viewed as a fun brainstorming day that gave them an opportunity to think big, utopian and creatively, and to learn about how artistic practice can open doorways to expressions of the ideas they value.

What else did the collaboration offer the project?

I really enjoyed the learning and connections I have made with the experts in urban ecology. It made links to real life scenarios in a site-specific way, taking the development and implementation of this children's workshop into a space that engaged with the City of Melbourne beyond the participants of the workshop.

¹ <http://kathyholowko.com.au/>

How has working with non-arts partners changed, developed or informed your artistic practice (if at all)?

I got to make many great contacts with people working in urban ecology, an area I am very interested in. I have already been able to use their knowledge in other projects and hope that these relationships can be built upon in future works.

Do you have any advice for artists working with children who want to collaborate with other specialists?

I would say, 'Do it!' In my experience people are really willing to talk or get involved in artistic projects. Don't ask for too much time, be organised in presenting your idea, and reliable in your dealings.

I found the hardest part was finding the right people. My *Wild City* collection of specialists was the result of building good relationships over time, where my initial contact person knew I was committed to the topic and opened up a gateway to their colleagues.

Make a decision about whether you are an interpreter of your specialist or if they are able to be directly involved - both ways are interesting ways of working. I was lucky to have a group experienced or very interested in being able to communicate with children.