

A stylized, colorful map of a city, likely Melbourne, Australia, showing various blocks and streets in shades of red, blue, green, and purple. The map is overlaid with a dark blue gradient at the bottom.

The Future is Landscape

Leading academics, designers, policy makers, industry leaders and practitioners explore and discuss the crucial role of the built environment in creating a greener and more sustainable future.

Foreword

Landscape needs us to demonstrate what can be achieved

“Participation is critical for the future of landscape – and we need to understand how to enable the public to contribute to the conversations that we’re having.”

Coalitions and partnerships will be critically important in the future of urban landscape.

We will see unusual partners come together to deliver projects in a particular way.

And these partners will mutually benefit from working together while also serving the public good.

Effective grassroots communication strategies and enabling of social license will enable citizens to contribute to the conversations around landscape.

Education at all levels – from primary school education through to higher degree research – deliver significant outcomes when it comes to sustainability.

The landscape architects of the future will create diverse and sustainable open spaces, in increasingly dense urban environments.

The environmental impact of dense urban development brings with it a need to reduce its footprint, by creating diverse outdoor environments and public open spaces.

In addition to responding to the challenges of urbanisation, the necessary work of landscape architects is increasingly in focus, with climate change and the public health pandemic rapidly changing how we use public outdoor spaces.

We need to encourage people to walk and to use active mobility as a means of facilitating health outcomes.

It is about both improving people’s wellbeing and the environment.

We can set this path by demonstrating what can be achieved and the rest will follow.



Professor Martyn Hook

Dean, School of Architecture and Urban Design
Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor, College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University



In focus: Practice Research Symposium (PRS)

RMIT’s Practice Research Symposium (PRS) is a biannual meeting bringing together supervisors, observers and practitioners engaged in a practice-based PhD program in the areas of design and creative arts.

The RMIT PhD program was originally developed by RMIT’s School of Architecture and Design and has been taught in Australia for more than three decades.

At the PRS, RMIT invites candidates to reflect upon the nature of their creative practice with a critical, reflective framework to articulate the contribution it offers to their discipline and community of practice.

Through this community, RMIT offers a set of solutions and probable futures not only about design but also about how we understand the emerging landscape.

To learn more about RMIT’s doctoral program, which is recognised worldwide for its impact and innovative approach, visit: practice-research.com

Perspectives

Landscape is a rich platform that connects the world

“We believe that the future is landscape and rather than seeing it as an opposition to the city, we see landscape as vital to the significance of place.”

The value of landscape

COVID-19 has confronted us with the fact that everything in a globalised world is connected and as landscape is a concept deeply associated with ideas of connectedness, this raises the value of landscape thinking.

Part of this has been anchored in the value of seeing and working with landscape as a rich conceptual platform that connects to many aspects of the world that are more frequently seen and addressed in isolation from one another.

Rather than seeing landscape as an opposition to the city or a disposable or optional feature of its constructed reality, we see landscape as vital to the significance of place and its effective and robust ecological and social functioning.

The importance of our cities' living structure and the role that open space systems play in people's health, as well as the living systems of water, vegetation, birds, animals and insects, has been dramatically emphasised during the global pandemic.

Financial commitment to a greener future

The huge scale of recent financial commitments for a greener urban future, such as those recently outlined for Europe, makes it possible that landscape thinking and an emphasis on connectivity may be used to further inform the design of urban spaces.

It can also potentially be used to strengthen relationships between places, cultures and living systems across scales of space and time and to emphatically embody these relationships that are so vital to the quality of all forms of life.

The value of such thinking can be magnified when significant resources are committed to greener urban futures.

The design of the urban landscape is the integrative process that can bring this about.

Landscape architecture at RMIT

Landscape architecture has been taught at RMIT University since the 1970s and has a long tradition of ambitious and socially committed design-led teaching, research and practice.

We have a strong legacy of practitioners who explore how their practice can engage with critical challenges in contemporary life, using the medium of landscape as a physical, conceptual and political tool for positive and transformational change.

We engage with the issues at stake in the world, with the pressure these exert on the landscape systems that constitute the physical reality that we wish to influence, and with the agendas of the many industry partners with whom we are working.



Dr Katrina Simon
Associate Professor
Associate Dean, Landscape Architecture
RMIT University



[Hear more from Dr Katrina Simon](#)

In focus: A distinctive focus on teaching and research

There is pressure exerted on landscape systems that still constitute the physical reality that we wish to influence and on the many industry partners' agendas with whom we are working.

To undertake this and take it in a new direction, there is also a distinctive focus at RMIT in teaching and research on experimental methods in investigating sites, systems as well as generative techniques and design that mobilise and connect across different domains of knowledge.

This means engaging quantitative experiential site investigation with quantitative modes of measurement and analysis, learning from and responding to Indigenous ways of knowing and enabling students to construct their distinctive ways of working.

Putting these techniques to work to imagine and create possibilities for a more integrated, productive, livable and living landscape future will help to continue to connect to projects and conversations worldwide.

Perspectives

Long-term urban strategy and rapid reaction

“The pandemic has exposed how problematic our relationship with nature is – we clearly need to repair and make something better and not just return to normal.”

The resilient city

London faces the twin shocks of COVID-19 and Brexit: a new disrupted reality that is only the dress rehearsal for the inevitable future upheavals of the climate emergency.

London was the first truly global city: facing global threats, can it become one of the world's most resilient cities?

Now – as we are seeing with the direction of city leadership internationally – is the perfect time to establish such a strategy.

This combination of long-term planning and the capacity to quickly react – slow and fast gears of policymaking – is key to enacting transformational change in the city.

An energetic public sector

In the UK, the dominance of the market and an impulse to shrink the public sphere has affected the government's ability to adequately respond to national emergencies.

It is now essential to look into more effective complex partnerships that nurture an energetic state sector.

City mayors have become central to this role, drawing upon their convening powers, establishing joined-up policymaking, and investing patient capital to achieve long-term objectives beyond the immediate economic cycle.

In every city around the world, mayors and public administrations are realising that a city's landscapes, streets and open spaces are a means to extend health and social policies for public benefit.

15-minute city

Cities have always been laboratories of innovation and one pervasive concept that has become familiar through the pandemic is the idea of the 15-minute city.

Implicit in the concept of the 15-minute city is the idea of proximate and heterogeneous urban uses.

An ecologist will confirm that nature detests a monoculture and we need to maintain rich and balanced urban ecologies in our cities as much as in our natural surroundings, creating, for example, a more intimate relationship between where we work and where we live.

Through the pandemic, we have all become more aware that we are fundamentally entangled with the natural world.

Rather than the false dichotomy between nature and culture, urban and natural, we need to move towards shaping a productive city with a closer relationship with natural landscapes.



Professor Tom Holbrook
Director
5th Studio
Mayor's Design Advocate
Greater London Authority



[Hear more from Professor Tom Holbrook](#)

In focus: London, a city of 1,000 villages

London has been described as a 'city of 1,000 villages' – and while this conception holds a certain truth, it also has the potential to be an anti-urban sentiment.

Today we are finding that the zonal separation of functions in London stemming from this previous post-crisis moment is problematic.

As a practice, we have noticed that the capital's greatest challenges now lie in precisely those interstitial areas between the 'villages', where different urban ecologies interrelate.

Our ability to rapidly transform power relationships in our cities is exemplified by our work to transform over 50 streets in Westminster for socially-distanced outside dining.

At the same time, and in a different gear, is our work with the Greater London Authority on the city's Royal Docks: a huge piece of obsolete infrastructure, recently revealed as the new home for London's City Hall.

Perspectives

The future of landscape is about regenerative design for people

“We’re at a point where we have to face crises – not only an environmental one – and we must act for the future of our planet.”

New approach to urban design

Humans are the primary cause of permanent planetary changes and crises that we have to face, setting a vision and changing paradigms.

Beyond thinking that putting a green carpet on the city would be enough, this vision needs to take on a completely different approach to city planning, urban design and landscape design.

It is about reconsidering the city’s concept as a city made of neighbourhoods based on short distances.

An inclusive city made for people and nature across different social infrastructures.

Infrastructure design plays a key role to shape regenerative cities where natures can come back and flourish.

Change the streets to change the city

Cities’ infrastructure has to focus on returning relevance to people and nature rather than cars.

If we want to change our cities, we need to change our streets first – and this is where we are at right now.

We have to change our modes of transport and the idea that people have to rely on cars.

COVID-19 has made us realise how important it is to make room for other means of transportation, such as walking and cycling.

Tactical urbanism

Tactical urbanism is a tool that can accelerate change, towards the implementation of the future city vision.

It is a methodology that can also involve citizens to deliver such change.

The best metric to measure the results of tactical urbanism is to test how people respond and adapt to change.

Over the past six months and as a result of the pandemic, we have seen cities around the world adopting tactical urbanism as a mainstream tool to accelerate change.

We have now learned that tactical urbanism can show people the immediate results of potential change – so much more effective than just debating about it.

In Milan, over the last two years, we have delivered light, quick and cheap transformations of public spaces and streets through the Open Plazas and Open Streets programs.



Demetrio Scopelliti

Director of Urban Planning and Public Space Design
Mobility and Environment Agency, City of Milan



[Hear more from Demetrio Scopelliti](#)

In focus: Milan 2030

Milan is working to change perspectives on three main topics: urban design, infrastructure and mobility.

The Milan 2030 plan introduces a series of regeneration areas by bringing the city and private actors together to face environmental challenges to transform underused spaces into beacons of sustainability with new uses, thanks to the C40’s Reinventing cities initiative.

The design standards for these spaces will prioritise clean energy, green economy, zero-carbon ecosystem services and reforestation issues.

At the same time, Milan is also working on reclaiming public space for the people.

The idea is to make the city better for people and more livable for all citizens, starting from the neighbourhood unit.

Perspectives

Buildings and communities to support health and wellbeing

“The social determinants of health are economic and social – but sadly many of these are shaped by the money, power and resources that people have.”

Landscape’s impact on health

We need to be matching best practice in design and construction on medical and scientific research.

Buildings and communities must be harnessed as vehicles to support human health and wellbeing.

The importance of measurement

There is nothing more important than the ability to measure outcomes and the opportunity to develop a roadmap that gives us clarity on what we are developing.

Measurement and certification drive accountability and change.

Looking at the example of air quality, we know that poor air quality is an environmental cause of premature mortality for close to seven million people a year.

This is why in a WELL community we require ongoing air quality testing during the construction and post-construction phase.

Looking at healthy drinking water, we know there are heavy metals, pesticides, and antibiotics that sit in our water systems.

We require water testing procedures and periodic measurements so that people can have access to clean water.

We have to start designing places where the easy healthy choice becomes the visible choice.

For example, there are many locations in the UK where there is no access to healthy food – it’s just fast food options.

This is not only about having access to urban agriculture within our communities but having supermarkets that offer healthy alternatives.

If we can demonstrate that we can impact the number of doctor visits or the cost of medical care in those communities, we will be able to start providing these resources on the ground to the people who most need them.



Ann Marie Aguilar
Senior Vice President, EMEA
International WELL Building Institute



[Hear more from Ann Marie Aguilar](#)



In focus: WELL Community Standard

The WELL Community Standard is the first district scale rating system exclusively designed for health and wellness, which aims to set a new global benchmark for healthy communities and impact individuals not just within the walls of their home or workplace but throughout the public realm.

This is currently still in its pilot stage, so there is great flexibility in interpreting the requirements by looking at the feedback gathered and working with industry experts to refine and enhance it.

These concepts encompass areas for intervention across the urban landscape and look at air quality metrics, water quality and light levels to start integrating appropriate acoustic levels and thermal comfort with healthy and safe material usage.

The project scope and boundaries are areas that can contain public infrastructure, future proposed or existing buildings and landscaping, renovations or expansions to existing developments, infill developments or even new constructions while delivering health and wellness benefits as well as sustainable design.

Perspectives

Approaching landscape in Brussels in a pandemic context

“Curating landscape is a way to play a role in changing culture.”

Approaching landscape in a pandemic

The pandemic in Brussels highlights the split between the ‘high city’, the fringe of the city less affected, and the ‘low city’, the industrial valley where the denser and poorest urban tissue can be found.

Our practice, Taktyk landscape+urbanism, was tasked with addressing the problem of flooding in such fragile neighbourhoods.

People with low socioeconomic backgrounds were living in areas that faced annual flooding.

Setting open space as a framework to regenerate the city and how it impacts the people who live in fragile neighbourhoods must be considered.

The current responses, adapting streetscape to increase water management are unable to cope with the issue.

The problem we now face is how do we speed up the answers as well as upscale it, our approach was to identify the spatial capital of the urban tissue to build new Coalitions for Water Management.

Solidarity through Watershed coalition

The work was executed at the scale of the watershed working across local, regional, national and private properties.

Doing so, we stressed a form of solidarity between the healthy part of the city to the part at risk using the context of a landscape biennial to expose our research – new typologies of spaces were researched through design.

The ambition was to test at the scale of a municipality design prototypes that could be replicated at the metropolitan scale.

It involved restructuring the heritage park systems into sponge parks.

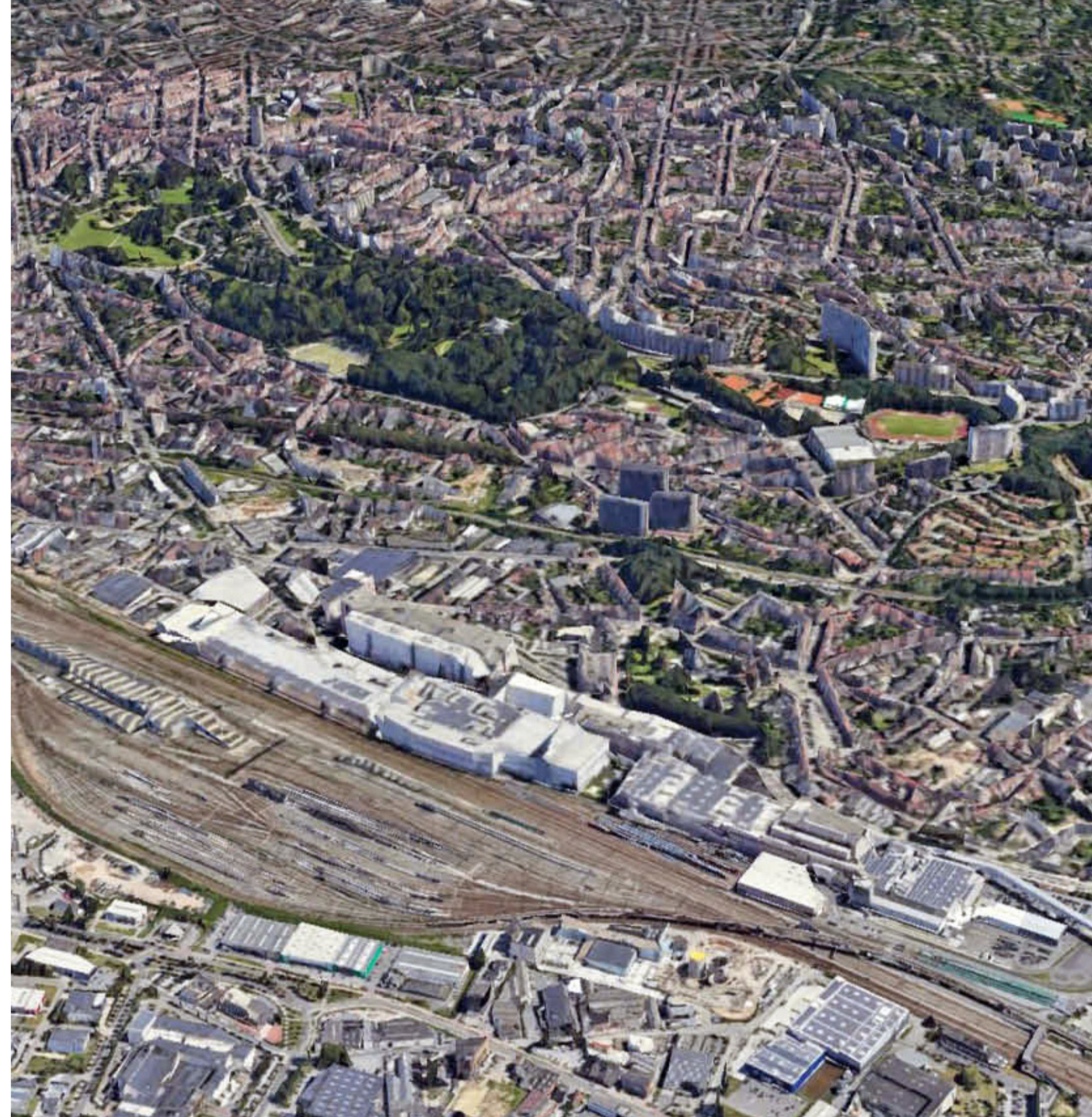
Three living labs towards health landscapes at a regional scale

The project led to three living labs, with the first one being ‘sponge parks’, based on the capacity of the ground to collect and retain water.

The second was the living track labs envisioning new ecological infrastructure at the city scale.

The third is the health gardens network, which is used to promote the exchange and fostering of bio-cultural knowledge and health practices from Brussels’ cosmopolitan society.

This current research involved the expertise of inhabitants, ethnobotanists, anthropologists, doctors, and pharmacists.



Dr Thierry Kandjee

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[Hear more from Dr Thierry Kandjee](#)

In focus: Collaboration with Audi

The Audi factory is using a third of the municipality territory, and we wanted to accommodate the Integrated Water Management system within their current spaces.

We approached them to bring them along the trajectory of rethinking their role as a cooling infrastructure influenced by the prevailing wind for the city.

The discussions with Audi were very complex because they are still producing electric cars, but they are starting to move and reflect about their future and how they will adapt to it.

Today they are becoming a partner in the redevelopment of the projects and they’re starting to reduce parking spaces used for employees to expand the system, and that’s a very concrete example of an emerging partnership which is currently in process for the city.

Looking forward

We focus on strengthening joint efforts on urban development

“RMIT is closely involved in the development of the research and innovation agenda for an inclusive and health promoting built environment in Europe.”

COVID-19 has changed our lives and transformed our built environment – turning our homes into libraries, cafes, work spaces and play spaces. It has returned biodiversity to our cities and shown us what clean air feels like. The pandemic is an unparalleled call to action to drive sustainability and transform the way we live.

As governments are starting to invest in construction and infrastructure as part of their economic recovery packages, it is an opportunity to be proactive and advance and deliver buildings and infrastructure to develop cities that not only address climate change and energy challenges but also have an inclusive human-centric approach.

Landscape urbanism is at the heart of that as it looks into how we can create these spaces that drive socio, ecological and economic development impact.

At RMIT Europe, we're focused on strengthening joint efforts on urban development and bringing knowledge into action on topics such as the development of 100 positive energy districts and neighborhoods, the 15-minute city, and how we rethink urban mobility systems and space, as well as how to downsize district donuts, an integrated approach for urban greening and circularity transitions.

We are also progressing another partnership called Built4People, which is about placing citizens at the heart of the low carbon transition in buildings and districts.

We support the European Commission's research and innovation agenda, based on our involvement in the European Construction Technology Platform where we lead a committee focused on inclusive and health conducive built environment design.

As part of the preparation of the next European Research and Innovation Framework Program, Horizon Europe, new mechanisms are being developed for public-private partnerships. And one of those partnerships will be focusing on topics around sustainability in the built environment, driving urban transitions to a sustainable future.



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About this publication

This publication is an outcome of the global webinar The Future is Landscape hosted by RMIT Europe on 25 November 2020.

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Published December 2020

About Landscape Architecture at RMIT

RMIT Landscape Architecture is a world leading design program that investigates and proposes better ways of living in a complex and rapidly changing world.

Our specialised program combines art, science, nature and culture to design natural, urban, private and public spaces. Learn from acclaimed local and international landscape architects, architects and urban designers and expand your skills to contribute to the future of design research and practice.

To learn more about Landscape Architecture at RMIT, visit rmit.edu.au

About RMIT Europe

RMIT's European hub in Barcelona, Spain, is the gateway for European research, industry, government and enterprise to innovation and talent in Australia and Asia.

We leverage the University's global connections to deliver an international dimension to research and innovation beyond Europe's borders.

We provide early access to the next generation of talent for European industry including servicing our partners seeking local talent for their operations in Australia.

To learn more about RMIT Europe, visit rmit.eu or contact europe@rmit.edu.au