

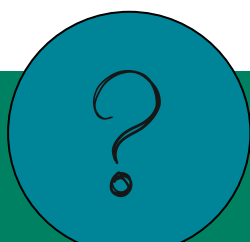


**CITIZEN SCIENCE
CASE STUDY**
SEPTEMBER 2021

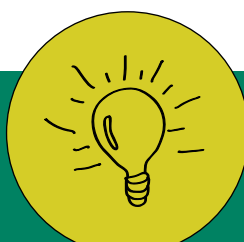
Reflections on using citizen science to improve active living in rural Tasmania

Overview

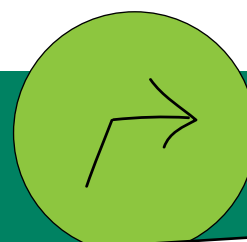
- To better understand and promote active living in rural Tasmania, this research project utilised a novel citizen science approach.
- This pilot project engaged citizen scientists to collect data on features of rural towns that make it easier or harder for residents to be physically active with the aim of improving walkability of rural and regional Tasmanian towns.
- The citizen science approach required the same level of resourcing as traditional data collection methods however, resources were used differently, particularly to support engagement.
- Involving citizen scientists in data collection and interpretation generated information not usually gathered through more traditional data collection approaches.
- The project team have secured funding to expand the use of this approach across a larger number of Tasmanian towns.



HOW DID WE USE
CITIZEN SCIENCE?



WHAT DID WE LEARN



WHAT'S NEXT

How did we use citizen science?

This project piloted the use of citizen science to audit the features of rural towns that make it easier or harder for residents to be physically active. This project was a partnership between University of Tasmania researchers, Tasmanian Department of Health, and the Local Government Association of Tasmania. The aim was to develop and test a way of gathering local level data that could inform targeted policy action to improve walkability in rural and regional Tasmania.

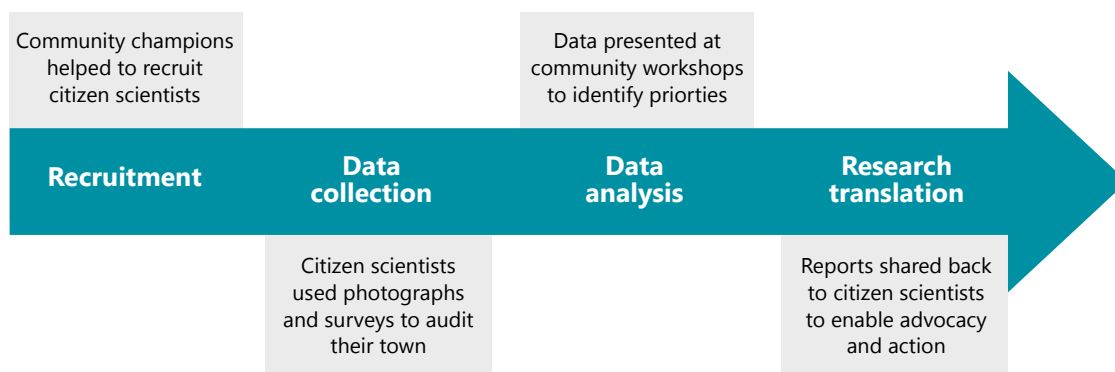
The research team recruited community champions from three rural towns in Tasmania to invite other interested community members to participate. Once recruited, citizen scientists used surveys and photographs to audit aspects of their towns that impact walkability and active living, such as access to footpaths. A dedicated project officer was responsible for connecting with and supporting citizen scientists to conduct this research.



Examples of photos of footpaths taken by citizen scientists

The research team convened community workshops in each town to present data collected and support citizen scientists to identify local priorities and strategies with the potential to bring about change to improve walkability. Following the workshops, draft reports were shared with citizen scientists for comment and once finalised these were made publicly available to help community members advocate for change within their community.

Citizen scientist involvement in the different phases of the project



What did we learn?

Key advantages of using a citizen science approach included the ability to:

- Generate local data and knowledge
- Enhance community engagement and contributions to bring about change
- Ensure action was driven by community needs and priorities.

“Generating local knowledge in context for action is very powerful ... the idea that the community themselves generated the knowledge and can use that for advocacy is part of what drove this project.”

The project team reflected on the experience of using a citizen science approach, with the following insights emerging:



Citizen science uses resources differently: The use of fewer resources for data collection was offset by the time spent supporting citizen scientists. Having a key contact person to support and engage citizen scientists (for example, through email reminders) was crucial to success.



Importance of closing the loop: Engaging citizen scientists in discussions to interpret the data they had collected provided additional insights and led to a deeper discussion about the factors influencing walkability than the audit tools and photographs alone.



Attending to community interest and readiness to engage: Understanding the ways in which community members want to be involved, including a flexible process that enables different levels of involvement, is important to ensure that communities are supported to engage in this work.



Building on existing connections: The project team's existing connections with the towns involved in this project made it easier to recruit community champions. Recruitment is likely to be more challenging in places where existing connections are not in place.



Incorporating diverse perspectives: There was limited diversity of perspectives represented in this project. There is a need to be mindful of the fact that findings will reflect the perspectives of the citizen scientists who choose to be involved, and that developing strategies for ensuring diversity of engagement will be important for capturing the perspectives of the broader community.



Ensuring sustainability: This project is intended to be the first step towards the development of a sustainable approach to engaging rural communities in gathering local data on walkability. However, it is challenging to develop sustainable citizen science projects within the constraints of current research funding, which focuses on one-off, time-limited research projects.



Working in partnership: The involvement of university researchers was perceived to lend credibility and rigour to the process and confidence in the findings, while partnerships with local and state governments increased the relevance and use of the findings.



What's next for this project?

The project team have secured a Medical Research Future Fund grant to expand the project and build on this pilot study. They will further trial the use of a citizen science approach to generate local walkability data in other rural communities. Ultimately, the research team hope to generate a methodology and tools to enable rural communities to use citizen science to generate local data to inform action and advocacy for improving the health and wellbeing of their local community.

“Don't underestimate the resources required to do citizen science. It doesn't just do itself, which is kind of what you think of Citizen Science, is the citizens doing the work for you in a way. But it does actually require a fair bit of time and resource.”

Interested in finding out more?

To find out more about the Rural Walkability Citizen Science project and view the project reports, please visit the University of Tasmania's project page on their website: menzies.utas.edu.au

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