

MEDIA RELEASE

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Surveying social attitudes to trees in cities across Australia

The changing face of the nation's urban tree estate is under the spotlight as part of new research into what influences private home-owner decisions to plant trees or remove them.

The UTAS School of Geography and Environmental Studies is conducting a national survey to help build a comprehensive picture of Australian attitudes related to trees in cities.

"This knowledge is useful to researchers, managers and residents to help understand and shape cities across the nation," said Professor James Kirkpatrick, who is running the survey with colleague Dr Aidan Davison.

"We are interested in finding out the causes of the planting and demise of trees in Australian cities."

"To that end, we want to hear from as many people as possible about their interaction with trees and their favourite story about trees in cities."

The survey is part of a three-year \$130,000 study under an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant.

The national study includes assessment of changes in tree cover in parts of Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney and Townsville, as well as interviews with urban land managers.

Professor Kirkpatrick, Dr Davison and Grant Daniels recently examined the front garden characteristics of homes in Hobart - prompted by a study in Montreal, Canada which found neighbouring gardens were more similar than those up or down the street and more alike than those across the road.

"We decided to test the prevalence of these relationships in Hobart by using a random sample of groups of five front gardens from 32 suburbs," Professor Kirkpatrick said.

The study found front gardens in Hobart were diverse – a finding that surprised the researchers.

"We expected some sort of influence but then found out that the answer was there is basically no contagion between neighbours and front gardens in the same street or suburb."

“The diversity could be due to the different sizes and age of gardens, along with the enormous variation between individuals of different age, background, education and wealth in their preferences for different types of gardens.”

“For example, the tertiary- educated tend to prefer the untidier and more arboreal form of the garden. Their equally well-off older neighbour might like highly manicured flower beds and lawns.”

Urban planners in Hobart may also need to pay attention to the findings.

“For example, strategies that aim to influence the activities of people in their gardens by educating them cannot assume that changes will permeate through a neighbourhood once a few people are convinced,” Professor Kirkpatrick said.

None of the authors of the paper think that this is necessarily a bad thing.

“Diversity in gardens reflects diversity in people and may be preferred by native wildlife,” Professor Kirkpatrick said.

To take part in the survey and to tell your favourite story about trees in cities, visit:

www.urbantrestories.org

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