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Out of bounds: Insights from children to support a cultural shift towards sustainable and child-friendly cities

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INTRODUCTION

One of Australia's primary transport challenges is the achievement of sustainable cities. An important part of meeting this challenge is a growing awareness of the symbiotic relationship between the goals of sustainable cities and children's rights. The principles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) highlight the responsibility of the States Parties to uphold the child's right to live in a safe, clean and healthy environment and to engage in free play, leisure and recreation in the environment. According to the CRC a child's well-being and quality of life is the ultimate indicator of a healthy environment, good governance and sustainable development (UNICEF, 1997). A key characteristic of a child-friendly city is its capacity to provide opportunities for children to have freedom of movement to explore their environment uninhibited by physical, social or cultural constraints. Using this criterion, Australian cities may not rate highly in terms of their child-friendly status.

When Australian parents are asked to reflect on their own childhood experiences, they usually remember having more freedom than their own children have today. A generation or more ago, children were far more likely to be able to independently explore their own neighbourhood or city than children are now. There are various reasons for this, including increasing car ownership and use, ironically much of which is related to the serve-passenger requirements of taking children to school, to sport and to recreation and entertainment. Other possible reasons include: an increasing fear of public spaces in Australian cities and the construction of children and youth as a 'problem' (Malone and Hasluck, 2002); the erosion of natural or wild spaces for children to play in (Cunningham *et al.*, 1994; Cunningham *et al.*, 1996); increased social pressure on parents to be 'good parents', for example by driving their children rather than exposing them to 'dangers' as pedestrians and cyclists (Valentine, 1997); the social traps experienced by parents when they feel unable to let their child walk because of the dangers posed by other parents driving their children (Tranter and Pawson, 2001); the increasing choice of the 'best' schools and child care centres that require children to be transported by car; and the trend to 'over-occupy' and 'over-organise' children's lives.

While many Australian parents strive to provide the best possible upbringing for their children, in doing so, they may collectively be contributing to city environments that are less child-friendly than they need to be. Australian cities may well be in crisis in terms of their provision of some of the features that are regarded by children around the world as essential.

This paper explores the links between child-friendly cities and sustainable cities (including sustainable transport systems). It then outlines the state of Australian cities in terms of the independent mobility of children: the freedom they are allowed to explore their own neighbourhood without an adult. This is examined at both the city-wide and neighbourhood scales as well as the micro-scale of school grounds. The considerable value of this independent mobility for children is explained, in relation to the children themselves, to adults responsible for their needs, and to the wider environment and community. The paper then outlines how a concern for the needs of children may be an important catalyst for encouraging sustainable transport behaviours in adults. The UNESCO child-friendly cities initiative is discussed as one way in which a child-focussed approach can have benefits for the sustainability of whole cities. The paper discusses children and youth from the ages of eight to fifteen.

LINK BETWEEN CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

In this paper we investigate two perspectives on the link between children's rights and sustainable transport. First, we examine the similarities between the features of child-friendly cities and the features of sustainable urban transport systems. Second, we explore the range of impacts on children's health and well-being of a transport system dominated by mass-car usage.

Child-friendly cities and sustainable urban transport systems

An investigation of research on child-friendly cities and research on sustainable cities and sustainable transport reveals some interesting parallels. Both of these concepts – 'child-friendly cities' and 'sustainable transport' are difficult to define. There are

also dilemmas involved in adults attempting to define the characteristics of a child-friendly city. However, research both on and with children can provide some insights into what a child-friendly city might reasonably be expected to incorporate. The following paragraphs will first outline the qualities of a child-friendly city and then outline some of the distinguishing features commonly associated with the concept of sustainable transport.

Research on children in cities throughout the world shows that despite the diversity of the places where they live, children value similar qualities in their urban environments (Malone, 2001; UNICEF, 1997; Chawla, 2002a). One significant outcome of the UNESCO Growing Up in Cities project research in the 1990s was a set of indicators of quality of life by children and for children (Chawla, 2002b). These indicators have parallels with the parameters being constructed around what a child-friendly city should be. The uniqueness of the growing Up In Cities project was that it attempted to utilise the participation principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to emphasise that cities should be evaluated not for children but by children themselves.

The list of positive socio-physical indicators for urban environments identified by children in cities includes: provision for basic needs, social integration, safety and free movement, peer gathering places and safe green spaces. The negative indicators include: social exclusion, violence and crime, heavy traffic, lack of gathering places, boredom and political powerlessness (Chawla, 2002b). That is, for children a child friendly city supports social integration. Children feel welcome and valued and are an important part of a caring community. In contrast places that provoke feelings of alienation, marginalisation, being invisible and being harassed to move on, are deemed negative or places which are not child friendly (Malone and Hasluck, 2002; Hart, 1995). Quality places for children are also places where they feel they can depend on adults' protection from crime, violence, pollution and traffic danger and where they are able to meet and play with their friends. They should also be spaces where children are able to freely explore their environment and extend their range of movement as they mature. Children should also have access to green or 'wild' space in urban environments so they can connect with nature and natural things, through play, construction and reflection (Maxey, 1999; Cunningham *et al.*,

1994). Such contact with nature is being increasingly recognised as being key to children's environmental learning (Malone and Tranter, 2003b). Children should also be encouraged and supported to take responsibility for, and become involved in decisions about their own environment- to enhance their stewardship and responsibility for the earth (UNICEF, 1997). They should be valued as citizens of today, rather than future citizens or citizens of tomorrow (Matthews and Limb, 1999). Boundaries between 'adult' and 'child' should be broken down to enhance the equity needed for sustainability (Maxey, 1999).

The concept of sustainable transport involves almost as much flexibility in interpretation as that of sustainable development. However, there is general agreement on some goals of a sustainable transport system, even if there is less agreement on how to achieve these goals.

A sustainable urban transport system should meet a range of criteria (Schiller and Kenworthy, 2003; Centre for Sustainable Transportation, 2003). It should provide the needs of a society for access and mobility to be met in a way that is in harmony with the health of individuals as well as environmental health. It should be equitable, both within and between generations. It should not deplete the resource base that supports it. It should limit emissions and waste pollution so that the planet can assimilate them. It should limit the consumption of non-renewable resources to the level at which sustainable renewable resources are developed, and limit the use of renewable resources to the rate at which they can be generated. It should re-use and recycle materials as much as possible. It should minimize the land area devoted to transport, and avoid the destruction of green or natural spaces within cities. The transport system should "enhance the liveability and human qualities" of cities (Schiller and Kenworthy, 2003) as well as provide affordable, efficient transport that supports economic goals.

A brief perusal of the features of the two types of cities described above (child friendly and cities with sustainable transport systems) shows that many of the features of a child-friendly city support the concept of sustainable urban transport. In particular, the need of children for safe and free movement around their neighbourhoods and cities requires many of the features of a sustainable transport

system. The needs of children are also implicit in the concept of sustainable transport, especially in regard to the importance of equity. Any transport system that devotes large levels of resources (including urban space) to a transport system that serves the needs of a minority of its population, and undermines the freedom of other sections of the population, does not meet the requirements for a child-friendly city. If we design a city with a sustainable transport system, it is likely to meet the needs of children. At the same time, if we aim to meet the needs of children, then our transport systems are likely to become more sustainable.

If we consider the state of Australian cities in the light of the discussion on child-friendly cities above, then we could argue that Australian cities are already in a state of crisis. If we examine some of the indicators of a child-friendly city, including the opportunity for safety and free movement and for safe and accessible places where children can meet their friends (especially in natural environments), then Australian cities do not fare as well as cities that are materially far more deprived (Chawla, 2002b).

Australian cities (along with many other western countries) may have reached a point where the advantages that can be provided to individual children through increasing use of private motor vehicles is outweighed by the disadvantages that come through the collective impact of these same vehicles.

Impacts of cars on children

Some innovative research in Canada has identified a list of impacts of cars on children. This list has been used to help motivate parents to consider changing their driving behaviour (O'Brien, 2001). The following abbreviated list, quoted from O'Brien (2001, 7), relates specifically to Canada. However, available data from Australia suggests that each of the impacts on children is also similarly evident in Australia. Comments in brackets in the list below relate to Australia.

- “Traffic fatalities are the leading cause of death in Canada for children over the age of one year”. (This is also the case in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002).)

- “Fewer than half of Canadian children now walk to school”. (Recent data from South Australia indicates that 70 percent of 5 to 12 year old children are now driven to school.)
- “Two out of three Canadian children do not meet average physical activity guidelines to achieve optimum growth and development”. (This is likely to be similar in Australia, especially given the next point. Data on modes of transport in Sydney collected by the Transport Data Centre of Transport NSW for the Sydney Household Travel Survey show that while total vehicle kilometres increased by over 2% per year between 1991 and 1999, the share of walking trips declined, and the average length of walking trips also declined.)
- “More than a quarter of Canadian and American children are overweight”. (Recent research in Australia estimates that overweight and obesity affect about 23 per cent of children and adolescents in Australia. Six percent of Australian children and adolescents are obese. These figures are judged to be conservative estimates, and in Australia “the prevalence of overweight children almost doubled, and the prevalence of obese children more than tripled” between 1985 and 1995 (Waters and Baur, 2003).)
- “Heavy traffic has reduced the independent mobility of children and youth”. (Traffic levels in Australia have continued to rise. One of the fastest growing areas for car trips (in both trip number and distance) is the “serve passenger” trips, which have increased by more than 25% from 1991-1997 (Newton, 2001).)
- “Opportunities and locations for spontaneous play are severely restricted by traffic”. (This issue is further discussed below.)
- “Children may be more vulnerable to airborne pollution because their airways are narrower than those of adults ... [and because] they have markedly increased needs for oxygen relative to their size. They breathe more rapidly and inhale more pollutant per pound of body weight than do adults”.
- “Exposure to traffic noise has been linked to reduced reading levels in children”.
- “In Canada, approximately 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation. These are contributing to global warming which will have long-term impacts on children”. (In Australia, the figure is about half of this

figure (16%). This is still a sizeable and growing proportion. Emissions produced by cars increased by 22.2% between 1990 and 2000 in Australia (Travelsmart Australia, 2003.)

O'Brien (2001) used this list of negative impacts of cars on children to highlight to parents the problems of cars. She found that when parents are told about the impact of cars on children, they become more open to changing their behaviour to decrease their car use. The things that concerned them most are "the loss of spontaneous play opportunities and restricted independent mobility" (O'Brien, 2001, 7).

THE STATE OF CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENT MOBILITY IN AUSTRALIAN CITIES

Children's independent mobility - their freedom to explore their own neighbourhood or city without and adult - is low in Australian cities compared to many other countries, and looks set to worsen in the future, as car travel continues to rise. Though most Australian children do not suffer the extremes of disadvantage that many children suffer in other parts of the world (e.g. inadequate water supply or housing), many Australian children have less freedom to explore their local environment or their city than children with higher levels of absolute poverty. For example, in Braybrook (suburban Melbourne), where young people are constructed as a problem and hence removed from the streets, they are less able to participate in community life than, for example, the disadvantaged young people of the very low income Boca-Baraccas area in Buenos Aires (Chawla, 2002a).

In comparison with children in German cities, children in Australian cities have lower levels of freedom to walk to school alone, cycle on main roads alone, visit friends alone, use public transport, cross main roads alone and go out after dark. We can see each of these as 'licences' that parents give their children. The age at which children are granted these licences, or the percent of children in each age group that have these licences, is an indicator of the level of children's independent mobility.

Data collected by Paul Tranter in the 1990s shows that while there is considerable variation in children's freedom within cities, children in Australian and New Zealand

cities have much lower levels of freedom than children in German cities in terms of the percent of children that are given these licences (Tranter, 1996; Hillman *et al.*, 1990). For example, while 80 percent of 10 year old children in German cities were allowed to travel to places other than school alone in 1990, only 37 percent of 10 year old children in the Australian schools surveyed were given this licence in 1992.

Recent data relating to the licence of children to walk or cycle to school indicates that the independent mobility of Australian children continues to decline. For example, data for Adelaide on modes of transport to and from school show a dramatic decline in numbers of children walking and cycling to school between 1981 and 1997 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Modes of transport to and from school - Adelaide

	1981	1997
By Car	24	60
Walk	42	20.5
Cycle	14	4.5

Source: (Bikewest, 2001)

Over the last decade, children's independent mobility has eroded in Australian cities, while their trips as car passengers have increased. For example, for the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Areas, there have been significant changes in children's independent travel to school in the ten years from 1991 to 2001. During this period, the percent of children cycling to school (both primary and secondary) halved (from 1.8% to 0.9%) while the percent taken by motor vehicle increased from 37 to 49%. The loss of children's independent mobility is likely to be continuing. The Sydney Household Travel Survey found that during the period August 1998 to July 1999, the number of walking trips for children less than 16 years on weekdays fell by 5 percent, while trips as car passengers rose by the same proportion (Newton, 2001).

Two important reasons for the restriction by parents of their children's independent travel, particularly as pedestrians and cyclists, are traffic danger and stranger danger. Yet there may be an important link between traffic and fears of assault and molestation in residential streets. As traffic levels increase, more and more people

(adults as well as children) cease to use the streets as pedestrians. This is partly a response to traffic danger, but also a response to the loss of local shops and services, and hence greater reliance on the motor vehicle for access to these shops, schools and even playgrounds. Eventually, residential streets are perceived as being deserted, lonely and hence dangerous places for children, in terms of the fear of assault and molestation. When people do leave their private homes, they do so behind the closed doors of their private motor vehicles. Thus there are few adults around on the streets to provide surveillance and support for children. In particular, there are few adults who know their neighbours' children and can look out for them. In contrast, if traffic levels are low enough to allow streets to be used for walking, cycling, social interaction and playing (all of which are important activities for children) it can be argued that potentially at least, streets become reinvigorated with supportive community life.

CHILDREN'S MOBILITY AT A MICRO-SCALE – SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS

For a growing number of urban primary school children in Australia, there is little access to natural or wild spaces in their neighbourhood spaces. School grounds provide some of the few spaces left where children have some independence to explore and interact with their own environment. Consequently, school grounds have increasingly important implications for children's environmental learning (Moore and Wong, 1997). However, the restriction of children's independent mobility in Australian cities may now even be extending to their own school grounds (Evans, 1995b; Malone and Tranter, 2003b; Malone and Tranter, 2003a).

Although the geography of children has attracted considerable attention (Chawla, 2002a; McKendrick, 2000) there has been less geographic research on children's use of their school grounds. The Australian research from which this paper draws explored the impact of school ground design and rules on the play behaviours of children in five Australian primary schools, two in Melbourne and three in Canberra (Malone and Tranter, 2003a). School grounds, and policies about their use, may also influence the play behaviours of children, particularly play that can contribute to environmental learning (Disinger, 1990).

Despite a growing awareness of the importance of children's play, instead of improving children's outdoor play opportunities in primary schools, changes to some Australian school grounds have reduced children's opportunities for creative and diverse play. The most serious of these include: the reduction in the time given to recess (lunch and other recess periods) (Evans, 1997); the amalgamation of schools in the name of greater economic efficiency (Evans, 1997; Evans, 1998); the removal of play equipment (Evans, 1995a); and the implementation of restrictive rules about children's use of school grounds that force teachers into a policing role (Evans, 1995b).

Children at most schools surveyed had strict limits on what activities they could engage in and where they could play. Often the most interesting parts of the school grounds were not available to the children. One of the techniques used in the research on children's play involved tracking the spatial movements of children during recess and lunch breaks. This technique allowed us to identify the way in which many schools restricted the mobility of children, even within their own school grounds. Often the most interesting and valuable (in terms of environmental learning) parts of the school grounds were "out of bounds" for the children. Figure 1 shows the spatial patterns of children's play at one of the primary schools surveyed in our research (Malone and Tranter, 2003a). Despite this school ground having an apparently excellent environment for children's environmental learning, the children's play is restricted to a small part of the grounds.

Not all schools restrict children's play in this way. One school in our study, Orana School, allowed children considerable freedom to use large sections of their school grounds (see Figure 2). This school was a Steiner (or Waldorf) school, which strongly encouraged children to interact with their environment in both formal teaching situations (e.g. using the educational garden at the school in class activities) and in informal play (e.g. building cubbies in the forest). This school allowed children to be creatively untidy in their play, to dig up their school grounds (or at least a section of the grounds), to engage in 'dirty' activities such as playing in water channels or gardening, and to creatively use available materials (including natural materials) to construct their own play environments.

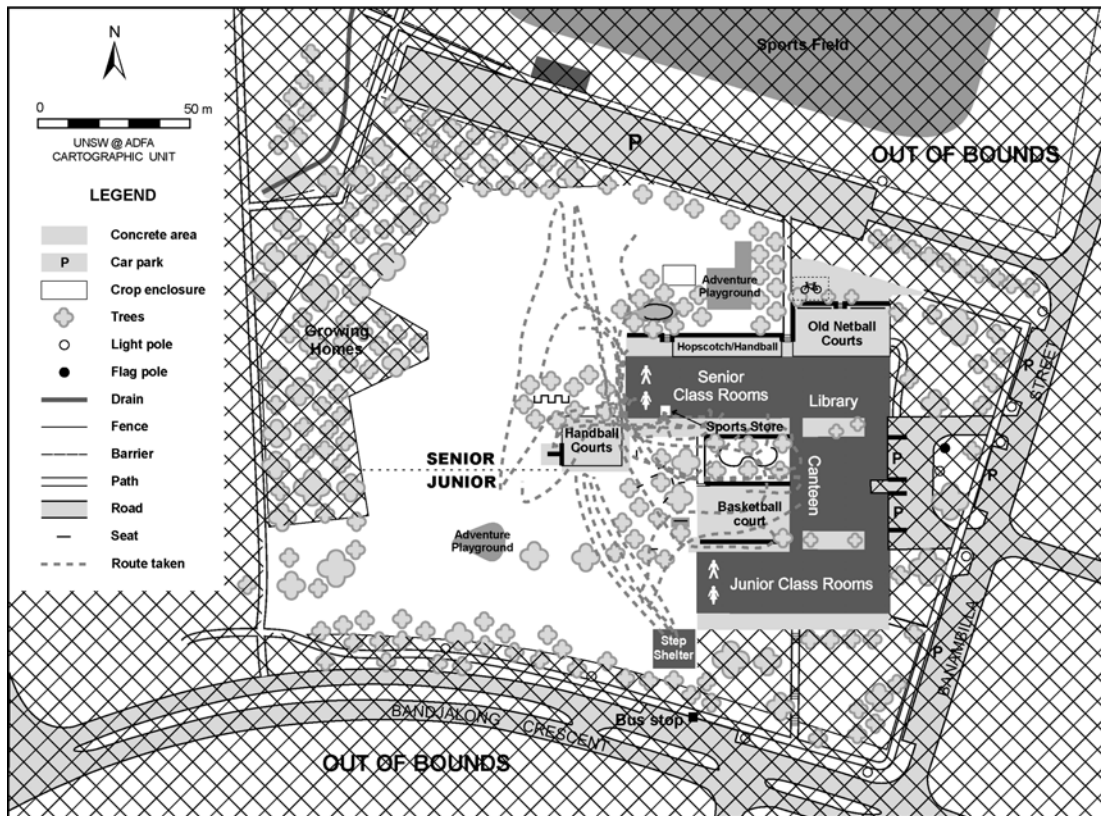


Figure 1: Spatial patterns of children’s play during lunch at one Canberra Primary School. Each line represents the movement of one child over the ten observations in the behaviour mapping.

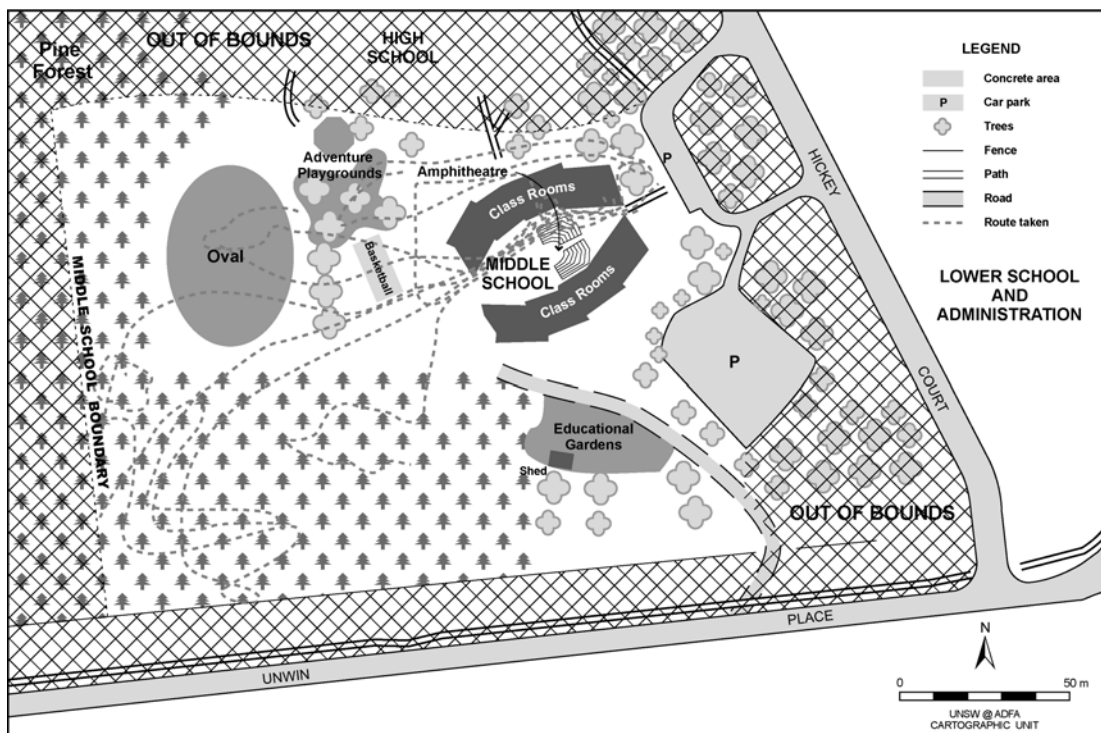


Figure 2: Spatial patterns of children’s play during lunch at Orana School. Each line represents the movement of one child over the ten observations in the behaviour mapping.

The majority of children at the schools surveyed desired more freedom to use their school grounds. Yet, at many schools, teachers restrict children's freedom to use the playground for a number of reasons: ease of supervision of children; safety considerations including traffic danger, 'stranger danger', and bullying; keeping the school grounds neat and orderly; and keeping the children clean and tidy.

At this micro-scale of school grounds, we can see some of the same processes operating that restrict children's freedom at the neighbourhood or city-wide scales. Adults restrict children's freedom in school grounds because this simplifies adult's lives: it keeps children out of the way, or easily supervised –it keeps children in their place. A similar process operates at the city scale:

"The conceptualisation of children in transport and environmental planning as 'a problem' has resulted in an urban environment which is extremely hostile to their needs and aspirations. As problems, children are tidied away behind railings, in parks, in gardens, and - best of all – indoors" (Davis and Jones, 1997).

Children in many Australian primary schools may be missing out on valuable and enjoyable play experiences. Perhaps one reason for this is that adults organise children's play with their own needs in mind, rather than those of the children. Another possible reason is the lack of understanding of the value of play for children.

Many school grounds may 'look' impressive to adults, with shiny new play equipment, neatly mowed lawns, no 'clutter' or untidiness, and aesthetically appealing flower gardens that are carefully tended by school gardeners. Yet children may extract limited benefit from each of these features. Instead, our study reveals their preference is for loose materials to manipulate, long grass to play in, the freedom to make their own constructions and even to develop their own gardens.

Adults have a poor understanding of the needs of children to interact with their environment - particularly to manipulate their environment. Adults are more concerned with an aesthetically appealing environment than they are with allowing children to create their own play environments. If planners and policy makers in

Australia and elsewhere want to give children more freedom, either within school grounds or within cities, then we must start to see children's needs as important. If we do that, we will create more sustainable cities in the process.

VALUE OF CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENT MOBILITY

There are compelling arguments which support the notion that children's freedom to explore and interact with their environment may be of considerable value, not only for the children, but also for adults responsible for their safety, the wider environment and the local community (Tranter and Pawson, 2001). This section outlines some reasons why the children's freedom (particularly their independent mobility) is something which may not be compensated for by increased mobility of children in cars.

Independent access to their local environment may be important for children's own personal, intellectual and psychological development, and for allowing them to get to know their own neighbourhood and community (Moore, 1986). This depends on "active exploration", which is not provided for when children are passengers in cars. For children to develop a sense of place, they require direct contact with the natural aspects of their environment, including vegetation, soils and people and animals (Orr, 1992). However, if they lose their independent access to their environment they are deprived of the chance to develop this sense of place (Tranter and Pawson, 2001).

Not only is it important that children be able to get to local play areas by themselves, but walking or cycling journeys to school and to other destinations provide genuine play activities in themselves. As Cunningham *et al.* (1996, p.37) found in their study of children in an Australian town, when children are taken to school by car: "there were no opportunities for kicking rocks or toads, looking for dead birds, making friends with animals, playing, or simply dawdling along with friends – all activities unremarkable in adult eyes but part of the experience and development of childhood".

Parents and other adults who care for children may also benefit if children are given more freedom. Parents face two types of "costs" for transporting their children to

school and to other locations. The economic resource cost of parents transporting children is high. An estimate of this cost in Britain using Department of Transport methods of evaluation, for the year 1990, was between £10b and £20b (Hillman *et al.*, 1990, 168-175). Opportunity costs arise when other activities are excluded because of commitments to transport or escort children (especially home from school).

There are traffic congestion, pollution and safety costs associated with the extra traffic involved in transporting children. As our roads become more dangerous, more parents drive their children, thus contributing to increased levels of danger for the remaining pedestrians. Thus, there are also important environmental implications of children's loss of freedom.

There may also be community benefits in creating residential environments, which allow children more independence. If more children use the streets as pedestrians, this may help to generate a stronger local community. The presence of children is an effective way of breaking down the natural reserve between adults. Streets become more interesting, more livable, more communal places (Tranter and Doyle, 1996). This can be self-reinforcing: if more pedestrians use the streets, this in itself creates a situation that is far more conducive to children's independent access to the local neighbourhood and beyond.

ENCOURAGING SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT BEHAVIOURS – INFLUENCING ADULTS THROUGH CONCERNS ABOUT CHILDREN

Research has shown that a focus on children can increase the effectiveness of community-based social marketing as a way of reducing the use of the car (O'Brien and Kowey, 2000). (Social marketing involves using commercial marketing principles to influence people's social and health behaviour.) Working with parents and children in primary schools can lead to successful travel behaviour changes. This is part of the process involved in the various TravelSMART programs in Australian states linked with schools (see below). Some useful initiatives associated with

changing the travel behaviour of children on the journey to school include the Walking School Bus and Safe Routes to School projects.

Initiatives such as the Walking School Bus have been criticised, for example, by Mayer Hillman, a British researcher who has investigated children's freedom in England and Germany. According to Hillman, walking school buses, though introduced with the best of intentions:

“... promote paranoia among parents that they are not acting responsibly unless they are always with their children outside the home and to make them feel irresponsible if they are unable to do so or to delegate someone to act in their place” (Hillman, 1999).

Similar arguments have been made by Kearns *et al.* (2003). They conclude that while Walking School Buses do (re)legitimate walking by children and reduce the number of car trips to school, they are “at best, an ambivalent response to the hegemony of motorized transport” (Kearns *et al.*, 2003). Walking School Buses do not challenge the views that streets are for cars and children are at risk in public space. They have similar effects to the provision of parks and playgrounds for children in that they serve to keep children out of the way of adults (Cunningham and Jones, 1999).

There are also concerns about the real value of the Safe Routes to School Projects:

“It is as if the school journey is the only one requiring a safe environment in which to travel, overlooking the fact that children make many more journeys to destinations in their free time than they do to and from school and that 90 per cent of their fatalities occur on these other journeys ... Why not *Safe Routes for Children?*” (Hillman, 1999)

Notwithstanding these criticisms, one of the advantages of a focus on schools is that children themselves can be involved in finding ways to increase levels of walking and cycling. This also has long term effects on sustainable transport. If we can change the mind-set of children so that they see an alternative to car travel, at least for short

intra-urban trips, then when they become adults they may be less inclined to turn immediately to the car. Unfortunately, many Australian children become conditioned to believe that the car is the best, or the only, mode of transport even for short trips

Some of the most promising examples in Australia of a concerted effort to change transport behaviours through social marketing involving children, with objectives related to both child-friendly and sustainable cities, involve the various the TravelSMART programs linked with schools. These include TravelSMART to School (WA), TravelSMART SA, TravelSMART School Program (QLD) and TravelSMART Schools (Victoria). TravelSMART is a social marketing program that raises awareness about the negative impacts of cars and encourages alternative travel behaviours (e.g. walking, cycling, public transport and car pooling for trips to school). Parents as well as teachers and children work cooperatively on projects that also involve members of the local community: "TravelSMART empowers students to make environmental change" (Department for Planning and Infrastructure: Government of Western Australia, 2003). For schools that participated in TravelSMART to School in Western Australia in 2000, the average reduction in car trips to schools was 34 per cent.

UNICEF'S CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES INITIATIVE: GLOBAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

Ideally towns and cities should be the place where children can socialise, observe and learn about how society functions and contribute to the cultural fabric of a community. They should also be sites where children find refuge, discover nature and find tolerant and caring adults who support them. If, having rich environmental experiences, feeling safe and secure, connected and valued, are universal indicators of quality of life, then what better place to start than to evaluate cities through the eyes of its children?

The principles of sustainable development clearly articulate the importance of children's role in the changing environment and the value of children's creativity and ideals for formulating potentials and opportunities for a sustainable future. UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities initiative has captured the essence of these principles and has,

State of Australian Cities National Conference 2003

through the development of worldwide partnerships, endeavoured to support Mayors and municipal councils in finding ways to encourage children to participate and contribute to discussions of environmental responsibility, stewardship and learning.

Children have a special interest in sustainable cities – they are the future contributors, decision-makers and citizens of these cities. The goals of sustainability insist that nation and city governments maintain the integrity of the social, economic and environment fabric of their global and local environment through processes that are participatory and equitable. The principles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) reinforce this responsibility of the States Parties when it challenges them to uphold the child's right to live in a safe, clean and healthy environment and to engage in free play, leisure and recreation in the environment. According to the CRC a child's well-being and quality of life is the ultimate indicator of a healthy environment, good governance and sustainable development (UNICEF 1992, UNICEF 1997). If the goals of sustainability are not achieved then it will affect children more profoundly than other members of the global community.

The connection between children's rights and sustainable cities has been formally articulated in a number of global declarations and documents emerging from intergovernmental summits and meetings. Some of the most significant documents include *The Plan for Action* that resulted from the World Summit for Children and the Rio Declaration and the action plan of *Agenda 21* both endorsed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Principle 21 of the Rio declaration clearly reinforces the role of youth in sustainable development:

Principle 21. The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilised to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all (United Nations 1992).

As does the introduction and the entire content of Chapter 25:

Chapter 25.1. Youth comprise nearly 30 percent of the world's population. The involvement of today's youth in environment and development decision-

making and in the implementation of programmes is critical to the long-term success of Agenda 21 (United Nations 1992).

More recently, an emerging focus on urban environments has given rise to the development of the *Habitat II Agenda* and with children in mind the *Children's Rights and Habitat Report*. Presented by UNICEF at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements at Istanbul in 1996 the *Children's Rights and Habitat Report* draws attention to the important *role* children have in sustainable cities:

Children have a special interest in the creation of sustainable human settlements that will support long and fulfilling lives for themselves and future generations. They require opportunities to participate and contribute to a sustainable urban future. (UNICEF, 1997, preamble)

At the local level, the relationship between sustainable development and children's lives isn't just about adult's role as stewards and their capacity to act on behalf of the child, it is also about recognising the capacity for children and youth to be *authentic participants* in planning, development and implementation processes (Malone 1999). Democratic behaviour is learnt through experience; so children must be given a voice in their communities so they will be able to, now and in the future, participate fully in civil society (UNICEF 1997, Malone & Hasluck 1998). Local governments have a role to ensure the principles of *Local Agenda 21* and the spirit of the *Conventions on the Rights of the Child* are the impetus to create appropriate mechanisms for children's participation in building a sustainable and equitable urban future. Sustainable development then in terms of children's rights should and is being supported through UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Initiative.

UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities (CFC) initiative was developed in response to meetings leading up to and around the development of the Habitat 2 Agenda. At these meetings participants clearly recognized that the situation of urban children around the world was of critical concern. The guiding principle behind the initiative was that safe environments nurture children of all ages with opportunities for recreation, learning, social interaction, psychological development and cultural expression.

UNESCO's "Growing Up In Cities" program (building on and supporting the Child friendly cities initiatives) provided a multi-disciplinary insight into the way in which researchers working with children, local adults and policy makers, can facilitate improvements in children's lives in a multitude of urban environments. A recurring theme of the UNESCO's GUIC cities initiative is that there is a mismatch between young people's expressed needs and what local officials view as what their needs should be (or are). Often this is because as adults we believe we know what children need – and don't bother to consider what the children are saying. Often we forget that childhood is changing – the world is a different place and when we reminisce about our own childhoods we tend to overlook this changing world. A common response from aid agencies and government offices has been that research can be "a waste of money". The GUIC research project clearly demonstrates that "open-ended participatory action research" is valuable in both an applied and an academic or theoretical sense. The GUIC project sites have also been actively applying their research through actions on the ground (sooner rather than later), consequently positive changes as a result of their input (e.g. confidence in children, changes to the physical environment or a willingness of planners and officials to consult with children) have been the result. Several studies demonstrated useful model participatory processes to involve children in improving their own social and physical environment.

An example of this can be found at the GUIC site at Frankston (Melbourne, Victoria) (see Malone 2002). The GUIC project was integrated into a larger Safer Cities city wide project – with a strong children and youth component relying on the GUIC model of participatory research with children and youth. From the research by the children it became clear that the train station (which was also a transit station for buses and taxis) was a significant issue for young people. As this young woman states (Malone 2001):

Everyday when I get off the train on my way home from school I see them at the station. Young mothers smashed on drugs. They sit in the walkway. It is so sad. They hassle you for money- I try not to look. I always feel unsafe at the train station - I am lucky I have a friend who travels with me. (Becky 16 years old)

The key issues revolved around the lack of security, the poor condition of the station and the high incidences of drug related transactions that occurred there. The site was significant for children and youth because it played a key role in many of their lives. First, at a more metaphorical level it represented the transition between primary and secondary school and consequently the shift for young people towards autonomy (the station was the connecting site for all the city buses taking young people to the high schools). Second, public transport was vital to young people being able to socialise, meet friends, engage in recreation activities, go to school, visit Melbourne city, shops or even get down the coast to the beach. Not having a safe and secure transit station jeopardised the capacity for young people to experience life in all its diversity. In fact, the research conducted by the young people clearly illustrated that the impact of the having no safe access to public transport was causing many of their peers to feel frustrated, marginalised and isolated in their suburban 'estates' – often causing groups of them to engage in what many in the community saw as inappropriate anti-social behaviour (drunkenness, petty vandalism etc.).

Once the young people identified the issues, the group then presented a list of possibilities to council to improve the state of the train station. These included cleaning up the toilets and painting the station, more security guards, a crack down on drug dealers, better connecting times between trains and buses so young people didn't have to wait on the street and a more novel (but adopted idea) of playing classical music at the station to create a serene ambience. The final outcome was that the young people felt valued and responsible for the quality of their environment and learnt skills and improved their quality of life. The local community benefited because they used the train station too, and because they developed respect and knowledge about what it meant to be a young person in their community. A child friendly city is an adult friendly city after all.

CONCLUSION

If we wish to develop sustainable, child-friendly cities, then we must re-assess our policies of basing our treatment of children on the policies of making large sections of our cities (and even our school grounds) "out of bounds". If we wish to create a

cultural shift towards sustainable transport, a very useful starting point is to develop policies that will give our cities back to our children.

Australian children have a preference for modes of transport that are inherently sustainable (walking and cycling). Given the choice, children would prefer to be allowed to walk or cycle to school and to other locations. Such modes of transport allow children to experience the enjoyment and stimulation of interacting with place – with people and with nature. However, if children are constantly driven everywhere, they can become conditioned to believe that the car is the best (or the only) way to get anywhere, and that adult transport means driving a car.

If we are unable to achieve this change in culture, then the direction of transport changes in Australian cities will have continuing negative impacts on children's health and well-being, and indeed, on the culture of childhood. Children are not able to experience fully the joy of childhood if they are deprived contact with their own environment.

Children may also have another likely impact on sustainable transport. If we can use policies such as TravelSMART to School to allow children to experience travelling around their neighbourhood by themselves, then children themselves may become the best advocates for sustainable transport. Research on a community based social marketing project in Toronto, Canada, suggests that "enthusiastic children may be the strongest force to get parent's attention. Indeed .. if children beseeched ... their parents to let them walk, changes to routine could occur" (Greenest City, 2001).

The achievement of more child-friendly and more sustainable cities will require more than physical changes to our cities such as traffic calming or the provision of a denser network of services (though these may be important (Tranter and Doyle, 1996)). It will require a deep-seated change in the culture of how we treat children and how we provide for their needs for accessibility within cities. An important part of this change is a change away from individualism towards stronger social capital (Cox, 1995; Hunter and Gregory, 1997). Unfortunately, "this has been eroded by the modern industrial culture that fosters individualism and deprecates community" (Cunningham *et al.*, 1996, p.11).

A cultural revolution (to create more child-friendly cities) can occur only when marginalised and diverse voices are listened to and celebrated (Engwicht 1999). Both the UNESCO Growing Up In Cities project and the UNICEF Child-friendly cities initiative are key international projects that have been attempting to achieve this within the contemporary policy context of sustainable development and children rights.

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