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# Institutional Enablers for Children's Right to the City

(photo credit: VicHealth)



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# What is Children's 'Right to the City'?

Children's 'right to the city' can be defined as their ability to experience independent mobility within an urban area.

Independent mobility means being able to access, use and move within/through public space without being escorted by adults

Independent mobility for children (<18) refers to active transport: walking, cycling, using public transport, wheeling (learner's permits 17-18)

# The Problem

- \* There has been a huge international generational shift: from children able and allowed to explore cities, using walking, cycling and public transportation; to fearful and car dependent children.
- \* This has environmental (pollution caused by driving children to school), economic (costs of transporting children by car) and social/health (raising obese, fearful children) implications

# Trends in Children's Independent Mobility: example of the journey to school

- \* In the UK in 2001, 50% of children walked to school < 2 km
- \* In Australia in 2003, 25% of children walked to school < 2km
- \* In Melbourne, 1/3 children walk < 5 minutes/day
- \* In South Australia, > 70% of children aged 5 - 12 years old travel to school by car, with # of walking journeys to school decreasing by 46.5% since 1986

Harten, H & Olds, T (2004) "Patterns of active transport in 11-12 year old Australian children" Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 28(2):170; VicHealth, 2002. Education, Local Government and Health. The Walking

School Bus Program Funding Guidelines Transport SA, Spring 2002. TravelSmart SA News

# Purpose of Research

- \* How to reverse this trend? How to make cities an 'off lead' area for children? How to support 'free range' children?
- \* Aim of research is to identify interventions that facilitate children's independent mobility within urban environments and to determine whether there are principles across interventions that can be replicated in different settings.

# Activities to Date

## \* Research

- Health/social interventions
- Design interventions
- Role of transport & traffic
- Children's geographies
- Children & parental social & physical environmental perceptions

## \* Presentation: Walk 21 Conference

## \* Liaising: Professionals & academics in the field



# Current Research Trends

- \* Research happening in the UK, Italy, Sweden, Finland, USA, Japan, Australia & other industrialised countries
- \* Health and Safety focused (physical activity related to child obesity prevention; accident prevention)
- \* Baseline data: current mobility behaviour of children, environmental perceptions (children & parents)
- \* Growing Up in Cities Project on children's participation in planning practices (human rights based)

# What We Know

- \* Children's independent mobility has decreased
- \* Societal norms have changed (Pedestrian Council of Australia: parents should hold their children's hand when crossing roads until 11)
- \* Individual negotiations between parents and children over 'licenses' (age at which it is appropriate to do 'x')
- \* Reasons: parent's fears around traffic and personal safety (stranger danger)

# What We Don't Know

Urban design & social interventions that may

- \* (1) facilitate children's independent mobility,
- \* (2) be replicated internationally

What is the role of spatial planning at the local level with regard to children's independent mobility?

This research aims to address these questions.

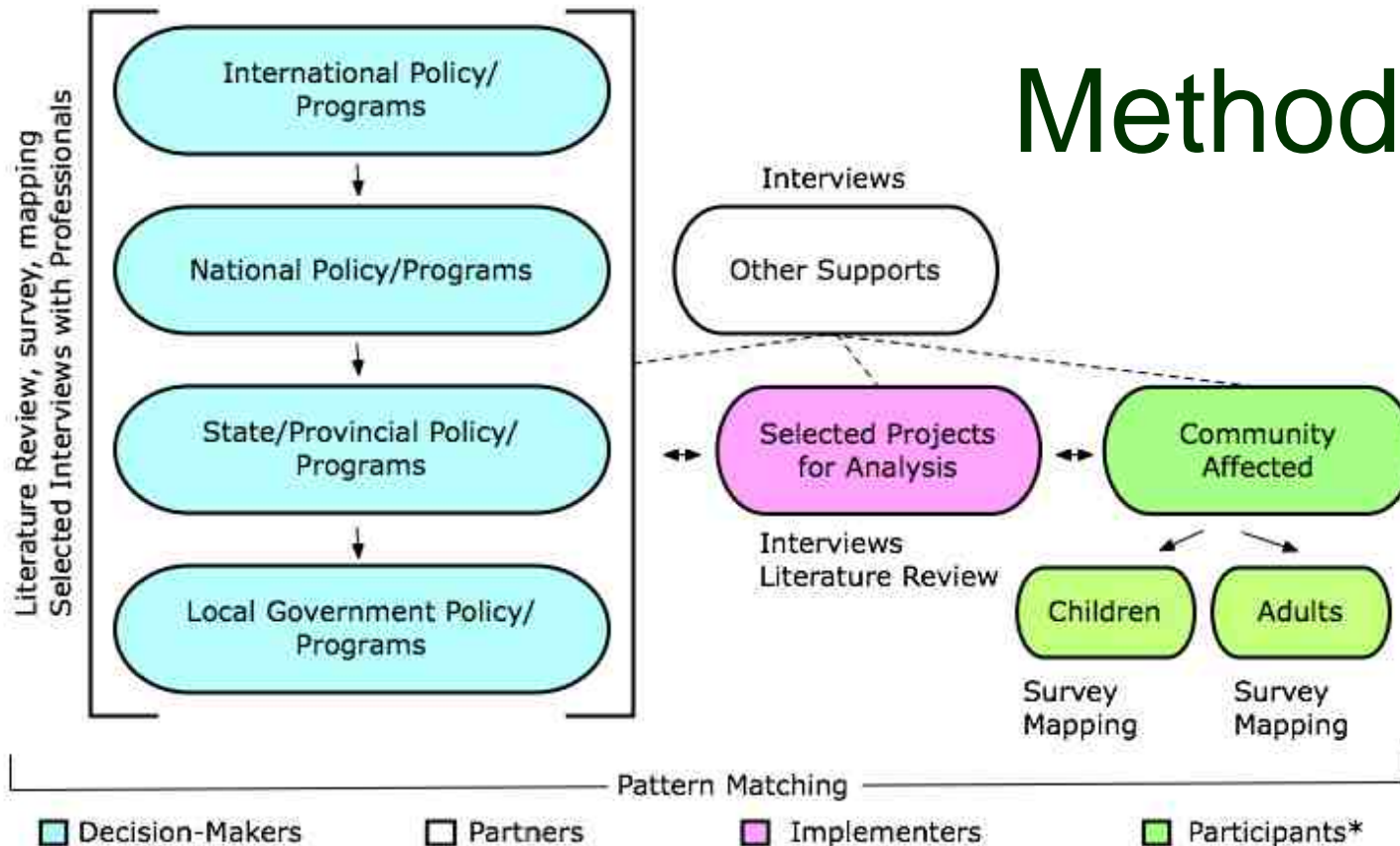
# Possible Factors

- \* City Size (cannot explore in this research)
- \* Traffic amount and speed
- \* Location and quality of public spaces & facilities
- \* Perceptions of local environment by parents & children
- \* Children having family in the area
- \* Parents' belief in children's competence
- \* Expectation that other adults should & will watch out for kids & ensure appropriate behaviour

# Preliminary Propositions

- \* Children will have higher independent mobility if:
  - Both parents and children view their environment positively
  - Children can access facilities/activities locally
  - Traffic in the area is lower and slower
  - Parents have greater confidence in their children's competence
  - Goals of local policies, programs, parents & children converge

# Methodology



Proposition that effective interventions are embedded within an overall policy/program/social structure in which the goals of children's mobility are similar amongst governing institutions, the project and the community affected.

\* Kelly et al (2006) Promoting physical activity in communities: approaches for successful evaluation of programs and policies *Evaluation and Program Planning* 29: 280-292

# Contrasting Cities

- \* Melbourne 'safe' city & Cape Town 'unsafe' city
- \* **Commonalities:** Commonwealth, post-colonial British influence (Dutch influence in CT too), urban form based on American and British theory/practice
- \* **Differences:** Crime rate and traffic deaths, racial issues & segregation, level of car ownership by middle classes, acceptability of gated communities

# Criteria for Case Study Sites

Melbourne	Cape Town
Interesting diverse environment (lots of affordances) plus govt attention to youth empowerment	Interesting diverse environment (lots of affordances) plus govt attention to youth empowerment
Dull environment plus no commitment to youth empowerment	Dull environment plus no commitment to youth empowerment

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# Thank you!

(photo credit: VicHealth)

