



Children's everyday freedoms: Local government policies on children and sustainable mobility in two Australian states



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ABSTRACT

While the significant contribution of transport in greenhouse gas emissions is well researched, the pivotal role that children's transport plays in these trends is not fully understood. This paper assesses the potential of integrating the hitherto separate literature and policy bodies of sustainable travel planning with that of child friendly cities, in order to better inform policy development. Based on a review of literature on child friendly cities and sustainable travel, we have developed a new operational framework for child centred sustainable travel policies. The framework measures consideration given to sustainable travel in children's policies and promotion of children and young people's needs and rights in sustainable travel policies from the point of view of children as equal citizens. We then review 25 child friendly policy and guidelines and 19 sustainable travel policies from Australian local governments, using this framework. This policy review finds limited integration between policies on child and youth friendliness and sustainable mobility, despite the recognition of the reduced rates of active travel amongst children.

1. Introduction

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the relationship between sustainability and mobility. The inherent link between urbanization and transport technologies including mass car production has been widely discussed. This combined with cheap oil has afforded increased mobility which, in turn, has resulted in the development of unprecedented urban sprawl in cities across the world, particularly in affluent societies (Newman et al., 2009; Sharpe and Tranter, 2010).

Despite the increasing knowledge regarding the role of location, built environment and the provision of social and physical infrastructure on carbon intensive travel patterns, the contribution of children's transport in these trends has received limited attention. Research on children and their environments generally focus on the link between the growing trend of children's sedentary lifestyles and increased time spent in micro environments. In many of these interdisciplinary studies, the associated health issues such as obesity, diabetes and various cardiovascular diseases have been highlighted (Epstein et al., 2012; Giles-Corti et al., 2014; Rahman et al., 2011; Sallis et al., 2012; Villanueva et al., 2013). While a few scholars, notably Paul Tranter have discussed the link between child friendly cities and sustainable cities (Malone and Tranter, 2003; Tranter and Pawson, 2001; Tranter and Sharpe, 2008),

children's right to sustainable travel is not commonly considered in transport planning discourse, despite the fact that children are future environmental decision-makers.

This article calls for the integration of mobility related sustainability policies with child and youth friendly policies for two main reasons. Firstly, the increasing use of private cars to transport children (due to the contemporary lifestyles imposed upon them and associated environmental issues) requires greater attention in order to facilitate better informed policy making. Secondly, it is critically important to recognize the capacity of children and young people to be active citizens (Cook et al., 2015; Fusco et al., 2012; Horelli, 2007), change agents (Heft and Chawla, 2006; Malone, 2013; Malone, 2015) and indicators for successful cities (Enrique Penalosa quoted in Tranter and Sharpe, 2012) in order to achieve sustainable neighborhoods now and also to secure the changes needed for a sustainable future.

More specifically, this paper aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What is the degree of integration between policies relating to child friendly cities and policies relating to sustainable travel?
 - a) What consideration is given to children's mobility needs and rights and sustainable travel in the child friendly cities policies of Australian local governments?

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- b) What consideration is given to children's mobility needs and rights in Australian local government sustainable mobility policies?

Policies for child and youth friendly cities, along with sustainable travel plans and strategies across local governments in Victoria and South Australia (SA), are reviewed (using the HyperResearch 3.7.3 software). Local government areas were selected based on the presence of child friendly initiatives. For Victoria, all of the urban municipalities who were signatories to the Victorian Child friendly Cities and Communities Network are included (12 councils). In South Australia, councils that are part of the Child Friendly SA initiative are included (3 councils). This list represents a wide diversity of socio-economic and spatial characteristics according to the Australian Population and Housing Census in 2016.

First, the purpose and objectives of 25 Australian local government child friendly policy and guidelines in the context of consideration given to sustainable travel are examined. Second, 19 policies in relation to sustainable travel are reviewed in the context of their recognition and promotion of children and young people's role and needs and rights in these spaces from the point of view of children as equal citizens and change agents. The full list of policies reviewed is included in Appendix 1.

2. Defining child and youth friendly precincts

The term 'child friendly' has been used to refer to the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative that is the embodiment of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) that was developed in 1989 (UNICEF, 1989). This definition asserts that a child friendly city is actively engaged in fulfilling the right of every young citizen (under the age of 18) to a wide range of standards, including their participatory rights in their communities as equal citizens, their rights to be safe and protected from harm and their rights to have environments supporting their needs to learn, play and be social (UNICEF, 2013).

Despite the fact that the term 'child friendly' is frequently referred to in the policy and research literature, 'child friendly' is still a concept difficult to define precisely. Firstly, the age range covered with the term varies across the literature. Although the *Convention on the Rights of Children* defines a child as any human under the age of eighteen, in the literature the term commonly represents pre-schoolers and primary school aged children (0–12 years). Throughout this article, we use the term 'child friendly' to cover all children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years, including plans for young people aged 12–18. In addition, we use the term 'youth friendly' to refer to local government youth plans that target the age group of 19–25 years.

The multidimensional nature of child friendliness has been discussed by several scholars and academics. The UNESCO initiated project *Growing Up in an Urbanising World*, lists both the positive and negative indicators for 'child based environmental quality' (Chawla, 2002). In relation to neighbourhood environment, the positive indicators such as 'safety and free movement', 'peer gathering places', 'varied activity settings' and 'safe green spaces' all directly relate children's mobility to their local environments. In contrast, 'heavy traffic', 'lack of gathering places' and 'varied activity settings' indicate low environmental quality for children. 'Social integration' and 'cohesive community identity' are also closely associated with children's non-motorised mobility whereas 'social exclusion' can be experienced by children who mostly travel by car as a result of loss of opportunities for social interaction (Chawla, 2002, p.229).

Chatterjee (2005, p.9) questions if 'child friendliness' is a place or the experience. She argues that child friendly places require a 'diverse range of physical and social settings from the immediate environment of the child to citywide locations'. She discusses the term of 'children's friendship with places' in the context of 'affordances' and also emphasises the importance of 'accessibility' for children. Oktay (2004) also

highlights the importance of 'hierarchy of public spaces from the front door to the street, to the public places and out to the countryside' because of the specific functions they afford and sense of safety and community they generate (p.33). Similarly, the problems associated with creating age specific places has long been recognized. For example, Woolley and Johns (2001) explain that local governments providing a skate park could result in outlawing skateboarding in the other places of the city. It was argued that play is not separated from the flow of everyday life and it is important to embed playfulness in children's everyday places (Christensen et al., 2017, p. 154). The spatial and temporal containment of play in playgrounds or skate parks, counteract with these notions.

More recently the importance of equal and affordable access to sustainable mobility for all has been included in the *UN New Urban Agenda* (article 34). Providing services in a wide range of areas including sustainable mobility that are responsive to the rights and needs of children and youth has been affirmed (United Nations, 2017).

3. Situating children in sustainable mobility discourses

The term 'sustainable travel' is often used interchangeably with the terms 'sustainable transport' and 'active travel/transport'. The term encompasses the activities of walking, cycling and usage of public transport. Given the widening presence of 'scootering' and 'skating' particularly amongst children, the definition of 'sustainable travel' can also be broadened to include these activities. Throughout this article we use the term 'sustainable travel' to refer to walking, cycling, scootering, skateboarding and public transport as opposed to 'active transport' which tends to be a dichotomous term to imply that public transport is a non-active mode (Easton and Ferrari, 2015).

The 'journey to work' is the focus of much of the current literature pertaining to sustainable travel. In the Australian context, this is particularly evident in the dissemination of official statistics. Apart from infrequent household surveys, the travel patterns of children, or the parents' journeys accompanying their children to school, do not appear in these statistics.

Historically, since the 1987 Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) which defined sustainable development as a 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs', numerous studies have focused on the impact of climate change on children. Central to these studies was the fact that children, particularly in developing countries, would be most affected by environmental decline. It has also been recognized that children are at the centre of this definition by the UN not only as 'future generations' but as the 'change agents' and key stakeholders in moving towards sustainability (Chawla, 2009; UNICEF, 2015; Malone, 2013; Tranter and Malone, 2008).

The importance of 'habitual learning' (O'Brien et al., 2000; Tranter and Pawson, 2001; Lehner-Lierz, 2003) in earlier ages has been stressed in some studies and also by the United Nations. For example, in its 'children on the front line' document (2015, p.76), UNICEF state that 'sustainable thinking from a young age onwards is more likely to have a lasting effect than trying to modify already ingrained habits later in life'. Similarly, the habitual nature of travel behaviours and the difficulty surrounding overcoming this path dependence is widely acknowledged (Tranter and Pawson, 2001; Chatterton et al., 2015; Thynell and Wolmar, 2014; Schwanen et al., 2012).

4. Towards a co-benefits approach: Child and youth friendly - and sustainable

Both 'sustainable travel' and 'child friendly cities' have recently been the focus of large body of research and practice. Due to the fast paced urbanization and increased social, economic and environmental pressure on our cities, car dependence is likely to remain as the focus of urban research in the coming decades. Likewise, the health and welfare

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