



About the GROWING UP

Growing Up in Cities is an eight-country international participatory research project sponsored by the UNESCO–MOST (Management of Social Transformation) program. The goal of the project is to document some of the human costs and benefits of economic development.

This is done by showing how young people's perceptions and actual use of the micro-environment resulting from economic development affects their lives and their personal development. The micro-environment refers to the urban neighbourhoods of young adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 from low socio-economic backgrounds. In the study, the perceptions and priorities of young people themselves are used as the basis for participatory programs for (re)shaping urban environments.

The project aims to close the dualities and differences between rhetoric and reality, research and action. It also has longitudinal and cross-cultural dimensions.

The original *Growing Up in Cities* project was founded under the UNESCO program – 'Man and His Environment: Design for Living'. At a conference convened by UNESCO in 1970 to define the program, Kevin Lynch, an eminent urban planner from the United States, recommended that

the program should include a focus on urban quality from the perspective of young people. From this recommendation was conceived the UNESCO-funded project *Children's Perception of Space* (1972). Coordinated by Kevin Lynch, the project was conducted in four cities – Melbourne, Warsaw, Salta and Mexico City. The project applied the question: 'What interchange between people and their environment encourages them to grow into fully realised persons?' to young people's relationship with their city environment.

The *Children's Perception of Space* project showed that the best urban environments for young people should have the following attributes: a community with a strong social and physical identity; opportunities for engagement, for having a role in the community; and a city that served as an educational facility, a place to explore and learn about the world. The findings revealed that these conditions depended not on standard statistical measures of young people's life quality such as family income or formal education (which had been the mainstream indicators of urban quality), but on finer grained differences in social and physical integration.

The compilation of the country reports were published in the landmark book authored by Kevin Lynch called, *Growing Up in Cities in 1977* (MIT Press).

After reviewing the findings Kevin Lynch (1977) wrote: 'A good city is one in which children can grow and develop to the extent of their powers, where they can build their confidence and become actively engaged in the world, yet be autonomous and capable of managing their own affairs.'

Twenty-five years on the project is being revisited. The replication study was conceived in 1994 by Dr Louise Chawla within the Children and Environment Program of the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, Trondheim, Norway. The goal was to return to the original sites to investigate the longitudinal impact of urban changes on young people and the cultural impact of global mobility, and to add new sites in Asia and Africa.

The sites for this contemporary revisit of *Growing Up in Cities* include: Buenos Aires and Salta, Argentina; Melbourne, Australia; Northampton, England; Bangalore, India; Trondheim, Norway; Warsaw, Poland; Johannesburg, South Africa; and Oaklands, California, United States. The project has been funded internationally through the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, the Norwegian Ministry of Child and Family Affairs, Childwatch International, and the Management of Social Transformation program of UNESCO.

Since the original project's initiation in 1970, children's rights in participating in the management of their urban environment is more widely accepted. There is now recognition among development agencies that increasingly the world is becoming more urbanised and the majority of the population in these urban environments are young people (more than 60 per cent of the population of South Africa, for example, are under 18 years).

In light of these growing trends, the goal of the replication project has shifted and intends to use participatory-action research with young people so as to apply in very practical terms the results of

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the research. The project draws on the conceptual framework of the *Child-Friendly City* initiative launched by UNICEF in 1996, and responds to the rights for young people to participate in community decision making as conceived by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), and the United Nations Habitat 2 Agenda (1996). While the project was initiated before these international agreements and programs were conceived, it is now seen as one of the first international projects to integrate the principles of these agreements and programs into grassroots participatory action.

Another unique feature of the project is its interdisciplinary nature. In the replication project, as in the past, the work is conducted by interdisciplinary teams who combine experience in social research and city planning or design. The current project involves architects, urban planners, geographers, psychologists, anthropologists, educators, community developers, activists and social workers from cities around the world. To accommodate and develop a wholistic and interconnected research design across all these disciplines a multi-paradigmatic and multi-method approach was adopted by the original team leaders (a blend of both quantitative and qualitative methods).

In the current *Growing Up in Cities* project, the emphasis has been on a participatory research methodology. This emphasis has led to the modification of existing methods to enhance their 'critical' and 'transformative' intent, and for the

participants to become more actively involved in the research 'process'.

Study methods

There has been a range of methods used in both the original and current research, and the following is a list of methods used across the sites. Not all methods have been incorporated into the research design of every site. Those methods added to those in the original study are shown in italics.

- Inventories of local demographic and environmental features;
- Observations of young people in public and private spaces;
- Extended interviews with and by young people about the negotiation and use of public and private spaces;
- Young people's current and future perceptions and images of danger and problems in their use of public space;
- Young people's drawings and mental maps of the city image;
- *Young people reporting on their territorial range in the neighbourhood and surrounding city;*
- Participant-taken photographs;
- Participant-led guided tours of the neighbourhood;
- *Participatory focus group sessions and workshops;*
- *Young people's video images;*
- *Young people's images and designs for a child-friendly city;*
- *Interviews with parents, city officials and other people involved in youth related activities.*

Further initiatives

Funding for the ongoing international coordination and development of *Growing Up in Cities* through to 1999 has been provided by the UNESCO–MOST program. One of the major goals for the next two years is to start new international and regional networks by running workshops to train new city teams. The first of these workshops has already been conducted at the Averroes Centre in The Netherlands.

A manual published by UNESCO provides an overview of the *Growing Up in Cities* model and methods in a flexible 'tool-kit' format so communities can adapt the process to their local context. An academic book is currently in progress and will be published through Earthscan early in 1999.

Negotiations are also underway between UNESCO and Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation to produce a documentary on the project later in 1998, comparing four of the research sites, one of which will be Melbourne.

Further information

The *Growing Up in Cities* project has its own international website <<http://www.unesco.org/most/growing.htm>> and interactive networks through a forum discussion line on Childwatch International's linked website.

The current Australian *Growing Up in Cities* program is directed by Dr Karen Malone. It is funded through an Australian Research Council Small Grant, a Deakin University Postdoctoral Fellowship, and an Honorary Fellowship from the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Readers who would like further information on the project can contact Dr Malone at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, or through the project's interactive website: <http://www2.deakin.edu.au/GUIC>

– **Karen Malone**