

teen walkabout

A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS



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'All practitioners who seek better outcomes in built, social and natural environments need at some point to be aware of strategies and techniques that can be employed to elicit constructive involvement from the public and to negotiate changes to communities in which we live, work and play'

(Whitzman and Cook, 2011 p. 1).

This paper looks at one technique that seeks better outcomes in the built, social and natural environment by utilising an initiative established by Victoria Walks as a research tool to see how communities, in particular young people/teenagers, are responding to the environments planning practitioners create. This paper will briefly provide a background on Victoria Walks and its Walking Maps initiative to inspire and excite people to explore Victoria on foot as well as a brief theoretical look on the relationship between participation of young people before continuing on to describe the walks created.

Teenagers treat their local neighbourhood as an important site for social contact with friends and neighbours (Freeman, 2010). I have chosen to focus on creating a local neighbourhood walk for teenagers by teenagers, including teenagers in the process of designing, participating and evaluating the walk. Two walks were constructed, one that highlighted the places the teenagers liked to visit and one filled with places in their local area that they would show someone new to the area or to Melbourne in general.

Through facilitating this process, it became very clear what the associated benefits of walks created for teenagers by teenagers are: to entice teenagers to feel inspired about the places they live in and to realise the opportunity of sharing them with others.

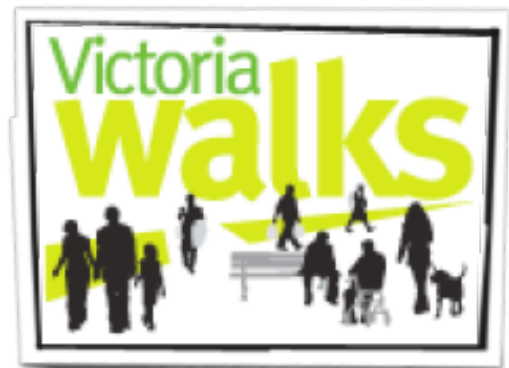


Victoria Walks

VicHealth was the world's first health promotion foundation, established by the Victorian government as part of the Tobacco Act of 1987 (VicHealth, 2011). Through the initiatives of VicHealth and this Act, a new standard for international best practice was achieved by ban smoking from workplaces, public spaces and reducing the number of adult smokers by half, among other achievements. Due to their successes, VicHealth now works in partnership with organisations, communities and individuals by continuing making changes in social, economic, cultural and physical environments to improve society's health and well-being. One such area is the benefits of walking.

According to Pucher et al (2010), many nations have experienced large increases in obesity rates over the past 30 years. Several studies have indicated that there is a link between the increase in obesity rates and physical inactivity. The role of physical activity in preventing weight gain is well documented with regards to the health and physical benefits. In addition, there is a growing amount of literature that supports the role the built environment can have on encouraging people to engage in physical activity, i.e. providing infrastructure for walking and cycling.

One initiative that VicHealth supports is through funding Victoria Walks. According to their website, VicHealth funds Victoria Walks because walking is a great and free way to increase physical activity and assists in reducing obesity, local traffic congestion, pollution (noise and airborne) and a host of preventable diseases (Victoria Walks, 2011). Victoria Walks is a registered health promotion charity that is managed by an independent voluntary board. This organization is a signatory of the International Charter for Walking and a voting member of the International Federation of Pedestrians (IFP), which was founded in 1963 as an umbrella organization for national pedestrian advocacy groups (Victoria Walks, 2011).



Source: www.victoriawalks.org.au



One of Victoria Walks' major initiative is their

Walking Maps website (www.walkingmaps.com.au), a platform to inspire and excite people to explore Victoria on foot. It provides a medium for individuals and organisations to create walks for a wide breadth of activities and services to promote the benefits of walking (see Table 1). Whether an individual, community group, charity, non-profit organization or business, a number of factors could influence the types of walks created. Firstly, the ability to promote active and healthy lifestyles to families

and community groups, to activate streets and to improve liveability, the environment and social connectedness. In addition, to celebrate the historical, cultural, artistic or natural treasures in an area when promoting local destinations to visitors and improving local economies at the same time (Victoria Walks, 2011).

FOR YOU	FOR FAMILIES	FOR THE COMMUNITY
Become fitter and healthier and improve cardiovascular and pulmonary fitness	Benefits flow onto children - keeps them active and reduces the pollution they breathe	Improves local safety and security by an increase in active and passive surveillance
Feel more energetic	Helps children feel connected with and aware of the community in which they live	Reduces traffic, its noise and pollution
Increase muscle strength and endurance	Reduces traffic and increases child safety - especially outside schools at pickup and drop-off times	Increases road safety - drivers are more likely to slow down and take more care in streets where people are walking
Lose weight, reduce body fat and increase muscle tone	Reduces reliance on cars as the main form of transportation. This reliance has had the greatest impact on children, which has been reflected in the rising rates of childhood obesity and respiratory illnesses	Boosts local economy - people who walk more often will shop for longer periods of time and are more likely to spend more money locally
Live longer by reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke		Creates a positive cycle - as people see others walking, they will feel safer to walk themselves
Better manage conditions like high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes		
Reduce joint and muscular stiffness and pain		
Strengthen bones and improve balance		

(Table 1: Benefits of Walking, Victoria Walks.org.au)

Youth Participation

Planning practitioners are becoming increasingly aware of the direct impact their decisions about the built and social environment have on younger members of society. There is an acknowledgement that the environment shapes their lives by impacting on their ability to interact with neighbours and friends, to walk to school or shops and to play outside. They are also beginning to recognize young people as active agents in their own right, who are able to contribute to social cohesion, enhance social capital¹ and able to influence and shape their own social worlds (Freeman and Vass, 2010 and Witherspoon, 2009). However, opportunities for young people to experience these rights are diminishing, especially for children aged between eight and 14 years (Freeman, 2010 and Gill, 1999). There are many associated benefits for engaging children and young people in decision-making processes that impact their communities. Some benefits include:

- * grounding adult understanding and decision-making in the reality of children and young people's experiences;
- * children and young people bring fresh ideas, viewpoints and vigor to problem-solving;
- * children bring an enthusiasm and optimism that has not diminished by repeated failure and hard experiences;
- * creates deeper roots and stronger loyalties;
- * creates 'leadership assets' waiting to be cultivated;
- * seeing the value children's contributions can bring to community development; and,
- * recognising the knowledge and experience of children in their environment may differ from adults and have the ability to capture these needs and wants.

(NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009, Mokwena, 2006 and Freeman and Aitken-Rose, 2005)

Children have become passive social actors in their everyday lives, however this does not have to be the case. The NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2009) believes that as citizens of their community, children and young people have the right to participate in community development processes, as this will improve the capacity of environments to support their needs. When children can experience the benefits of participating in something worthwhile, they are more inclined to want to participate again or in other areas of their lives.

¹ Social capital is generally defined as the product of social interactions and networks of social relations, which are characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity (Freeman, 2010).



Aim

To design and participate in a walk created by teenagers for teenagers.

Chosen Participatory Methods

Kothari (2001) states that particular participatory practices are effective in producing what is considered 'truth' or at a minimum is closer to achieving 'truth' than other less participatory methods of enquiry. Using Sarkissian's (2003) 'Community Participation in Practice' as a basis for choosing participatory methods to use, face-to-face meetings were considered the preferred method of creating the walk. They provided the opportunity to correct the participants if they miss understood questions and to provide clarifications if necessary. Face-to-face meetings would also provide the participants with the freedom to expand and amend their responses. Sarkissian also recommended using 'Storytelling' as a powerful way of communicating their opinions and memories. Storytelling has the potential to foster personal empowerment and to raise everyday realities to a higher level of meaning and understanding. Mapping exercises were used during the face-to-face interviews to provide a visual aid to assist the discussion. Audio recordings were ideal way of keeping records of the responses of the teenagers and provided the opportunity to use their responses verbatim if required.

Creating the List

Three 14 to 15 year old girls, who have high levels of independent mobility, were invited to assist in creating a walk around their local area. These girls were asked to think about their top five favourite places in the Preston/Thornbury/Northcote/Brunswick area of Melbourne, maximum ten km north of the CBD, before they arrived at the face-to-face meeting. They were asked to explain why they had chosen these places, what made them special. Two girls, Molly (14) and Charlotte (15), participated in the face-to-face meeting. Both girls outlined their top five locations as well as a third friend's top five, Cameron (15), who was unable to attend the meeting. The girls marked on a provided map of the area (Figure 1), while Table 2 details their opinions about those places and why they chose these specific locations in their own words.

Nearly half of their favourite places were clustered in Preston, or around their high school, Northcote High. All of these places are accessible via public transport, whether the Epping railway line or the No. 86 or 112 tram routes. The girls spoke about riding their bikes to take them to these locations. Parks were a prominent feature in the list, as Molly said in the meeting 'Parks are the best 'cos they are free!'

Figure 1: The top 15 favourite places in Preston, Thornbury, Northcote and Brunswick, Melbourne

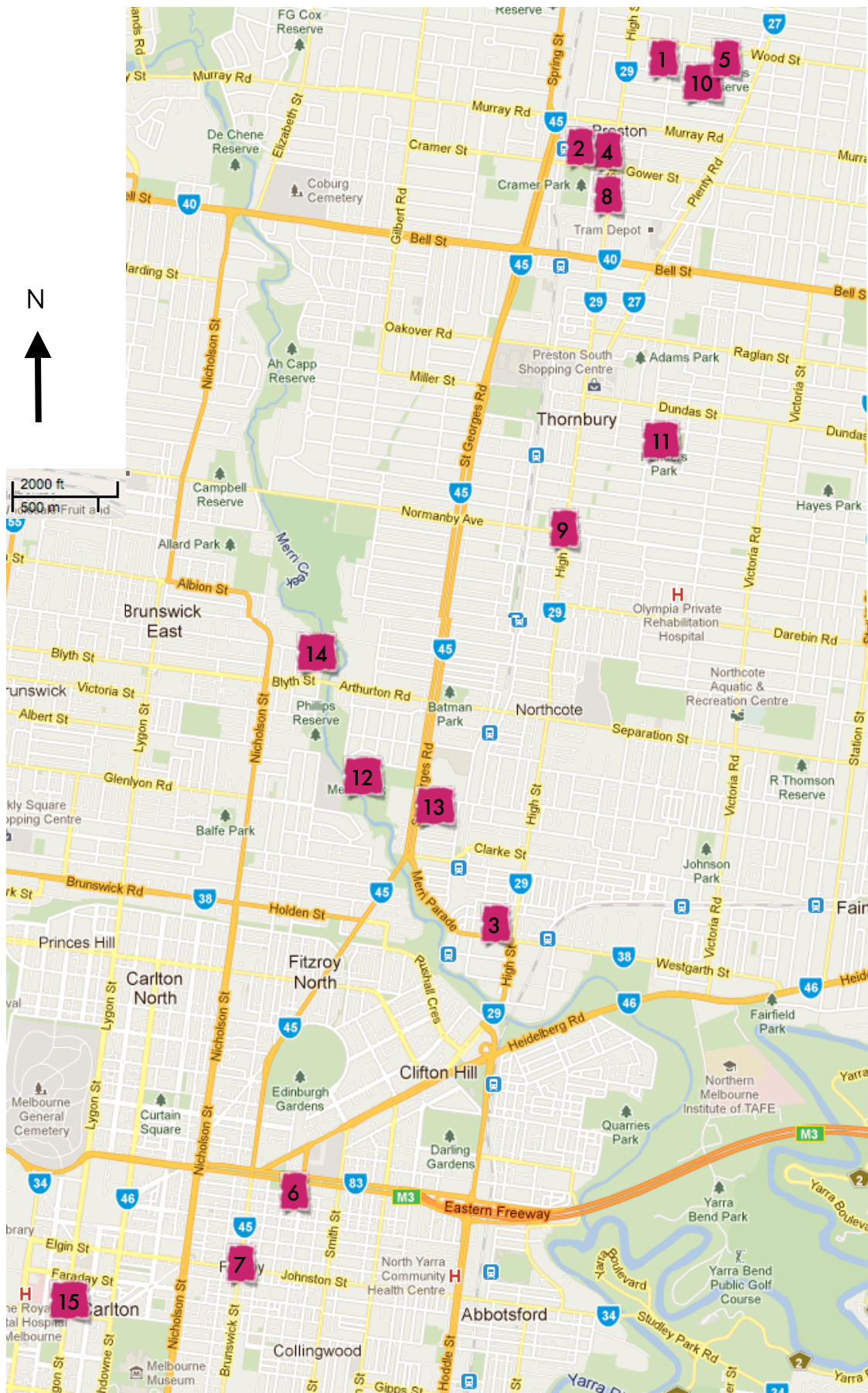


Table 2: The top 15 favourite places in Preston, Thornbury, Northcote and Brunswick

NO.	PLACE	REASONS FOR CHOOSING
1	The Secret Park	Molly: My friend found it in Preston when she was walking around the alleyways. We call it 'the Secret Park' because we never saw anyone else there. We really like it because there is this really big tree that we climb a lot. We have all these adventures there.
2	Preston Market	Molly: We love Preston Market because it is really multi-cultural. There is a lolly store Cameron and I go a lot and it sells American lollies. It is this cheap place where you can chill out.
3	Westgarth Cinema	Molly: I really like it because it is really local. I could walk there really easily or bike there or take a bus two stops. It is quite cheap, cheaper than Northland and is way less packed. They (the staff) are really nice and they let you use the toilets there without having to buy anything. People could sneak in to the cinema all the time, they don't ask for a ticket or anything. But we don't do that because we want to keep going. They trust everyone there to not do that and that's why it feels like there is a big community of people. Like in Hoyts, they check your ticket four times! Charlotte: It's always so cool, like temperature wise so on hot days movies are really good.
4	Mai Lan Bakery 'Pork Bun Place'	Molly: Cameron's dad found this place in the Age and it was voted the best pork rolls in Melbourne. We were like "Oh okay, we'll go there", to just sort of try something new and it was amazing! They are the best pork rolls ever and they are only \$3.50. We go there as much as we can.
5	A. J. Davies Reserve	Molly: Sometimes we go here when it is really hot and have water fights with Cameron and her younger sisters.
6	Fitzroy Pool	Molly: It's \$2.10 to get in. So cheap and again, it's really close to our school. There are never a lot of people there so it's not too packed. It's not like Northcote pool (where) it is so packed and it's \$12 to get in. Charlotte: They have night sessions and stay open until 8:30 pm too.
7	Brunswick Street. Fitzroy	Molly: I really like Brunswick Street, I wish there were more streets like it. All of our friends love Brunswick Street. It's got all these really cool clothes shops and a really cool second hand clothes shop called 'Hunter Gatherer'. There are also heaps of parks near there and quite close to all of our houses. Charlotte: It's got a mix of old and new, op-shops and chain stores and really good food places that are really cheap.
8	High Street, Preston	Molly: This stretch of High Street (between Murray Road and Gower Street), you can just cross the street at any time, even if you are not at the lights. The vibes you get there (are) chill. They have all these bargain stores along there too as well as the Pork Roll place.
9	Loophole	Molly: We like visiting Loophole, it's this local community centre and help out there sometimes.
10	Cameron's House	Charlotte: Cameron's house is one of my favourite places because it's just so... I dunno...it's just the vibes you get. She has 13 animals and a big trampoline in her backyard and all the best DVDs. Her parents are just so welcoming, sometimes we just drop in after school and we can stay for dinner and sleepover.

NO.	PLACE	REASONS FOR CHOOSING
11	Pender's Park	Charlotte: Pender's Park is only two blocks away from my house. I like hanging out in parks because you can bring a blanket and friends and food and it doesn't cost anything. You can just have fun.
12	Merri Park	Charlotte: I really like Merri Park, it is right next to our school and there have been a couple of times after school where we would go to the milk bar across the road and we'll get food and just sit in the park to 6 o'clock sometimes. Molly: There is a playground in the park we are allowed in if it is after school hours.
13	Juline's Noodle Soup	Molly: Juline's is right across the road from our school and it makes the best chips ever, they are so good, so addictive. If it's a hot day and none of us have much money and we just want to chill, we will just cross the road to Juline's and get ice cream, some chips and a huge bottle of juice and sit on the nature's strip or in the park. The owner has a kid in year 9. He works at the cash register. If you cross the road after school, it would be filled with all these Northcote High students, who are all like "Hey Patrick! How you going?". It's our little community milk bar. Everyone knows it at our school, it's sort of like the Northcote High school canteen.
14	CERES	Molly: The natural feeling - so chill. You can just hang out there. The food is great, the hot chocolates are pretty good, organic. My parents shop there every weekend to get pretty much all of their food.
15	Lygon Street, Carlton	Charlotte: I really like Carlton, I like the shops, the parks nearby, Brunetti's and the cinema (Nova Cinema).

The Walk Results

Collectively from this list, we were able to create two different walks. The girls were asked to first chose their top eight favourite places and secondly a separate list of the top eight places they could take a visitor to the area or to Melbourne.

Top 8 Favourite Places

Molly and Charlotte had no trouble identifying their favourite places to visit. Their top eight favourite places are:

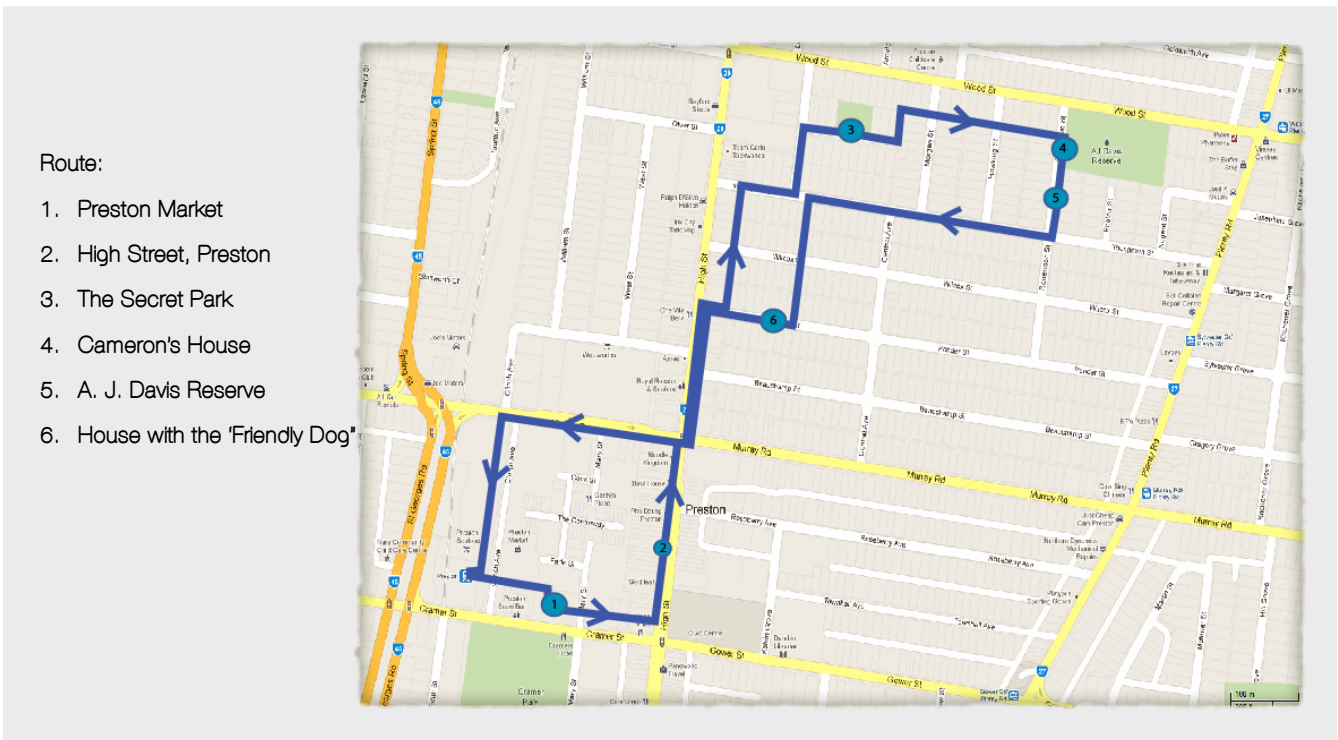
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|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Cameron's House | 5. Mai Lan Bakery |
| 2. High Street, Preston | 6. Merri Park |
| 3. Juline's Noodle Shop | 7. Preston Market |
| 4. The Secret Park | 8. A.J Davies Reserve |

Of these eight places, only five were visited. Reasons for this include time constraints as well as their close proximity to each other, which allowed the group to walk to all the nominated places within an hour. The five chosen places are:

- * Preston Market
- * High Street, Preston
- * Cameron's House
- * The Secret Park
- * A. J. Davis Reserve

Figure 2 shows the actual route taken to visit these places. The girls elected to give me a tour of 'their version of Preston'. An additional place was introduced while on the walk, a house with a very friendly dog that the girls liked to visit on their way to Cameron's house. Unfortunately, the dog was not in sight but it was an interesting addition to the walk.

Figure 2: The Preston Walk



Top 8 Places to show a Visitor

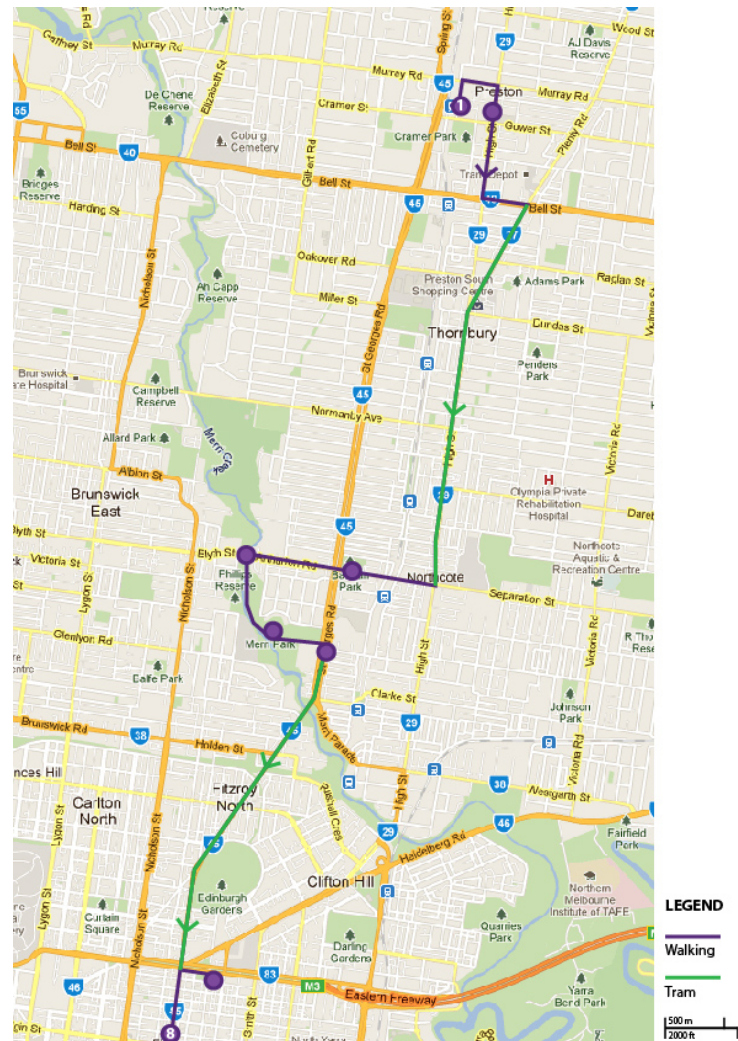
A little more thought went into determining the top eight places to take a Visitor. At first, the girls were keen on keeping the Secret Park in the mix but they soon came to the realisation that while the Secret Park may be a favourite spot for the girls due to the memories attached to this place, a visitor is unlikely to feel the same way.

An itinerary (Figure 3) was created to visit all eight places (Figure 4) to maximise the amount of walking as well as taking advantage of the tram routes that connect the suburbs we were visiting.

Figure 3: The Visitors' Walk Itinerary

TIME	PLACE
10:30 AM	Meet at the Preston Train Station to visit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * the Preston Market * Mai Lan Bakery * High Street, Preston
11:10 AM	Walk down to Bell Street and catch the No. 112 tram down to Separation Street / Arthurton Road.
11:25 AM	Walk to Batman Park and continue on to CERES
12:00 PM	Lunch at CERES
12:30 PM	Walk down Merri Creek to Northcote High School and visit Juline's Noodle Shop
1:30 PM	Catch the No. 112 tram down St George's Road and visit the Fitzroy Pools
2:00 PM	Finish up at San Churros for some afternoon teal

Figure 4: The Visitors' Walk



Route:

1. Preston Market
2. High Street, Preston (Mai Lan Bakery)
3. Batman Park
4. CERES
5. Merri Park
6. Juline's Noodle Shop
7. Fitzroy Pool
8. Brunswick Street



The Preston Walk

As the person being taken on the walk with three tour guides, this walk turned into a great opportunity to get to know the girls. A third member of the girls' close group, Cameron, met us at the Preston Market and gave great insights into the area as she was the one who lived in Preston. Unfortunately, the Preston Market (Figure 5) was not open on Sundays but the girls had a lot of stories to share; the noise from the shop keepers yelling out bargains, the cheap donuts and lollies they could buy.



(Figure 5: An empty Preston Market on a Saturday Afternoon)



(Figure 6: The tree at the Secret Park)

(Figure 7: The new playground at the Secret Park)

Figure 6 shows the girls' favourite tree. The girls shared many stories of finding new and innovative ways of climbing and using the tree, from using an abandoned shopping trolley to help them climb, to finding an old plank of wood to sit on in the tree, or finding an old tire and rope to make their own swing in the park. Figure 7 shows the new playground that has been constructed recently. The girls mentioned that the park has changed since they introduced that playground and not many children play on it.

It was clear when undertaking this walk that it was not one that could be shared with the general public. The stories were quite personal and very much about their everyday lives. However, I thoroughly enjoyed getting an insight into their world and the ways in which they interacted with it. It was while on this walk that the idea of inviting other friends and family, who would not know the area, would be worthwhile. This would provide a great opportunity to receive feedback about the walk and the process for myself and the teenage girls.

The Visitors' Walk

The Visitor's Walk had a rocky start. Unfortunately, the first attempt resulted in a reschedule as it began to rain very heavily. In addition, only my sister, Saran (19) was available to be taken on the Visitor's Walk on the rescheduled day. Relying on the teenage girls to co-ordinate and entice others to participate in this project proved unrealistic given the short time-frame and lack of collateral to assist the recruitment others. Many of their friends were busy with other commitments, chores or were unwell to attend. In the end, Cameron was available to walk through Preston and Molly met up with us in Northcote. These changes in attendance was not apparent until half an hour after the meeting time but despite the late start, we finished the walk in the scheduled time frame.



(Figure 8: High Street, Preston)

Cameron shared stories about High Street, the cuisines that her and her family would try and bargain stores she would visit to create costumes with (Figure 8). In the evaluation interview, Saran expressed her partiality for the teenagers being exposed to different foods and cultures along High Street, "Where I grew up, it was pretty much (just) cafes but they have all this asian and eastern european culture they normally wouldn't be exposed to. I thought that was good for them culturally". Molly joined Saran and I in Northcote, our first stop was the Batman Park (Figure 9), another park the group would visit. Utilizing public transport to cover the longer distances between key places was very effective, despite carrying out the walk on Melbourne Cup Day. We did not need to wait longer than ten minutes for a tram to appear to take us to our next destination.



(Figure 9: Batman Park)

CERES proved to be the most liked place to visit for Saran, who liked the fact that children could go there on a regular basis, "I only went once in Primary School and I thought schools would pay to go there for a day and you pretty much go away (thinking) that. It is really cool that they have markets (Figure 10) and it's more interactive then I remembered". At the end of the trip, Saran was asked if there was too much walking on this particular tour. She replied, "When you do these tours, it is just part of going (on them). It's part of the culture, if you walk you get to see more. If you want to drive that's up to you but that's not going to be as much fun'.

In Molly's evaluation of the entire process of choosing the places and conducting the walk, her observations centred around the notion of being more aware of how she lived, "I never really thought about the places that we liked going to. When you asked us why we liked going to these places, it was really strange to me. My friends (and I) don't sit down and ask why do we like going to the (Fitzroy) Pool." She also became aware of how all of her favourite places were connected along a path, predominately along a tram route from school and how her experiences differed significantly from others. "I sort of thought that's what all kids did but after hearing your stories, it sounds like our group is pretty different with how we bike everywhere."



(Figure 10: Closed Market at CERES)

Overall the sentiment from the three of us was positive. The places chosen proved to be of value and interest. Molly expressed interest in sharing this walk with her friends or have her friends take her to places she did not know of. While Saran expressed interest on revisiting CERES and Merri Park, highlighting how this walk had exposed her to new places. However, it was very apparent that either a Wednesday or Saturday morning/early afternoon would have been the perfect time to undertake this tour. Both the Preston Market and CERES organic market were closed on the day we visited them and we missed out on seeing these places at the ideal time. Saran and I had to rely on Cameron and Molly's stories. While these were very entertaining and insightful, they were second-hand.



My reflections and opinions on this participatory process seem to match Corcoran et al (2009)'s analysis of how young people animate the public realm in the suburbs. Corcoran et al state that young people appropriate the suburban landscape in ways that will suit their needs for interaction and adventure. They will create special meeting points (i.e. Juline's Noodle Shop) and hangout spaces (i.e. The Secret Park, Merri Park) that provide them with the opportunity to socialise or 'hang out' with other young people. 'Hanging out' is an important aspect of teenage socialisation. It provides an important outlet for learning how to develop and sustain social relationships away from parental supervision. Molly, Charlotte and Cameron's local knowledge about where to get the cheapest food, knowing who the friendly shopkeepers are, to what the best routes to take, support Corcoran et al's belief that feelings of personal safety are determined by the level of local knowledge and attachment to local people and place.

I can see this process working very well in classroom situations. By only tapping into one small friendship group, there were no conflicts or negotiation processes to facilitate as they were already in agreement. A greater depth of discussion and negotiation of places could occur by expanding the number of teens to a classroom size. Some benefits include exposure to differing points of view, the process by which places are chosen and the value of conducting the walks and obtaining feedback. All of these factors were experienced by Molly, Charlotte and Cameron. To quote Molly, "(We) don't get the chance to sit down and think about the places we go to, so listing them all down made us realise that we have all these cool spots".

Initially, when deciding how I was going to utilise Victoria Walks' concept of creating a walk, I was not going to engage with anyone in the creation process. Rather I was going to take people on a walk of my own creation and provide them with questionnaires to respond to. I am pleased that an opportunity to have access to teenagers was available. The outcome would have been quite different; one not as rich or as fulfilling to be a part of. It was very interesting to hear what they had to say about the places that they loved to visit. Their high level of independent mobility provided them with freedom to experience and expand their way of thinking, a trait that other teenagers could develop. They were very articulate and passionate about each other and their neighbourhoods. Through facilitating this process, it became very clear what the associated benefits of walks created for teenagers by teenagers are: to entice teenagers to feel inspired about the places they live in and realise the opportunity of sharing them with others.

As this has been only a small participatory project, further studies could analyse teenagers, whose level of independent mobility is low and underdeveloped, against the outcomes of participating in the creation of a walk of their local area and whether this would increase their independent mobility. These walks created for teenagers by teenagers could also provide planning practitioners with a rich source of research and greater insight into understanding how young people interact with their local built and social environment. They could become a tool for highlighting the aspects of the environments that work well and those that change as well as encouraging young people to interact with their environments in positive and inclusive ways.



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