Abstract
All cities are born and some die. But what happens to them in-between? The major cities of Australia have existed for about two hundred years and show signs of maturity. One of our fastest growing cities is only just over 50 years old: the Gold Coast became a city in 1959 and seems to be in its adolescent stage of development. This article explores various aspects of adolescent urbanism in the sixth largest city in Australia.

Introduction
Cities do not appear fully formed; small settlements grow over time and at some point achieve city status. The point at which an urban settlement becomes a city varies between countries and this, therefore, makes it difficult to define cities consistently and to compare them internationally. In Australia, there are many urban settlements that are called cities, however the criteria used to define them varies from state to state.

The Commonwealth Government has established a body called the Major Cities Unit (MCU) to help plan for the expected growth of our larger cities and to develop a national urban policy. The MCU defines major cities as ‘places with more than 100,000 people’, but there are many other urban centres with fewer people that are also called cities. Regardless of size, they are all in a state of flux: in some, the population is growing, while in others it is stagnating or even declining; in some, the local economy is booming and in others it is struggling to cope with global economic changes; in some, the quality of life is high, while in others it is falling in the face of high housing costs, traffic congestion and other growing pains.

This state of flux suggests that cities should be thought of as dynamic places where change is commonplace. But how can these changes be understood? One approach is to conceive of cities going through a life cycle similar to the cycle we experience as human beings: all cities are born, they all grow up and some eventually die. If we take an historical approach to cities around the world, many have ceased to exist. Some have ‘died’ as a result of war, some of famine and disease, some from natural or man-made disasters and some because they could not adjust to rapid economic change. In Australia a number of former mining towns have been abandoned and more may suffer this fate in the future.

But what happens to cities between their ‘birth and death”? How do they ‘grow up’? Can we learn anything about the processes of urban growth in cities from what we know about human development?

Until the early 20th century, young people moved quickly from childhood to adulthood with little or no transitional period. Although brief, this period was often marked by significant rites of passage that celebrated the young person’s new found responsibilities and opportunities: to marry, own property, leave home and begin paid work. However, until they actually settled down and took up these opportunities, young adults often experienced a period of emotional turmoil alongside their physical growth spurts in their transition to adulthood.

Psychologists began to study these traits among the young...
people of Europe and North America, while anthropologists carried out research among people in developing countries. By the second half of the 20th century, psychologist Erik Erikson had developed a theory of stages of development that applied across the whole of our life cycle. The fifth of his eight stages was described as ‘adolescence’. This transitional period may now have extended in time as children are exposed to adult pressures and influences at increasingly young ages and for educational and economic reasons are not able to acquire all the trappings of adulthood (a job, a home of their own, financial independence from parents) until they are in their 30s.

Is it possible to use any of these concepts to understand the growth of Australian cities? To explore this possibility we will look at the City of the Gold Coast, a place that did not become a city in the early years of European settlement like Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane, but began its rapid transition to city status in the middle of the last century. It is now Australia’s sixth most populous city governed by its second biggest local government authority and has in recent years been the fastest growing city in the country. The main features of ‘adolescence’ to look for in the growth of the Gold Coast as a city include rapid physical growth, new identity formation, emerging sexual awareness, ego-centrism and the development of analytical capacity.

**STUDENT ACTIVITIES**

1. What does the author mean by the quote that ‘some cities die’? Can you give an example?
2. Use an atlas to locate the Gold Coast. Write a description of its location in relation to all of Australia and to Queensland.
3. Use the Internet to find the definition of a city for the following countries: India; England; USA; Indonesia; China; and Fiji. What similarities and differences did you find? How can you account for these?
4. Why is it so difficult to define a city in Australia?

**Physical Growth**

In 1959 the Gold Coast Town Council in Queensland was renamed the City of the Gold Coast and a new Australian city was born. At that time about 30,000 people lived in the collection of small towns and coastal suburbs that made up the city. In 2011 the city was home to over 515,000 and is expected to reach over 750,000 in twenty years time.

Nineteen Fifty-nine saw the construction of the 10-storey ‘Kinkabool’ apartment block in Surfers Paradise, thought at the time to be an extremely tall building in what was a very low rise city. It is now overshadowed by ‘Q1’, the tallest residential building in the southern hemisphere with over 78 floors of apartments, topped with the SkyPoint observation deck. There are now over 300 high rise buildings in the city, most located in the narrow beachside strip between Main Beach and Broadbeach and including Surfers Paradise.

While this vertical growth has been spectacular, most permanent residents live in relatively low density, low-rise suburbs which have been expanding outwards at a great rate over the last fifty years. This rapid outward expansion has transformed many of the inland areas of the city and encroached on its environmentally valuable and sensitive hinterland.

**Identity Formation**

We know that during our teenage years we begin to develop and also experiment with new identities. The same could be said of cities. The Gold Coast has been trying out various new identities over the last few decades. In its early years, it was a family friendly place for holiday makers, but its character began to change as more people chose to make the Gold Coast their home. It has always been seen and certainly promoted as a destination for a better life: where the sun always shines, the beach beckons and there is also the chance to make a fortune. It is said that the Gold Coast is the small business capital of
Australia and until recently many people made money through buying and selling property. It has also had a reputation of being a place to party, whether at Bernie Elsey’s Beachcomber pyjama parties in the 1950s or now at the annual Schoolies or V8 Supercar championships.

**Figure 5:** Q1 building – tallest residential building in the southern hemisphere

In recent years the city has been trying to promote a new, more mature city image, focusing on its ‘knowledge industries’, in the fields of health and sustainable development, and its emerging cultural facilities. Hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2018 will provide a valuable opportunity to show to the rest of the world whether or not it has succeeded.

**Figure 6:** Gold Coast 2012

**Figure 7:** Map of Gold Coast and surrounding area
Emerging Sexuality
Alongside its reputation of being ‘famous for fun’, the Gold Coast has always presented a sexualised image of itself. It recently entered the Guinness Book of Records for holding the world’s largest bikini parade in which 357 young women walked along the beach of Surfers Paradise, under the watchful eye of Paula Stafford who popularised the bikini in the same place some sixty years earlier.

In the 1960s the Surfers Paradise Progress Association reacted to the introduction of parking meters along the beachfront by employing bikini-clad Meter Maids to top up any expired meters in the area. They were also used to promote the city to developers around the country as a place of investment opportunity and further reinforced the city’s image as a risqué city.

Ego Centrism
Adolescents often focus on their own internal world and pay little attention to the views and needs of others. The Gold Coast has for some time proclaimed itself the best possible place to live in Australia, if not the world. Objective comparisons with other places are often rejected and local politicians are discouraged from visiting other cities to learn how they might improve the management of their own place: if you already live in the best place on earth, what could you possibly learn from anywhere else?

This form of adolescent self-centeredness may perhaps be tolerable during the good times, when both tourists and permanent residents are keen to visit and/or relocate, but during economic hard times it can lead to an inability to appreciate the extent of urban competition.

Analytical Capacity
As we pass through adolescence we usually become more analytical and reflective, better able to appreciate our place in the wider world and less inclined to see ourselves as the centre of everything. In the 21st century, the Gold Coast has become more reflective. It carried out a major exercise in thinking about its long term future. Called ‘Our Bold Future’, this strategic planning exercise involved thousands of contributions from local residents. It confirmed a desire to see the city preserve its relaxed, sub-tropical lifestyle while modernizing and diversifying its local economy to make it less dependent on tourism and construction, sectors that are especially vulnerable to global economic forces.

In April 2012, the citizens of the Gold Coast elected a new Mayor to lead a new local council. They were elected on a platform of restoring the entrepreneurial spirit of the city and thus making it, once again, a place that will attract new residents.

Conclusions
Two major cities have emerged in Australia in the last hundred years. Canberra is the product of national debate about where to locate the new Commonwealth capital and the application of traditional master planning principles. The Gold Coast on the other hand has grown rapidly with very little planning, at least until recently. While Canberra has grown up in an orderly fashion, with impressive cultural facilities and a sense of maturity from an early age, the Gold Coast’s development has been more like that of an unruly teenager. Growing rapidly and preoccupied with its natural assets, it has taken risks and often suffered as a consequence. Recently, it has begun to show signs of a more analytical and reflective outlook.

There are signs that the Gold Coast is beginning to mature as a city and maybe to grow up as well as outwards.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES
5. Use the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to find the population of Australia’s top 10 cities. Are they all capital cities?
6. Use the ABS to find how the Gold Coast population has changed over time. Graph your findings and describe the trend in growth that is occurring.
7. Locate the ABS data for the current population. Draw an age-sex pyramid for this city. Which main age group is attracted to the Gold Coast? What impact will this have on services now and into the future?