

# Exploring the Potential Relevance of Sen's Capability Approach to Evaluation.

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# The Capability Approach

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- A theoretical framework about wellbeing, development and justice.
- Can trace it's roots back to (among others) Aristotle and Karl Marx.
- Pioneered by Amartya Sen, further developed by others.
- An *approach*, not a theory.
- Applied in welfare economics, development studies, social policy ...
- Discipline spanning – just like evaluation?

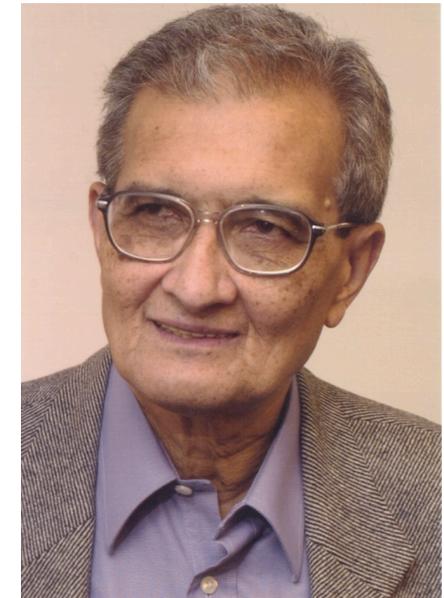
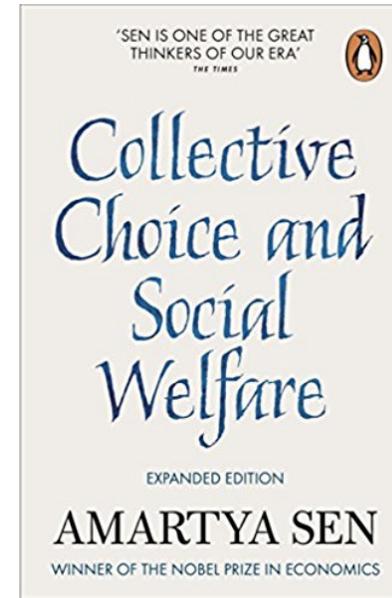
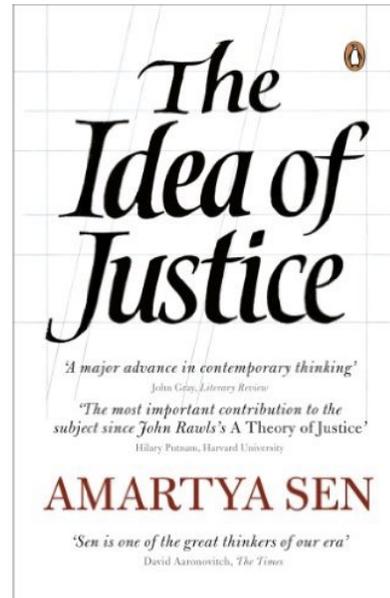
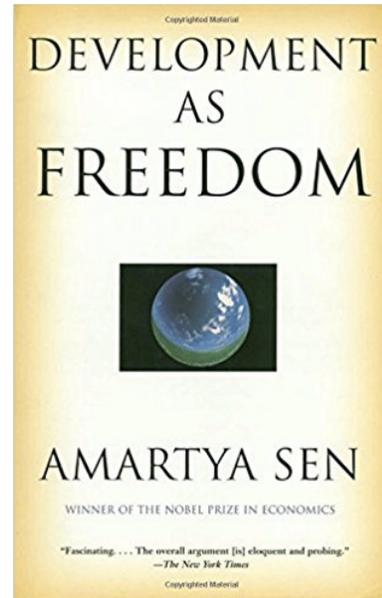
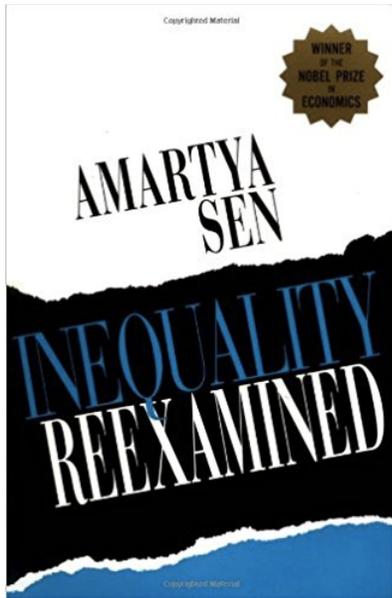
# Why the Capability Approach?

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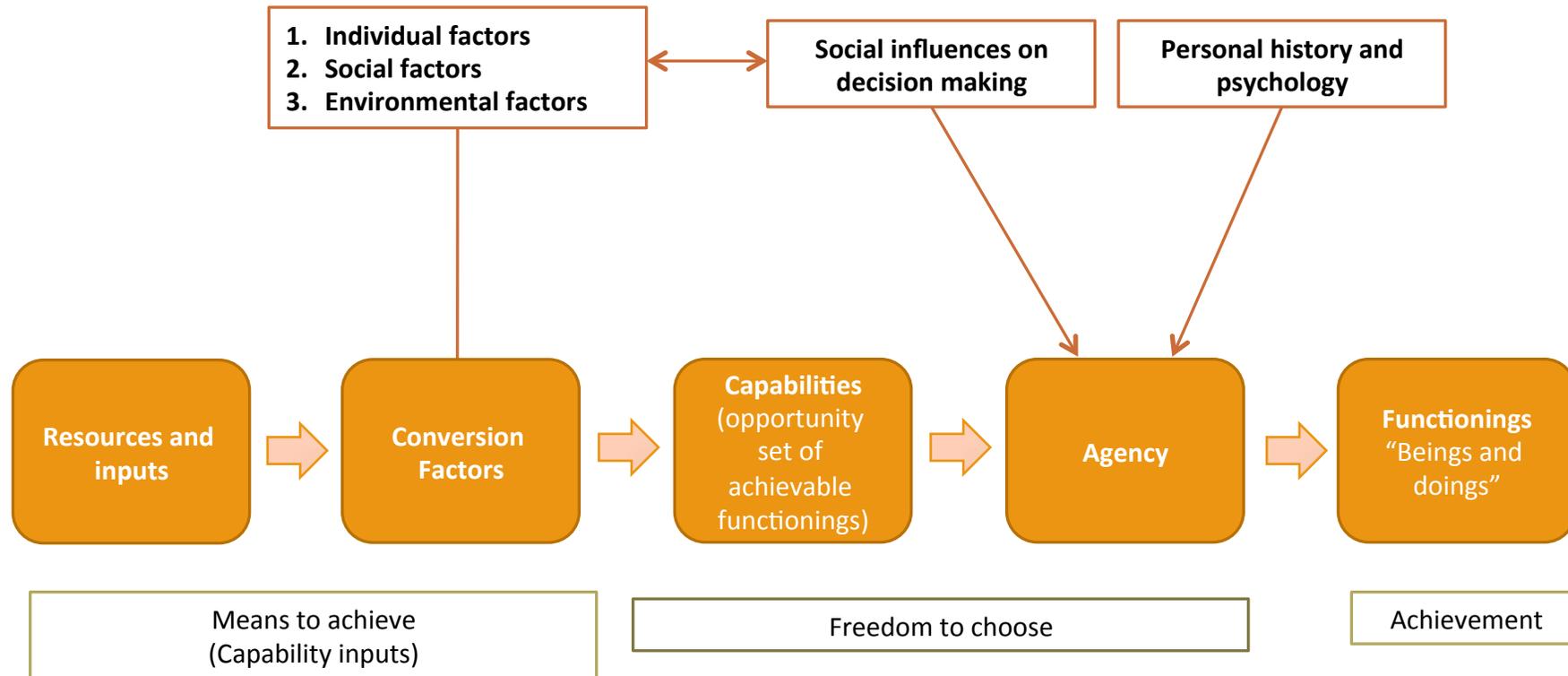
- Two challenges:
  - Conceptualising community participation, empowerment, self-determination?
  - Measuring outcomes that reflect and are respectful of Aboriginal values and desires?

How has the capability approach been operationalized in evaluation... And can it provide me with some guidance in evaluating difficult to define topics?

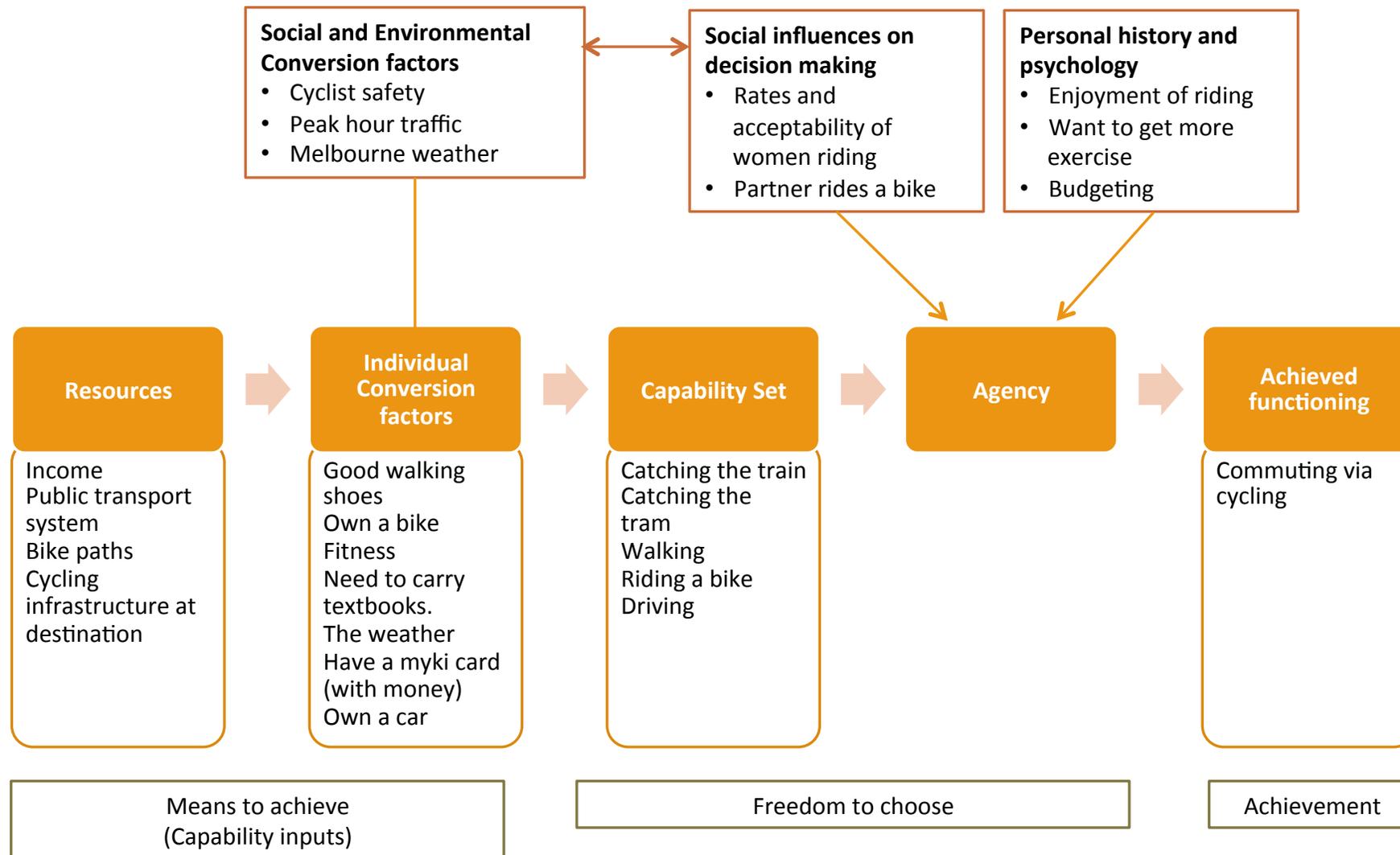
# Sen's Capability Approach

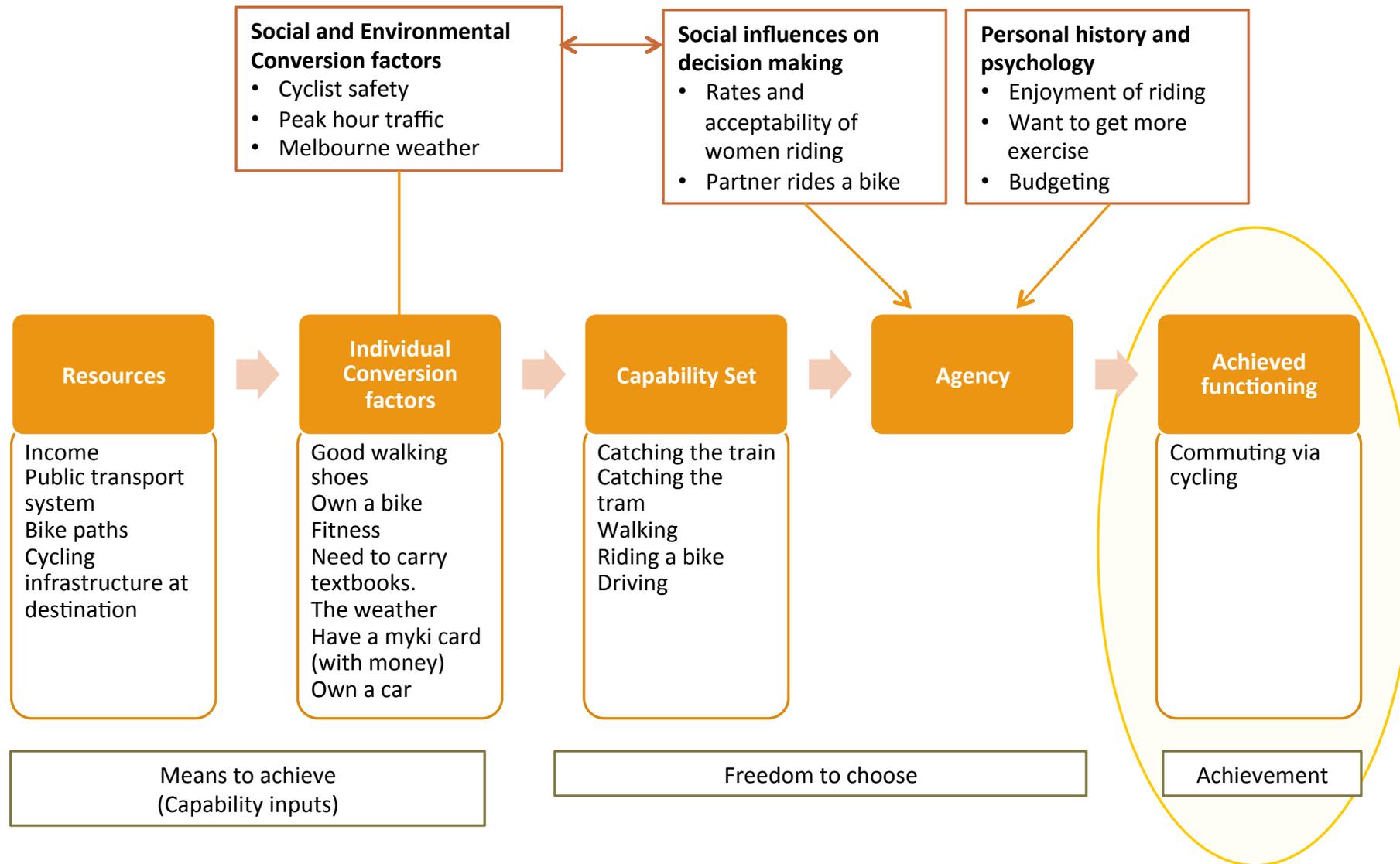


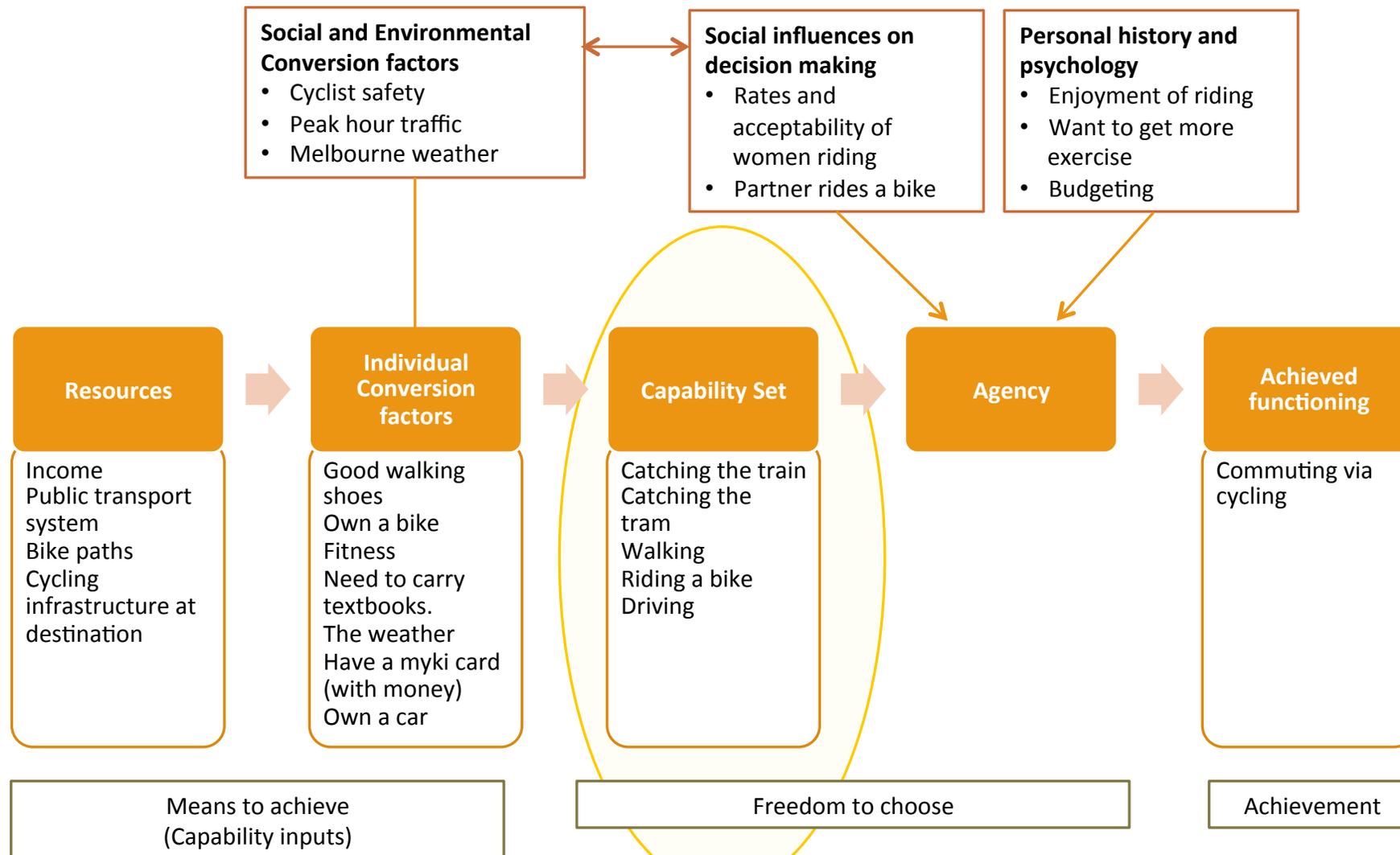
# Key concepts



*Adapted from Robeyns, 2007*







# An incomplete theory?

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Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities:

- life
- bodily health
- bodily integrity
- senses, imagination and thought
- emotions
- practical reason
- affiliation
- other species
- play
- control over one's environment

# Or “assertive incompleteness”?

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*the ideas of well-being and inequality may have enough ambiguity and fuzziness to make it a mistake to look for a complete ordering of either . . . The ‘pragmatic reason for incompleteness’ is to use whatever parts of the ranking we manage to sort out unambiguously, rather than maintaining complete silence until everything has been sorted out and the world shines in dazzling clarity . . .*

Sen (1992), *Inequality Re-examined*, p49

# The capability approach and evaluation

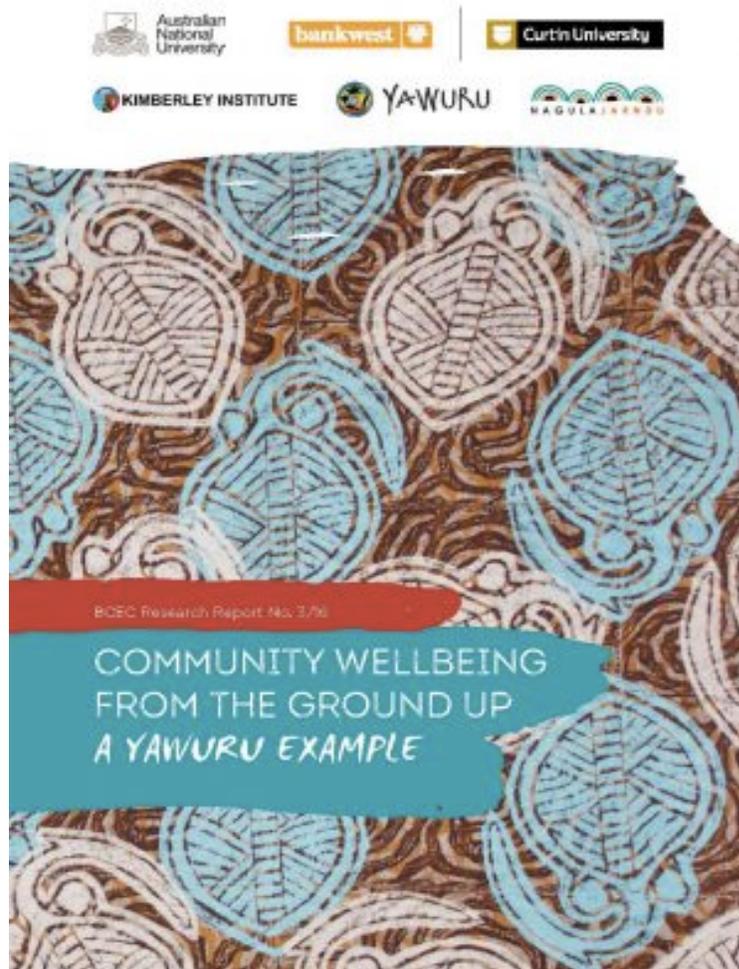
Journal	# Citations “capability approach”	
Advances in Program Evaluation	0	
African Evaluation Journal	1	Prince (2014) Macro-level drivers of multidimensional poverty in sub-Saharan Africa: explaining change in the Human Poverty Index
American Journal of Evaluation	0	
Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation	0	
Evaluation	0	
Evaluation and Program Planning	0	
Evaluation Journal of Australasia	0	
Evaluation Practice	0	
Evaluation Review	0	
Journal of Mixed Methods Research	1	Kim (2014) Community-Involved Learning to Expand Possibilities for Vulnerable Children
Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation	0	
Journal of Social Work Research and Evaluation	0	
New Directions for Evaluation	0	
Performance Evaluation	0	
Research Evaluation	0	

# Operationalization of the approach

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1. Evaluating poverty reduction projects
2. Assessing patient empowerment; and health/social care interventions
3. Analysing public policy
4. Conceptualising and creating measures of Indigenous wellbeing

# Conceptualising Indigenous wellbeing



Themes	Functioning
Family, identity and relatedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing your fish or kill with family and friends</li> <li>• Seeing and spending time with family</li> </ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in community cultural events</li> <li>• Being able to have a say or have control over what happens in my community</li> </ul>
Connection to country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking after country</li> <li>• Eating bush tucker, eating fish that was caught in season and meat that was hunted in season</li> </ul>
Connection to culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking and understanding the Yawuru language</li> <li>• Participation in law and ceremonies</li> </ul>
Safety and respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel respected and show respect to Indigenous groups in my community</li> <li>• Feel respected and show respect to family and friends</li> </ul>
Standard of living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate housing conditions</li> </ul>

# The approach and evaluation theory

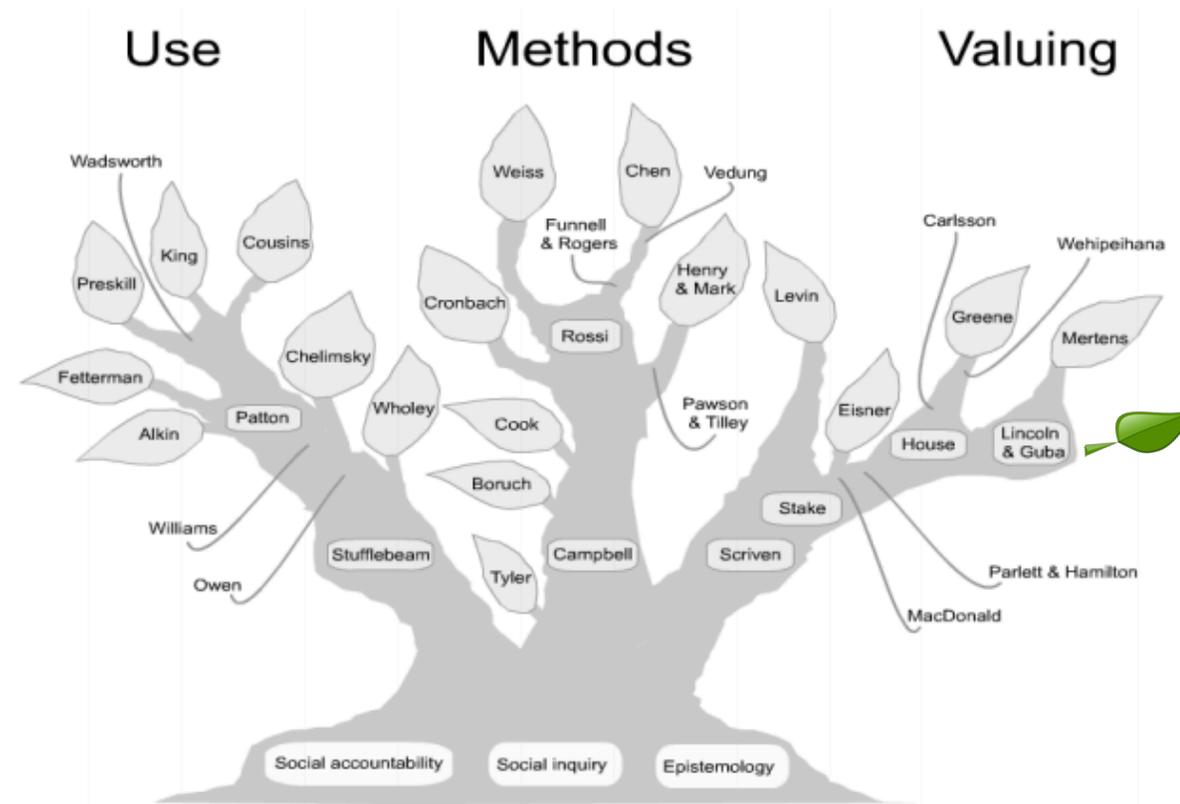


Figure 1. Evaluation Theory Tree

Source: Alkin, M. C. (2012). *Evaluation roots* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

# Reflections...

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1. A framework for valuing?
2. A democratic, deliberative participatory process?
3. A transformative paradigm to shift the evaluative space to freedom equality?

# Concluding thoughts

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The success of a society is to be evaluated primarily by the freedoms that members of the society enjoy.

— *Amartya Sen* —

AZ QUOTES