Urban – For Cars or For People?

Dark grey clouds of stink wrap around Dhaka – what once was green and clear has now become a massive stink and smoke bomb. It used to be a harmonious community centred around the Buriganga River but now has become so polluted the sky isn’t blue anymore. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world in Australia, Sydney’s George Street is shared with pedestrians and bikers, the sky the clearest cerulean blue and the air quality is like the most transparent crystal. Vehicles circle beyond the pedestrian-friendly environment and opens over 20,000 square metres of roadway into inviting public spaces. All over the world, people suffer from air pollution, noise contamination and light adulteration. We must fix our smoke-wreathed world into a place where it healthy, environmentally friendly, and more welcoming to the public.

First, 467 people die of asthma annually – especially when they’re exposed to terrible air quality and excessive smoke or lung-blocking substances. A 2020 study conducted by the Curtin University revealed that 2,600 Australians die each year due to human-caused air pollution. “As the world warms, the plants, and animals we share it with suffer. Just like us.” Quotes Doctor Linden Ashcroft as he strolls through the University of Melbourne’s’ gardens, gazing at the sky. 99% of the world’s population where air pollution levels exceed World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines. Every percentage of this number is one more person coughing from extreme smoke exposure, the hundreds upon thousands of lung cancer patients and those who suffer in terrible air conditions. When we implement pedestrian-friendly spaces, we also consider the general public’s health.

Subsequently, the pedestrian-friendly areas will encourage travelling on foot, bike, jogging and many more. This will also discourage cars and mass producers of carbon dioxide in that area. A 2020 study conducted by the Lionel University of California stated that only 12% of travel occurs by bike or foot (only 1% by bike). Additionally, the study also showed that there are many benefits of walking, such as lowered risk of heart attack, improved mood, more controllable blood pressure, increased strength, lower stress levels, mental health benefits and more. The average person only walks 3-5 kilometres per day. Meanwhile when we drive, we can gladly drive 33.2km without complaint. If we implement more pedestrian-friendly spaces, the amount of exercise an individual does every day will be doubled, perhaps tripled, whether walking your dog or having a nice nighttime stroll.

Most of the world lives in a dull, grey, lifeless world. The world has slowly been losing its colour, not only because of eye whites yellowing, but also because companies, houses, and the places around us have started using monochrome hues. It not only looks displeasing but also harms our mental health in the long term. This revelation was introduced by the Medium, which uncovered that 60% of the world has objects, items and materials that are either black, grey, or white. However, even the smallest change in our boring urban cities, perhaps by even adding a couple more flowerbeds, will significantly appeal to passerby more. By including some garden areas, public footpaths, fountains and drawings, the streets will be transformed into a welcoming public space for everybody.

Therefore, if we just implement one area of pedestrian-friendly space, we will invite more people to exercise and stay healthy, help asthmatics, reduce lung cancer rates, and make more of the world colourful and inviting – even if it’s just 90 square metres at a time. Next time you go out in your car, maybe ride a bike instead. Or if you’re sick of looking at the grey-and-white apartment next door – try planting a window box. Even one little decision can make a massive difference later on.