

Freeing Our Future

Why American children have become prisoners in their own homes and how a Dutch perspective can help

INTRODUCTION

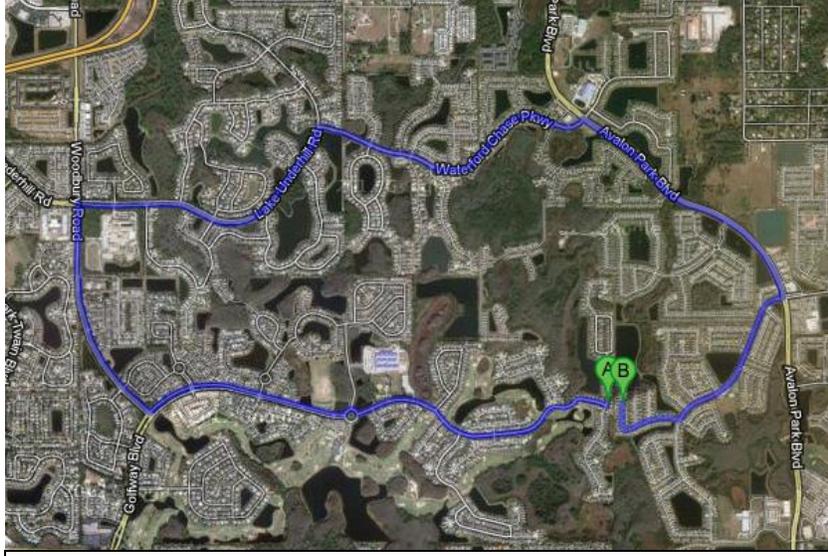
America is regarded as one of the freest countries in the world, with the highest value of it. Why is it then that they have failed to take into consideration their youth? With sprawling car-infested cities and rising CO₂ (U.S. EPA, 2021) emissions the future of America, children aged 5-15, are trapped within their homes, their only escape being the older generations' willingness to help. To achieve freedom, we must provide a sense of security and focus on

Across the Atlantic Ocean cities in the Netherlands have been following a formula, prioritizing active transport, for years with great success, having the world's happiest population of youth. (UNICEF, 2020) The Cultivated Mini-Polis in Breda aims to continue this legacy. The area aims to provide a miniature city, bursting with culture, art, and most importantly, all the necessary amenities of life accessible by active transport: a form of transport where you move yourself without need for a license such as walking or biking.



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPRISONMENT OF OUR YOUTH

To understand the relevance of the design of the Cultivated Mini-Polis we must first understand the root issue. Today, cities across the world are dominated by the car. It is seen as necessary for every household, transportation otherwise is slow, dangerous, and unreliable. Not only this but cars emit high levels of CO2 (U.S. EPA. 2021), and the future of our planet looks dire. The older generations are quick to look past this with easy access to cars and the belief their lives will come to an end before climate change is able to catch up. We must however remember the state of our youth. Currently young people all over the world are trapped at home, relying on their parents as personal chauffeurs, doomed to live in a world with ever rising sea levels. (Not just bikes, 2020) Children are seen as a chore; however, this is solvable and unnecessary.



Two Houses in Florida share a backyard, but it would take more than two hours to walk between the two. (Schmitt. 2013)
Photograph: Google Maps

FOSTERING FREEDOM

Youth are capable of much greater than they have been given credit for, and this imposed limit comes down to the way our cities have been built around cars. In moving towards active forms of transport, we open the world to our younger generations. Giving freedom to the youth provides great opportunities for society. Firstly, the strain on families becomes greatly reduced. Children can commute to important activities, such as school, on their own. This frees up time for parents to focus on their own stresses but also for children to learn vital skills in independence, making the transition into adulthood smoother. Young people will be able to begin contributing to society from a much earlier stage this way; they may be able to walk to the corner store to work and then bike to the local mall to shop with some friends, all without relying on anyone for transport. (Not just bikes, 2020)

A group of kids in Culemborg, The Netherlands cycles to school in dedicated bike lane.
Photograph (right): BicycleDutch. 2011



“Swing Time” by Höweler + Yoon Architecture in London is some of the latest public Space being created specifically for teens. These spaces are beginning to be created and utilized thanks to the growing numbers of teens with access to active transport. Photograph (Left): Höweler + Yoon Architecture. 2021

THE BEGININGS OF A BETTER PLANET

In giving freedom to our younger generation, we must not only consider our present but our future. We are headed towards catastrophe. With skyrocketing CO2 emissions, sea levels rising and, forests ablaze, we must act to save our planet for the coming generations. (U.S EPPA. 2021) Active transport is the most sustainable method of mobility. Taking a bike or walking creates zero carbon emissions and has numerous health benefits, unlike the car, which pollutes and contributes to the ever-sedentary lifestyle epidemic. (WWF. 2021) Our youth must be raised with a different mindset on transportation. One where bikes are the norm and infrastructure is readily available. This is crucial to setting them up with a sustainable environment to save the planet.

CREATING COMMUNITIES

When youth actively commute to accessible, close-proximity destinations the whole neighborhood becomes safer. This safety is vital as it leads to the sense of security necessary for parents to feel at ease with sending their children out into the world. When using modes of active transport, unlike cars, you are directly exposed to the outside environment. Daily commutes lead to familiar faces, and quick interactions between neighbors allow for relationships to form within the community building a sense of trust throughout. A positive feedback loop forms in which the more people are seen outside the more will feel inclined to join them and areas overall become much livelier with children able to play outside. (Jacobs 1993)

This is feasible because decreased use of cars means decreased rates of collisions. Cars in general pose as a huge safety risk, they are large, heavy, high-speed objects, which give a false sense of security to already mistake prone humans. No parent would ever reasonably let their child play by a highway. With active transport however, the chance of serious and fatal accidents dramatically decreases. (World Health Organization. 2008) The mistake that would cause a death in a car becomes a quick bump on a bike. Freeing our youth means creating lively livable and safe streets. An excellent choice for all users of the neighborhood.



IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CULTIVATED MINI-POLIS

As the importance and value of freeing our youth through the means of active transport has now been made clear the only thing left to do is implement. The Cultivated Mini-Polis has tackled this problem with ease. With its vision of a miniature city in mind, the Mini-Polis has virtually eliminated the car. Its walkable streets have provided everything a student would need nearby: shops, accommodation, entertainment, and greenspace. Ample bike infrastructure can be seen throughout, with dedicated lanes and space for parking. This area is not something you would want to miss confined in a car. The Cultivated Mini-Polis is a lively addition to Breda. With bustling venues where everyone's voice can be heard, the community constantly has something interesting to get people together. The crucial mini city element gives the proximity necessary for active transport to be quick and effective. The area has truly embodied what it means to give freedom to our youth.



CONCLUSION

Our younger generations need us to step up and make changes. Active transport opens a world of possibility and a bright future to them. Through this we can create healthy, happy, safe environments, with bustling communities where youth can actively participate outside their homes. American cities should take note of the innovations in the Netherlands to give their highest value of freedom to their youth.

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Image: Car Free City. James McKay. 2021

