

# LEADERSHIP SERIES

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## Walking into a Greener Future

By Ian Malczewski

A simple walk from my office to the nearest mall usually involves a delicate ballet of side-stepping cars parked on the sidewalk, sneaking around utility poles, ducking shopfronts, walking around restaurant picnic tables, passing through gaps in the barbed-wire fenced medians, and, of course, avoiding jeepneys, tricycles, and trisikads. It's an obstacle-course of survival challenge, and that's just in the first block.

It doesn't need to be this way. The public realm in all its aspects - transit, parks, plazas, roads, and sidewalks - ought to be planned first and foremost for the pedestrian experience. Not everyone drives, but everyone is a pedestrian, at least at some point during the day.

Project for Public Spaces, a non-profit organization in New York City, has distilled this idea into a slogan: "When you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get more cars and traffic. When you plan cities for people, you get more people." As simple as this notion is, it's surprising how many cities and planners ignore it.

Streets without pedestrians are lifeless, polluted, and, often dangerous places to visit. Jane Jacobs, a famous American urban thinker, believed that "eyes on the street" were the most effective way of creating safe and livable environments. Without pedestrians, neighbourhoods become havens for criminal activity, making them unattractive for people to visit or businesses to invest.

Because cities are much more than places of just industry and commerce, their livability has become one of their most important qualities. Livability attracts residents, tourists, and investment, and improves the overall economic and social stability of a region. Improving walkability is one of the fastest ways to improve livability.

Metro Iloilo could improve its livability by encouraging walking instead of driving. This would have a number of positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes for



the region and its citizens.

Socially, increased walkability would improve general public health, as walking is a form of exercise. It would also have the effect of reducing crime in areas where the current lack of pedestrian activity makes some spaces attractive for criminals.

Environmentally, there would be numerous benefits. Improved walkability means that people are

less reliant on air-polluting vehicles to move through the city. As more people inhabit sidewalks, they also begin to have shared sense of ownership, which can lead to reduced polluting nuisances like littering.

Importantly, there are also economic benefits to designing a city for walkability. Walkable neighbourhoods attract more people, who become customers for local businesses. Active pedestrian-oriented streets are also attractive destinations for businesses to invest, as investors can be assured of plenty of potential customers.

How might we improve the walkability of Metro Iloilo's public spaces? Banning cars from parking on the sidewalk would be a start. Taking down the barbed wire that prevents pedestrians from crossing the street would also help. Widening sidewalks and planting trees along them would transform concrete slabs in beautiful boulevards, keeping pedestrians shaded and improving air quality. Patios and outside eating areas are important parts of an active street life, but reducing the degree to which such areas encroach on sidewalks is another strategy to improve the city's walkability. Better pedestrian street crossings could be supported with more traffic lights and crosswalks.

When the private car was first introduced, it was meant to signal a new era of freedom, mobility, and convenience. Though it did temporarily deliver on these promises, the long term costs of planning cities for cars have been high. If we encourage walking in the city, however, we can still have freedom, mobility, and convenience, and can add sustainability and livability to the list, too.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** Ian Malczewski is the Knowledge Management Specialist of the Canadian Urban Institute. A Master's of Environmental Studies candidate at York University in Toronto, he holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Toronto in English and Semiotics and Communication Theory, and has also studied at Melbourne University, Australia. He is interested in the public spaces of cities, especially as they relate the stories of the history and culture of a place.