

Carfree Creative Saturdays in Hadigaun – A Canvas for Creativity and Connection



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The neighborhood of Hadigaun in Kathmandu is witnessing a remarkable transformation. Digo Bikas Institute (DBI) in collaboration with Ward 5, Hadigaun and the community-led team, *Jiwanta Hadigaun Abhiyaan*, has started a new initiative called "**Carfree Creative Saturdays**", breathing life into the mundane, reinvigorating the local identity, and fostering a renewed sense of place. This initiative is part of a broader vision of "Revitalizing Hadigaun through Placemaking," aimed at reviving Hadigaun's unique character and authenticity.

Children, whom I affectionately term as the "imagination experts," take center stage with free art sessions designed to let their creativity run wild. Themes like "What does your ideal city/neighborhood look like?", "When I grow up...", and "My biggest dream..." elicit a wide range of artistic responses that reflect their hopes and dreams for the future.



One child envisions more ice-cream stalls lining the streets, another imagines a street filled with colorful houses, flowers, and children playing safely. Such drawings serve as poignant reminders to architects and city planners about the importance of colors and vibrancy in creating lively urban spaces. One young girl described her dream city as even prettier in her head, prompting the question: How can we translate abstract concepts like love, friendship, kindness, and compassion into the physical reality of our cities?

A young boy meticulously drew the entire layout of his dream neighborhood, envisioning a community where all basic amenities, such as parks, playgrounds, libraries, and shops, were within walking distance along stone paved streets. His design emphasized the importance of having all essential social functions for living and working in close proximity, significantly reducing the need for cars and minimizing motorized commuting time. This vision points to a sustainable urban future, advocating for the creation of localized neighborhoods that prioritize people over cars. By ensuring that cities are designed to be walkable and self-sufficient, this concept puts people at the center of urban transformation, creating environments that work for everyone. The boy's drawing reflects a progressive approach to urban planning, where the focus is on enhancing quality of life through accessibility, sustainability, and community cohesion.

Another boy's artwork showcased his desire to cycle and play with friends all day, while another girl's dream city was filled with trees and flowers. These visions are not just about aesthetics but about experiences – seeing, touching, smelling, and listening to the environment around us. One child dreamt of becoming a musician and imagined a city where music filled the air with street performers and speakers playing tunes at every corner, highlighting a metaphor where urban spaces prioritize human experiences over traffic.



In the tapestry of dreams painted by the children, one girl's vision stands out vividly: a city where she could freely take her beloved pet dog for walks along the streets. Her aspiration reflects a deep-seated desire for urban spaces that accommodate not just human needs but also the companionship and well-being of pets, which are integral parts of many people's lives. In reality, urban planning often falls short in adequately catering to pets and their owners. Many cities lack sufficient parks, walking paths, and pet-friendly establishments, making it challenging for residents to enjoy outdoor activities with their pets. The concept of pet-friendly cities goes beyond merely accommodating pets; it encompasses creating environments that promote inclusivity, compassion, and community well-being. The girl's dream of walking her dog freely through the streets underscores the importance of reimagining urban spaces to accommodate diverse lifestyles and preferences. It challenges urban planners and policymakers to consider the holistic well-being of residents, both human and animal. By embracing the vision of pet-friendly cities, communities can cultivate a more vibrant and harmonious urban fabric where everyone can thrive.

Another boy's imagination soared high with visions of a sky filled with kites, speaking volumes about embodying a desire for cities to embrace creativity, spontaneity, and shared experiences. Today, however, as concrete jungles replace open spaces, the once common sight of kites has become a rare and nostalgic spectacle. As cities expand upwards and outwards, there is a risk of

losing the accessible, open areas that are essential for fostering community engagement and leisure pursuits like flying kites. The boy's dream serves as a gentle reminder of the need to consider the cultural and recreational traditions that enrich urban life, underscoring the importance of maintaining and creating public spaces that accommodate diverse forms of play and expression amidst the evolving urban landscape.

The diversity in the children's artwork underscores a fundamental truth: cities are not just about bricks and concrete, they are living stories. These young artists remind us that transforming cities is not only about practical solutions but requires vision, creativity, and a dash of magic.

"Most of the time, we're standing around chatting, which is nice because we never get to do that," said one participant. This sentiment is echoed by many who cherish the opportunity to engage with their neighbors in ways that the hustle and bustle of daily life rarely permits. "This is the only time I get to play and do things on my own without the supervision of my parents," shared another child, highlighting the sense of freedom and independence fostered by Carfree Creative Saturdays. "I now know how to cycle, thanks to Carfree Saturdays," one child proudly proclaimed, while another joyfully announced, "I have made three new friends."

DBI's vision is to transform Hadigaun into a warm, inviting neighborhood where parents feel comfortable stepping back, allowing their children to explore and grow.

Inspired by Hadigaun's success, other neighborhoods can adopt similar initiatives. The blueprint is simple yet powerful. Encourage community-led activities that promote creativity, connection, and physical activity. Foster environments where children can play freely, explore their surroundings, and engage with their neighbors. Imagine a world where every community has its own version of Carfree Creative Saturdays. Where streets once dominated by cars become vibrant spaces for art, music, play, and connection. Where the true essence of life unfolds in the spaces between buildings, filled with laughter, creativity, and the shared experiences of a community coming together.

It's not just about transforming physical spaces; it's about reigniting the human spirit and fostering a renewed sense of belonging and togetherness. Let's take inspiration from the imagination experts and create urban spaces that reflect the dreams and aspirations of all generations.

