



# Dreams need oxygen to live

I once heard the following quote: "*The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.*" I must admit that these words are very accurate in the modern world's context: I have no doubts that humankind is responsible for air pollution. One has been destroying this world due to their bad decisions and... lack of imagination.

## **Dark, dark despair**

I'm on the bus. I have got nothing to do, so I look out of the window. I see Kujawska Street, where there is a monitor informing about the dose of radiation present in the air. While the data shows that there is nothing to worry about, I feel a bit uneasy. The very presence of such a monitor in this place means that there is a need to control air quality. So, although radiation doses are currently normal, the situation can change quickly. Depressed by this thought, I get off the bus, only to find myself in another vehicle a few hours later. This time the bus passes Gdańska Street. I remember that less than two weeks ago there was a pair of artificial lungs.

It was created to show air quality in Bydgoszcz. I look at them with curiosity in my eyes and... I turn pale. Not so long ago, the lungs were white like snow. Now they are completely blackened due to pollutants present in the air. I have no words; it reveals the hopeless situation of the people forced to breathe air like this every day.

## **Gray reality...**

Numerous scientific publications confirm the connection between air pollution and various diseases. For example, the study conducted in six cities of the United States discovered that air pollution increases the risk of lung cancer, heart diseases and cardiovascular disease. Moreover, it turned out that the high amount of dust and sulphates in the air increases the risk of one's death. As we can see, the problem of air pollution is serious and urgent. Unfortunately, ordinary citizens very rarely encounter any opportunities to solve it. They are forced to counteract this threat on their own. That is why we can see a

progressive expansion of the air purifier market.

On a certain website, I even read the following statement: "Air quality in Cracow isn't very good. Since we have no influence on outdoor air pollution, it's worth at least improving air quality in our homes. More and more people decide to buy air purifiers." It shows that the average Pole notices the problem of smog and air pollution, but decides to act only in the area of his own home. Sadly, the author of this comment suggests that ordinary citizens are not able to take action on their own. I have to admit that it exposes the ineffectiveness of the attempts to raise air pollution awareness in Poland. Ordinary people have heard about the problem, but it is easier for them to return home, where the air is filtered all the time, than to take any action. Only the sight of impenetrable dark fog out of the window reminds them how serious the problem of air pollution is. However, the window can be covered with a curtain. The thought of smog can be replaced by a vision of a holiday on the picturesque coast of Australia, as well. It is a pity that the coral reef people want to see is dying because of global warming, air pollution and smog they ignore immensely.

### **... Anywhere on Earth**

What is more, air pollution is a global issue. The situation in some countries is worse than critical, especially in poor ones, where there are no funds to fight smog and the citizens are more concerned with

poverty than with air quality and cannot cope with this problem. For example, in Bangladesh the average PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentration in 2020 was 97.10 µg / m<sup>3</sup>. We should bear in mind that the annual standard established by the World Health Organization (WHO) remains... only 10 µg/m.

In the ranking of the world's most polluted countries Poland ranks 53rd out of 106 countries with the average PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentration of 61 µg / m<sup>3</sup> in 2020. Such a result - exceeding the standard recommended by the WHO more than six times - should motivate our society to take action. We should not forget that air quality decreases year by year. Our health gets worse, too.

### **Green dreams**

So what can we, average citizens, do to improve air quality in Poland and in other countries as well? To start with, we should take a cue from Scandinavian countries, where environmental solutions are almost an element of culture. This matter was raised in the *Nordic Green to Scale for Cities and Communities* survey conducted in 2019. According to its results, the key to success are ... alternatives. We should choose bicycles and electric cars instead of diesels. We ought to replace standard coal furnaces with geothermal energy and heat pumps. Such solutions have been inducted in, among others, Denmark. This country had the average PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentration of 9.4 µg / m<sup>3</sup> in 2020: one of the best outcomes of all European countries.

Of course, there are other options that we can take into consideration. For example, we can try to practice minimalism or zero waste. Thanks to them, one understands that it is no good to have too many unnecessary things; things that can be given a second, happier life (have you ever heard of „upcycling“?). Even if one cannot replace their car with a bicycle, they can look forward to using public transport and to “carpooling”. And when it comes to energy, a household can be equipped with a recuperator or photovoltaic panels - much more ecological and more economical solutions than coal.

The truth is that humankind has a variety of opportunities. Sadly, not everyone is aware of them. Well, it is a sign for us to spread the knowledge about methods of counteracting air pollution and climate change. We must take advantage of all these opportunities and... try to be better people.

### **A colorful vision**

I look at the faces of the other passengers. They seem too exhausted to think about the future at the moment, in contrast to me. I dive in my thoughts; I am sure that preventing low emissions will not only improve our lives, but it will also be the beginning of our path to sustainable development. Maybe even a path to create a real utopia, a paradise on earth?

The bus stops and the door opens. I get out and go my own way, surrounded by exhaust fumes.

Although my thoughts are fading away due to the city’s noise, I fall into my reverie again. I feel that one day I will be able to breathe fresh air here. I look up to the sky and promise myself to do everything I can to purify it. I smile at my thoughts. After all, everyone should have dreams. Well, those of mine need oxygen to live ...

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