

## PERU & DENMARK

### Sustainable Transportation

Ironically, although I am interested in studying sustainable transportation, I chose to supplement my education by flying to Denmark and then to Peru, easily releasing more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than the average American releases through driving in a year. If nothing else, this guilt propels me to learn as much as I can.

On the ground, the transportation systems in Denmark and in Peru are, in my opinion, both more sustainable than that of the United States, but for very different reasons. In Denmark, there is an extensive effort to promote sustainable transportation through bicycle infrastructure, buses, and trains. However, this is on the political side. On the practical level, Danes choose to bike and walk primarily out of concern for their health. Thirty percent of commuters in Copenhagen cycle, which along with walking is the most sustainable transportation option because it releases zero emissions.

In Peru, the traffic is much less organized and consequently it is dangerous to bike in cities (although commuters do). In Arequipa, the second largest city, the primary modes of transportation are walking, riding a combi, or taking a taxi. Walking is free easy and therefore appealing. Combis are a sort of van-bus combination that are capable of holding around thirty people if they are packed in well. This is the cheapest form of public transportation and therefore desirable to the majority of people. However, if it is not convenient to take a combi or a citizen has a little more money, taxis are another option. In fact, there are probably more taxis on the streets than personal cars. Although taxis are not public transportation like combis, I still prefer them to personal cars for two reasons. First, a shared car is one less car manufactured, and second, ownership of a car greatly increases the temptation to drive because one does not pay out of pocket for each trip.

However, the main difference between Denmark and Peru is that the transportation system in Denmark is designed to be as sustainable as possible whereas the transportation system in Peru is merely the product of people trying to reach their destination as cheaply and easily as possible. For example: combis, although a great public transportation option, are clearly not designed to benefit the environment because their old engines release an incredible amount of black exhaust. Cost is the primary reason why most Peruvians do not have their own car. However, this is changing. With the economic boom in Peru there is a growing middle and upper class, and more people are able to afford cars. While it is wonderful that the overall wellbeing of the country is improving, I fear that Peru is in a critical place. If Peru can invest in sustainable transportation now before their citizens become overly dependent on their cars, they could quite easily end up like Denmark instead of the United States. However, Peru like every other country has many other important issues to deal with. Yet, even if Peru does not have the means to make this investment currently, I argue that this would be a project worthy world development for environmental groups, because a relatively small investment now could pay large dividends later.