# urbanistica INFORMAZIONI

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### Redefining Urban Futures: The 15-Minute City and the Global Proximity Movement

Carlos Moreno

### The 15-minute city concept. A proposition for all cities

In the early 2000s, while the urbanistic and technologic world focused on "smart cities", I became increasingly aware of two things: the diminishing health and quality of life for urban inhabitants, and the escalating climatic concerns.

In a world that had become predominantly urban, the pursuit of quality of life emerged as a paramount imperative in the face of ecological, economic, and social challenges. I became convinced that we needed an urban model that addresses these concerns, grounded in its sustainability and humanity, rather than just its technological advances. It led, in 2016, to the concept of the 15-minute city, a city model that is today known all around the world.

The 15-minute city proposed a polycentric urban organization, based on four key

principles: Density (of housing and services), Proximity (of 6 essential needs), Diversity (functional and social), Ubiquity (digital solutions). These principles are interdependent and essential to create a more pleasant, happy living environment (e.g.: density enhances proximity, proximity makes density more pleasant, but proximity does not exist if functional diversity is not) (Moreno et al. 2021).

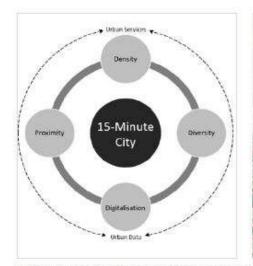
The 15-minute city enable each inhabitant to satisfy one's essential needs within 15 minutes of his home by active modes of transport (walking, cycling). It considers six essential needs: housing, work, access to healthcare, supplies, learning and self-fulfillment. For wider, less dense territories such as rural ones, the concept applies through the name of 30-minutes territories. The benefits equation is simple: proximity is making people's lives easier, more pleasant, less stressful and at the same time reduces

the carbon footprint of urban systems.

While the 15-minute city concept has gained global traction, it's not the number that's most significant. Instead, the essence lies in polycentrism, multi-functionality, and the availability of services. This breaks from 70 years of urban zoning, sprawling cities, and specialized locations. We need to shift away from the perspective that a successful city is one that expands quickly and covers great distances, a mindset molded by the Athens Charter and functionalism that have shaped our urban landscapes.

This concern has been present ever since cars began to populate our cities in the early 19th century, sparking a quest for urban planning on a human scale. Our achievement has been in modeling the convergence of six essential needs, providing suggestions to change life rhythms through chrono-urbanism, leveraging existing resources with multi-use strategies, and advocating for chronotopy. Moreover, we promote developing a culture that cherishes close-knit communities, a concept known as topophilia. The strength of this idea lies in its ability to be understood and embraced by all urban stakeholders, moving it beyond strictly academic or specialized circles.

This idea of a sustainable, healthy and happy city through proximity started to have a great echo in academic circles, but it really started to rise when the Mayor of Paris seized it in February 2020 as an opportunity to transform Paris. The fact that the French capital, known and admired the world over, nothing less than that, was to transform through proximity has been a milestone. A month later, under the threat of Covid-19, the whole world would go into lockdown.





Figg. 1-2. From the left: the 15-minute city framework (source: Moreno et al. 2021); "Let's embrace the "15-minute city" concept" (source-LIN-Habitat 2022)

### A runaway success, during the world sanitary crisis

Alongside to medical issues, Covid-19 has highlighted and heightened many of our societal problems. Globally, cities and their residents grappled with the constraints of localized living, which underscored the disparities in resources and infrastructure across neighborhoods, further exacerbating inequalities. Simultaneously, there was a silver lining: nature, biodiversity, and wildlife flourished in the absence of our relentless urban activities. This period of reflection allowed us to recognize the extent to which our habits and lifestyles contribute to the degradation of nature. It also laid bare the vulnerabilities of our urban environments, demonstrating a clear lack of resilience to such profound shocks.

The Covid-19 made people and government

realize a change was needed and the 15-minute city concept raised as a suitable solution for a sustainable, healthy and happy proximity.

The C40 Cities, a global network of major cities numbering close to a hundred and representing over a billion inhabitants, has always been at the forefront of urban transformation. As the pandemic ravaged the world, this coalition promptly recognized the significance of the 15-minute city concept and embraced it as a blueprint for building happier proximities. They envisioned urban centers that were greener in the face of looming climate change, and more prosperous as a response to both economic and societal crises.

The endorsement of this concept by the C40 coalition marked a pivotal moment in urban planning, driving its popularity and broadening its acceptance. This was evident in cities like Milan, which was profoundly affected by the Covid-19 tragedy, promptly launching strategies rooted in these very ideas. Their commitment demonstrates a collective drive to reimagine and rebuild urban spaces with residents' well-being, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience at the core.

After the C40 coalition launched a global recovery task force and endorsed the concept as part of a post-Covid policy strategy, the popularity and recognition of the concept have snowballed:

- UN-Habitat promoted it as a key element in the "World cities report 2022" and gave the 2022 "Scroll of Honour Award" to the 15-minute city, as a tribute for the improvement of the quality of life of citizens;
- the Association of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) has integrated it in its Pact for the Future for Planet, in 2022;
- UN-IPCC promoted it as a guideline to tackle the environmental crisis in cities;
- the World Health Organization supported it for promoting a healthy lifestyle by active mobility and low air pollution.

By 2023, the 15-minute city concept has reached worldwide recognition as a way to transform cities, step by step, to more resilient and happy cities. The movement hasn't stopped growing since and a lot of worldwide cities are reconsidering their city plan to integrate proximity: Roma, Portland, Nantes, Melbourne, Milano, Mulhouse, Nantes, Toulouse, Buenos Aires, Busan, Sousse, Scotland...

### It really is time for proximity cities and territories

The enthusiasm for the 15-minute city and the 30-minute territory on the global scale is reassuring, as we have no time to lose. We need to act quickly and globally, to halt the climate crisis and build better cities for a better world.

Cities are largely to blame for the environmental and climate crises. According to UN-Habitat, cities account for 78% of the world's energy consumption and produce over 60% of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet they cover less than 2% of the Earth's surface. This situation is set to worsen, given the continuing strong demographic growth. Indeed, today, 56% of the world's population, 4.4 billion people, live in cities. By 2050, with the

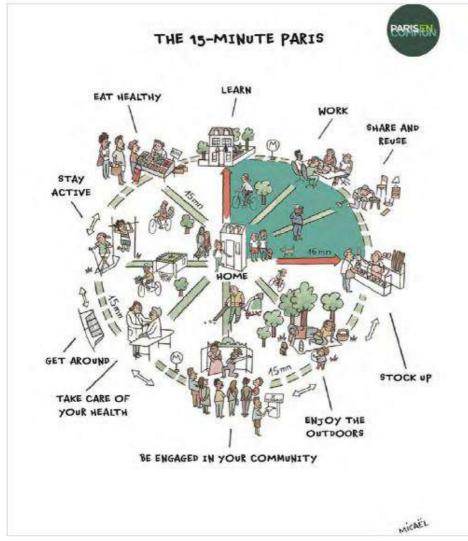


Fig. 3. The 15-minute Paris (source: Illustration by Micael Fresque).

current number of city dwellers doubling, almost seven out of every ten people in the world will be living in urban areas. At a time when the effects of global warming are already visible, with global temperatures rising by 1.2°, we need to take action.

Urban structures today have played a part in the deteriorating mental well-being of its citizens. The daily grind of city life - characterized by lengthy commutes, congestion, poor air quality, dwindling social connections, and underutilized spaces - challenges both our health and environmental sustainability. We can no longer turn a blind eye to these detrimental urban lifestyles.

For the past seventy years, we've lived under a system that emphasized rigid zoning, segregation, territorial divides, and accelerated gentrification. This was the legacy of Le Corbusier's Athens Charter - an approach that celebrated the notion of 'faster, farther'. It championed cities designed around the automobile, often at the expense of its inhabitants, sacrificing their well-being, valuable time, and leading to a monotonous routine of 'commute, work, sleep'. The need of the hour is to transition towards more holistic and human-centric urban designs.

How could we make it a change? It is time to meet the challenge of building new urban and territorial approach that promotes functional and social diversity, a stronger proximity equipment, for a high quality of social life. Well, it is time for the 15-minute city: a sustainable, liveable, viable and equitable city!

Polycentric, with a short distances pattern, the 15-minute city is a low-carbon city. The reorganization of transport aims to reduce car journeys and drastically cut CO2 emissions. The equation is simple. Fewer cars on the road means fewer carbon emissions. Fewer cars means fewer concrete waterproofed and high albedo roads. Less space for cars means more space for green areas. It is more room for human and plant life, for water

Thanks to the proximity of six essential needs, the 15-minute city is a city that's lived a lot in the neighborhood, encouraging neighborly exchanges. It's a pleasant place to live, with a high quality of social life.

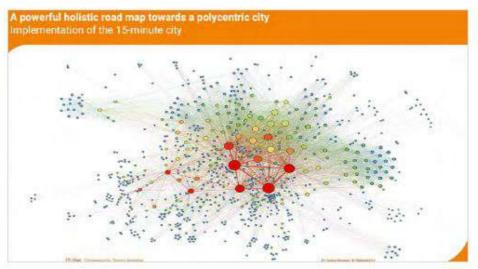
It's time to rediscover useful time, conviviality and happy closeness. It's time to say "hello" again. It's time to exist in our proximity, to rediscover the desire to be together and to take care of each other. It's time to respect nature and the planet. This is the true meaning of life. This is the profound meaning of the happy proximity of the quarter-hour city, the half-hour territory. It is high time to turn to the 15-minute city. Then, how?

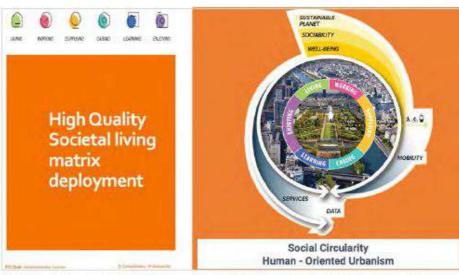
### The "Proximity Fresk"

The "Proximity Fresk" is a tool designed to evaluate the quality of urban or regional life, placing emphasis on feedback from residents and key stakeholders to ensure a true reflection of their perceptions. It is rooted in the digital platform dedicated to High Quality of Societal Life (HQSL) and offers a comprehensive toolkit to engage stakeholders actively. Inspired by various "Fresks" from organizations like the Shift Project, it aims to make complex findings about environmental crises more accessible. This engagement tool prompts individuals to introspect about their daily routines and lifestyles, using either fictional characters or mapping their own activities. This is organized around six social functions, such as distance from home, mode of transport, and frequency.

Key objectives of the Proximity Fresk include: · Understanding Urban Proximity: by embodying characters or roles, participants gain a deeper appreciation of urban life's intricate interactions;

- · Valuing Close Proximity Living: participants gauge the profound effects of living close to essential functions, recognizing its influence on personal well-being, social interactions, and environmental footprint;
- Recognizing Lifestyle Change Challenges: participants contemplate lifestyle





Figg. 4-5. From the top: a road map towards a polycentric city; Social Circularity and Human-oriented Urbanism (own elaboration).

alterations, they identify potential challenges, fostering empathy and realism;

· Envisioning New Proximity-Centric Life Scenarios: encouraging the design of life "scenarios" that centralize proximity, backed by actionable strategies such as community building or alternative mobility.

Being open-source, the Proximity Fresk has gained international acclaim, closely associated with the 15-minute city and the 30-minute territory concepts. Available in multiple languages, it's uniting a diverse global community that includes city leaders, academics, and residents, all sharing the ambition of embedding the principles of proximity in urban areas.

Over the past two years, this diagnostic, reflective, and actionable tool has been shared globally, adapted to various contexts

and languages. The mission remains to offer a potent, universally accessible instrument for fostering tighter, inclusive, and rewarding communities. As this global community collaborates, the Proximity Fresk is expected to further evolve, embracing new ideas and spurring positive global actions.

Gratitude is extended to all contributors and supporters of this worldwide initiative.

### A global Observatory of sustainable proximity, to help cities

One of the question I'm most often asked is: is the 15-minute city model applicable to "xxxx" city? What should we do to turn it into a 15-minute city?

I'm convinced that more proximity is suitable to every city or territory, and that all cities can evolve positively following the 15-minute city guidelines. However, the challenges and transformations to be achieved are not the same for all. The first step is thus to assess the initial situation to determine the main areas for improvement and priority actions, in the short and medium term, to adapt and limit the climate and social crisis.

In order to support the implementation of proximity approaches in cities worldwide and to support cities in their transformation, I have just launched in June 2023 the "Global Observatory of Sustainable Proximities" with the Chaire ETI and the support of the C40 Cities, the United Cities and Local Governments - UCLG, and UN-Habitat. This observatory will be a global center for knowledge sharing, as much as a global network that share the same vision and methodology to multiply the different implementation of sustainable cities, each with its own specific features. It aims to develop official measures and indicators of sustainable proximities but also to convey good practices, good ideas and federate

For now, the work of the observatory is structured on 4 thematic to address all facets of sustainable proximity.

Principles - Proximity planning and design, which addresses the intersection of proximity related topics such as planning and design, public space, mobility, land use and basic services across different scales

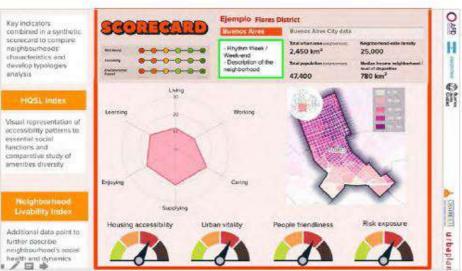
Indicators - Measuring across the SDGs, which addresses the development of indicators and their alignment with the current framework for follow up and monitoring of the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs.

Knowledge - Capacity building, which addresses the building of capacity for urban actors in the fields, such as mapping of best practices, provision of evidence based and efficient tools and methods through free online learning modules and training

Outreach - Advocacy and networks, which addresses the presentation and communication of tools and knowledge in relevant for and, in addition deploys global advocacy and partnerships campaigns to promote dialogue, sharing and learning.

In short, this observatory aims to be a helpful tool for city leaders, for international organizations, for urban planners, for citizens, ... and a dedicated place to dream and act together for tomorrow's cities.





Figg. 6-7. From the top: Proximities Fresk (own elaboration); Scorecard of Buenos Aires (source: AFD, Urbaplan, ETI Chair).

#### Conclusion

The 15-minute city has transcended its origins as a mere concept, evolving into a global movement shaping the futures of cities, both large and small, around the world. More than just a visionary idea, it provides a practical methodology and actionable tools that fundamentally transform urban living. At the heart of this transformation are visionary mayors and city leaders who have taken up the mantle, adapting the concept to the unique realities, histories, and cultures of their cities.

Proximity is no longer just a convenience; it's a powerful solution central to addressing our most pressing challenges: from climate change to economic growth and from social inclusivity to health and well-being. The polycentric approach of the 15-minute city emphasizes that everything one needs should be within a short walk or bike ride away. And as different cities embark on this journey, they're not isolated in their efforts. Instead, they're part of a worldwide network of initiatives that learn from, inspire, and enrich one another.

This universal adaptation showcases the potential of the 15-minute city as a unifying global vision, with the promise to reimagine urban life and usher in a new era of sustainable, inclusive, and human-centered urban development.

The evolution of any city must be perceived from the perspective of its potential and growth. Once regarded as a shining beacon, some cities might have lost their luster, failing to realize their promises of being dream metropolises offering a high quality of life. The challenge now is to steer towards a promising common future. While no magic wand can dictate its trajectory, we believe it's essential to embark on a grand plan that will lead the city into its next monumental anniversary with pride.

The present global trend is a shift towards a new urban economic geography grounded in proximity. This proximity isn't solely about physical closeness but encompasses economic, ecological, and social connections that foster a holistic city integration. The city's transformation aims to strike a balance between decentralization and distribution, steering clear of the saturation that has hindered urban progress.

Envision a city where facilities and infrastructure cater not just to one social group

or a singular purpose but are truly diverse: catering to all social strata, having mixed uses, and extended utilities. Spaces where economy, education, health, culture, and recreation coexist, not as isolated entities but as synergistic components of the same urban ecosystem.

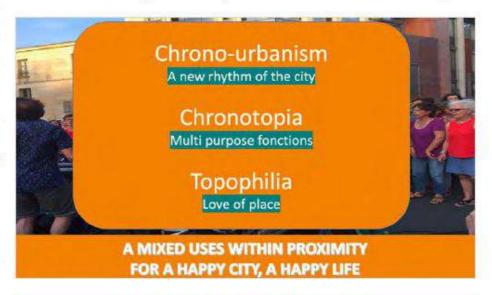
The key is ensuring these facilities closely intertwine with housing, ensuring that the six basic social functions - work, provisioning, education, health, culture, and leisure - are accessible to all, thereby defining true quality of life.

Beyond mere functionality, it's crucial to instill soul into this new geography. A city that exudes love at every corner, radiates life through its streets, and gifts its inhabitants the time to truly live. An urban space where its dwellers' eyes gleam with hope, and where the heart of the city beats in every square, park, and avenue.

The new economic geography isn't just about structures and planning; it's about constructing a humanized city that places its people at the heart of its development. It's an invitation to rethink not just as a cluster of buildings, but as a collective destination where each public space is a testament to the life, diversity, and hope that characterizes its residents.

In this transformative journey, it's commendable how certain progressive programs align with and embody this refreshing vision for the city.

Their proposals are not just words; they're a tangible and pragmatic call to develop an ambitious agenda that unites all economic, social, and civic forces. The goal is





Figg. 8-9. From the top: suggestions to change life rhythms; different implementations of the "15-minute city" (own elaboration).

to converge towards a shared purpose, crafting an urban tapestry where each strand signifies a pivotal player in building a more inclusive, sustainable, and livable metropolis.

A prosperous city is envisioned, growing not only in infrastructure but also in heart and collective consciousness. This initiative seeks to harness the dormant energy within each city dweller, inviting them to play an active role in reshaping their habitat. It's a call for collective action, fostering a positive ecological, economic, and social spirit, and co-authoring this chapter and the subsequent ones, sculpting the metropolis we all yearn for on both a regional and global stage.

### Credits

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