

# LIVING IN PROXIMITY IN A LIVING CITY

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*Abstract:* Rethinking urban life in a world of massive disruptions (climate change, air pollution, nature, water biodiversity and now Covid-19) has become one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. To face these crises we must urgently address lifestyles and mobility, move away from the omnipresent car and the petroleum era and question what kind of city we really want to live in. The proposition of Professor Carlos Moreno is the “15-Minute City” concept, in a compact zone (or the “30-Minute Territory” in a semi-dense or sparse zone), where inhabitants can access all their essential needs of life: living, working, supplying, caring, educating, enjoying. The 15-Minute City addresses the key components required for a sustainable world (ecological, social, economic) and integrates the concepts of chrono-urbanism, chronotopia, and topophilia. This reinvention of proximities utilizes the convergence of open data, digital mapping, geolocation and the massification of new services. Nevertheless, citizens and their quality of life are always at the heart of the 15-Minute City. It is thus a polycentric city which combines urban intelligence, social inclusion and technological innovation and ultimately defines itself as an urban life planning. Paris is among the world’s first cities to have implemented the 15-Minute City, where it is famously quoted as the “big-bang of proximities”. It has recognized this innovative approach based on a global and systemic vision of the city in order to meet the fundamental needs of its inhabitants and to urgently address the unprecedented challenges it is facing today. This concept has now become a global movement.

*Keywords:* 15-Minute City, 30-Minute Territory, Covid-19, polycentric urbanism, new urban culture.

The “15-Minute City” (Moreno et al. 2021: 93-111; Garnier 2021), a concept that has gone global, is now present in all latitudes (Dricot 2020). Why is this approach so popular? In this time of an increasingly evident climate change, and with a raging global pandemic of Covid-19, this proposal, originally put forward in 2016 (Moreno 2016), found itself in the international spotlight in early 2020 (Willsher 2020). Since then, it has opened up a very wide debate around the world on the indispensable need to change the paradigm of our urban and territorial lives.

ISSN 2283-7949

GLOCALISM: JOURNAL OF CULTURE, POLITICS AND INNOVATION

2021, 3, DOI: 10.12893/gjcpi.2021.3.8

Published online by “Globus et Locus” at <https://glocalismjournal.org>



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Fig. 1. 15-Minute city: reinvigorating cities worldwide.

Source: Chaire ETI.

I was surprised to see how this idea took shape, spontaneously on all continents. I was also amazed at the profusion not only of discussions, but also of commitments and concrete practices generated. I was happy to see, like any researcher who finds his idea set in motion, how this polycentric, multi-service, multi-use city, with a decarbonised roadmap, has become a new approach to proximity to change our way of understanding the city.

## WHAT IS THE 15-MINUTE CITY CALLED?

No longer an “organised campaign”, a “miracle solution” or a “magic copy and paste”, the “15-Minute City” for dense areas and its twin concept “30-Minute Territory” (*The White Paper – Minute City, 30 – Minute Territory* 2019) – for medium and low-

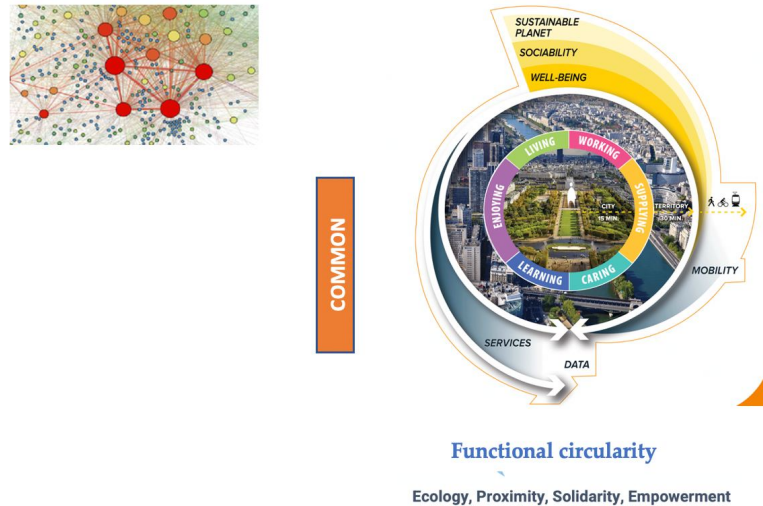


Fig. 2, 3, 4. *Functional circularity*.

Source: Chaire ETI-Paris Sorbonne Business School.

density areas – have come to provide, at the right place and at the right time (Obel award 2020), a conceptual framework, a methodological approach and analysis tools to encourage a new urban and territorial practice, with a different way of thinking and acting as a backdrop, by putting the use of the city at the heart of it.

We wanted to put a simple question at the centre of the reflection: “What kind of city do we want to live in? We have provided a complete, in-depth, systemic but also broad and open framework, with proposals to face our challenges, for a better life in our cities and territories. More than planning the city, we are above all interested in planning life in the city (Moreno 2020).

Bruno Latour rightly evokes the structural contradiction between “the world we live in” and “the world we live in”. In an urban and territorial world where the quality of life must be at the heart of our concerns, I wanted to add this dimension to the reflection, which is “the world where we think we live”.

With the “15-Minute City”, at the heart of the problem, we are thus setting out another way of living, producing, consuming, moving around, but also of feeling the city. Our approach is inspired by the matrix laid out by our colleague, Prof. M. Yunus, Nobel Prize winner in 2006 (Yunus 2016) and the imperatives of the Sustainable Development Goals 13 (United Nations ) and 11 (Allam et al. 2022). We take this path, “the triple zero: zero carbon, zero poverty, zero exclusion”. The “15-Minute City” is a proposal for convergence in the creation of ecological, economic and social value, to make our cities economically viable, ecologically liveable and socially equitable places.

## URBAN DEAD ENDS AND THE 15-MINUTE CITY

Faced with the segmentation of the city, a major factor in the deterioration of the quality of life, we ask ourselves: *a)* Are we going to continue to accept the social-territorial fractures that are becoming more and more widespread, in order to go faster and further with a “sacrosanct mono-use” that preempts so many precious resources? Like the university campuses, which are often far away and disconnected from any urban reality, or the business districts, such as La Défense to the west of Paris with its almost 4 million square metres<sup>2</sup> of office space and 180,000 employees (Agence François Leclercq 2016), whose model is now affected by the Covid-19 crisis? *b)* Are we going to continue to accept that we no longer have any useful time because we are sacrificing it every day by going to and from work, in difficult transport conditions, as France is the country in Europe with the highest proportion of employees commuting to their workplace every day (77 per cent) (Atelier International du Grand Paris 2016)?; *c)* Is it normal to see that 70 per cent of the active population in metropolitan environments move around in the same time slots that converge in the daytime on less than 10 per cent of the territory? Do we have to live with this commuting?

Yes, we want a new chrono-urbanism in order to leave behind subjugated mobility and move towards chosen mobility. The key words are: taking care of the time we have regained,



changing rhythms, desaturating public transport, roads, workplaces, reception areas where everyone arrives and leaves at the same time, and decentralising work. Is it still acceptable that buildings are used for one function only between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of the time, and the rest of the time they are closed? Is it sustainable to have so much and yet so little being used? How can we make better use of existing resources to save personal time? How can we have social time? How can we re-organise our presence in urban space?

Yes, make more use of places, develop their mixed use on a massive scale. Changing the uses of buildings so that they are multi-purpose is the second element, *chronotopy*. Can we continue to accept the disembodiment of our living areas, our neighbourhoods, which often fail to provide us with a broad coverage of our essential needs? Let's take the Priority Neighbourhoods of the City Policy (QPV). The report of the French Court of Auditors of February 2020 (Cour des comptes, *Chambres régionales et territoriales des comptes 2020*) is very clear: "The State devotes approximately €10 billion to them each year [...]. Despite the financial and human resources deployed, the attractiveness of priority neighbourhoods around three dimensions of daily life: housing, education and economic activity has made little progress in ten years". It is a question of "better articulating urban renewal and the social, educational and economic support of the inhabitants within the framework of neighbourhood projects".

Yes, we need to recreate a functional, social and also emotional link between the inhabitant and the place in which he or she is located. This third element is *topophilia*. This makes it possible to build mutual aid links, as we have seen with Covid-19. These links need to live in the neighbourhoods. Using public spaces for activities helps to create social links. Reinstalling local commerce, cultural and economic activities and local health centres.



## THINKING AND LIVING THE CITY DIFFERENTLY

This is why, with the “15-Minute City” (Moreno 2020a), we have proposed to find another way of thinking, through the use of the city, its decentralisation, its networking, its hybridisation between compact and less dense areas, in a continuum of poly-centrals, through the optimisation of its resources, through its through its renewed humanity

### *Decentralisation and community life*

We express the need to radically change the temporalities of life and the use of the existing, to change the rhythms of life, to be able to work differently, to recover essential social functions that are more accessible, for a quality life, to recover the intensity of social links, the affects lost by the weight of anonymity and solitude, to reclaim the love of place, to give otherness a place of choice in our lives, to recreate and relocate employment and activities, to reclaim public space for citizens, to encourage citizen participation in local (*La ville du ¼ d'heure* 2021) life.

### *The common good guaranteeing an urban policy at the service of all*

With the “15-Minute City” and its hybridisation with the “30-Minute Territory”, we are faced, here and now, with the profound inequalities that result in cities that generate wealth, which is very localised, but also poverty, attractiveness and visible exclusion. Cities where beautiful architectural achievements coexist with fragmented, segmented, fractured urban spaces (Moreno 2020b). To fight against gentrification, the key notion is that of the “common good” which contributes to the general interest, which is translated into regulatory tools in urban policy: social mix, city landholdings, commercial landholdings, participatory budgets, local public services. The metamorphosis towards the common good is the challenge of the next decade. Living spaces everywhere for a common good, taking up this mutualist motto.



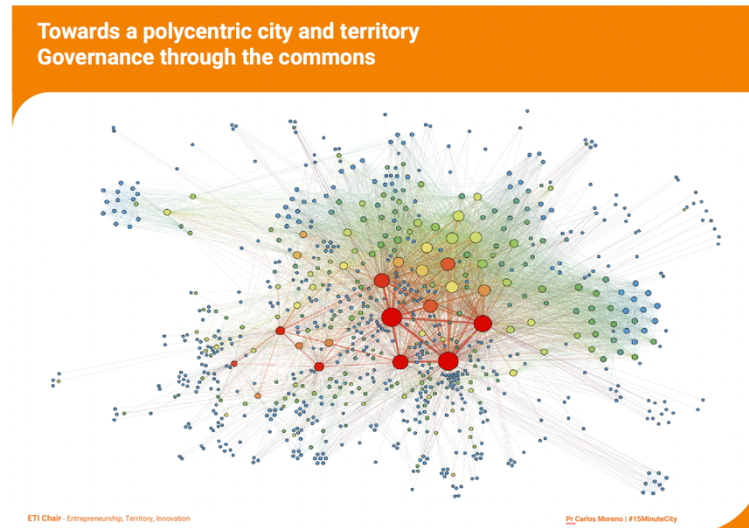


Fig. 5. *Towards a city / territory polycentric.*

Source: Chaire ETI.

### *A new urban ontology for a high societal quality of life*

We have proposed a new urban ontology with the modeling of six essential urban social functions accessible through low-carbon proximity: living with dignity, working while reducing commuting, buying supplies through short circuits, taking care of one's physical and mental health in proximity, accessing education and culture, and blossoming in conditions of harmony and resilience with nature. The detailed development of this ontology gives a roadmap in terms of uses and services, irrigating the city everywhere in a polycentric way.

The operational pillars of this model are: *a)* ecology, to have a low-carbon city with a virtuous behaviour on a daily basis; *b)* proximity, to develop new urban economic models to create value; *c)* solidarity, to develop social links; *d)* citizen participation to embody this new urban culture. These elements embody



the “15-Minute City” with a new matrix of High Societal Quality of Life and its cross-cutting indicators of social functions with those of Well-being, Sociability, and Committed Ecology (*The White Paper – Minute City, 30 – Minute Territory* 2019).

## A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Six years ago it was a concept. Today it is a reality in motion and this concept is becoming a global movement. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, during the first wave in March 2020, the global network of cities for climate, the C40, set up a “Recovery Covid-19 Task Force”. It is headed by the mayor of Milan, the capital of Lombardy, Giuseppe Sala. The sixth hard-hit European metropolis and epicentre of this new virality that has put our cities under a bell. This new situation, with its set of unprecedented measures, has made us question our future. Joint reflections with the C40 on the scope of this crisis have enabled us to bring out the “15-Minute City” as an urban and territorial way to bounce back (Moreno 2020c).

We proposed 5 years ago, just after the COP21 in Paris, to reflect on the climate crisis and the paradigm shift that is essential for our cities, which are the main contributors to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, by questioning our lifestyles, production, consumption and travel patterns. We had talked about another way of life, to break with decades of functional urbanism, which accommodates urban specialisation, which encourages its fragmentation, which sacrifices quality of life for the benefit of long distances to be travelled, where “distance becomes a vice”, as Richard Sennett (2020) says. Our proposal (C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group) is based on a new model, an urban ontology, which, by going back and forth between theory and practice, proposes a vision of polycentric urbanism, based on uses, circularity, mixity and high social intensity. The latest international survey by the International Workgroup Place(2020) and movin’ on kantar (movin’ on Mobility Survey) shows that the working population between 18 and 40 years of age is in favour of this new urban (International Workgroup Place 2021) approach. Decentralised “corporate working” places are emerging Action Longement, Communiqué de presse 2021).







Fig. 6. 15-minute city.

Source: Moreno 2020c.

The C40 has launched a global initiative and in 18 cities around (C40 Cities 2021) the world, it has given rise to concrete projects. The list of cities now engaged in this process around the world is long (Wright 2021; United Nations for Climate Change 2021). Zurich has just held a referendum on this decentralized (Busslinger 2021) city model. China has just announced its “15 minute circles of life” project and the new master plan of the city of Chengdu has been the framework for a large-scale project followed by 52 other cities (Yang Jian 2021). In France, multiple cities have announced their approach in this sense, in addition to Paris, Nantes, Aix-en-Provence and Mulhouse, to name only four different city sizes. The private sector with multiple actors has joined this paradigm; La Poste has just launched its new “Business Unit” based on proximity (Barnéoud 2020: 39-45; La Poste 2020). Projects highlighting proximity to the “15-Minute City” are now underway. For example, Altea has

signed an agreement with Carrefour to transform the land footprint of its Nantes hypermarket using the “15-Minute City” concept. More structurally and internationally in their 9 countries of operation, the Mulliez family launched in January 2021, Nhood, a new urban services operator for urban real estate regeneration and transforming an initial portfolio of 82 managed retail sites in France. Numerous property developers and private sector players around the world have taken it upon themselves to transform sites that were previously 100 per cent office space, or built land used differently, to move towards mixed use and services.

The recognition by the “obel award” on 21 October 2021 in Paris, for the global impact of the “15-Minute City”, as well as the “International urban leadership” in Barcelona on 18 November 2021, illustrate the scope of this dissemination worldwide.

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