The 15-Minute City

Concept:

The 15-Minute City is a model for urban development and urban mobility developed by Professor Carlos Moreno at the Sorbonne in Paris and promoted by Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo. The 15-Minute City is a city in which all residents can reach daily necessities within a short walk or bike ride from their homes. In their article from 2021, Moreno et al. introduce the concept of the 15-Minute City, which aims to ensure that city residents can perform six essential functions (living, work, commerce, health, education, and entertainment) within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from their homes. The 15-Minute City framework of this model has four components: density, proximity, diversity, and digitization.

The 15-Minute City is partly derived from historical concepts of neighborhood design, mixed-use, population density, and pedestrian friendliness as laid out by Jane Jacobs in 'The Death and Life of Great American Cities'. The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic revealed weaknesses in urban planning that had previously been overlooked. This finding accelerated the consideration and implementation of the 15-Minute City concept in response to the climate crisis and urban impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The restricted radius of movement led to an increased relevance of quality in one's own neighborhood. In this respect, the 15-Minute approach is an attempt to bring the built environment more in line with the people living there.

Goal:

The goal of the 15-Minute City is a more environmentally friendly and socially inclusive urban (sub)development, which should make urban life more qualitative, agile, healthy and flexible.

Main features:

1. The city should follow the rhythm of people, not cars.

2. Every square meter should serve multiple uses.

3. Urban quarters should be designed in a way, that people do not need to commute.

Conditions:

The concept does not serve as a fixed blueprint but presents a framework of ideas and principles and must be applied to the hyperlocal and socio-political context of different urban forms.

All urban residents - living in the center or suburbs - must have access to essential services in close proximity. To achieve this, it requires:

- a massive spatial decentralization;
- a transformation of existing infrastructure;
- the development of new services for each neighborhood;
- the transformation of streets into bike lanes and pedestrian areas;
- new economic models that attract local businesses.

The 15-Minute City also provides a framework to accelerate the path to carbon-free cities. It focuses on integrating land use and transport planning and is most successful when implemented as part of a citywide, city-led strategy that strongly involves local people.

Urban
Services

Density

Proximity

15-Minute
City

Diversity

Digital-
isation

Urban
Data
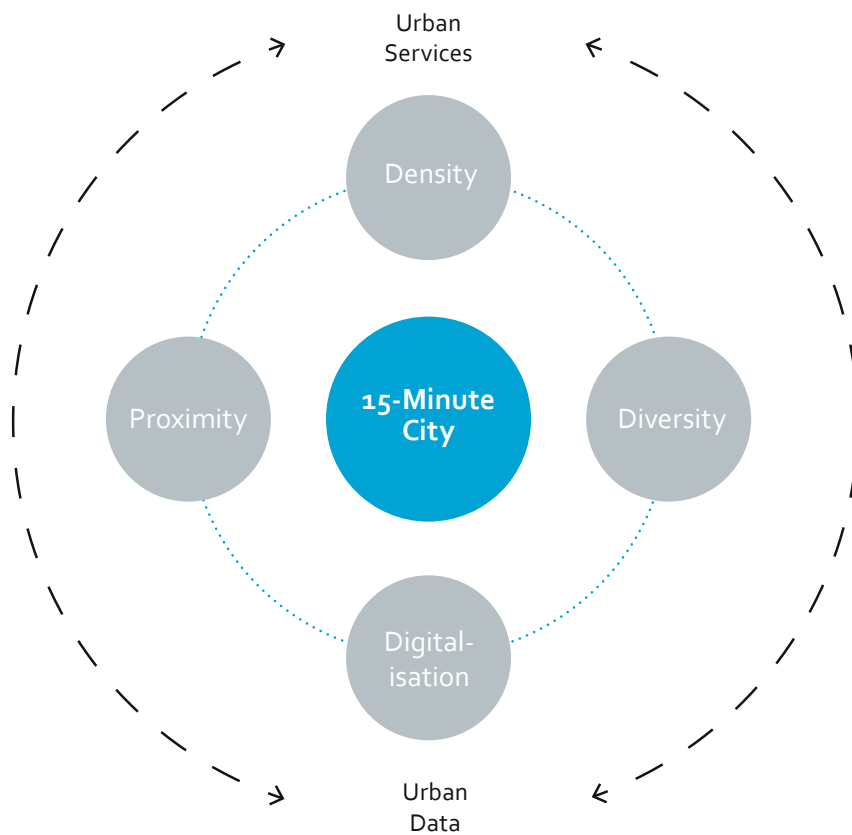
Source: Morento et al., 2020

Criticism:

In contrast to the concept's endorsements and opportunities, it is also subject to significant criticism. Spatial distances between living, working, (local) supplies, services, leisure, and educational facilities should be kept short so that the need for transport is reduced and traffic is avoided. The strong focus on spatial proximity is mainly criticized because it promotes gentrification which leads to increasing segregation and isolation of neighborhoods. At the digital LSE event „Urban Age Debate: Localising Transport", Prof. Edward Glaeser from Harvard University, among others, spoke out clearly against the 15-Minute City.

The concept, he says, focuses on upper-middle-income people, who often already live in neighborhoods with supply opportunities above the average. He argues that it cannot solve the much larger and more complex issue of how cities can become places of opportunities for everyone again. Gleaser calls for burying the idea of dividing cities into 15-minute parcels, saying that especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, greater social connectedness across neighborhoods should be the goal. Journalist Alice Delaleu accuses Mayor Hidalgo of excluding the poorer population of the outlying neighborhoods from the center: „By creating the city of quarters, the city is building new walls and sinking into selfishness."which should make urban life more qualitative, agile, healthy and flexible.

Development opportunities & risks:

The concept is occasionally criticized as an urban paradigm best suited for European cities (esp. Oslo, London, Barcelona) and not for the Global South or North American contexts. Despite its focus on people-centered urban development, the concept is based primarily on spatial and environmental observations and neglects socio-economic aspects, such as demographics, social composition, employment, and income. Since social inequalities, post-colonial legacies and informality are highly visible in the urban structures of the partner countries of German development cooperation and sprawling, less compact settlement structures are hardly taken into account, the 15-Minute City cannot directly serve as a concept that can be linked to, but rather intensify segregation and gentrification.

Proponents of the concept urge those investments under the 15-Minute City paradigm should be targeted to lower-income neighborhoods. This includes measures such as implementing inclusive spatial planning/zoning, affordable housing, and supporting collaborative and community-based approaches to housing development (e.g., cooperative housing). Urban planning interventions must be understood and implemented hand-in-hand with socially inclusive development processes.

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to further investigate on the applicability of the concept for the partner countries. Besides Bogotá, there are several cities working to reduce the average inner-city commute time from 80 to 30 minutes, creating a 30-minute city.

LE PARIS DU ¼ HEURE

Source: Paris en Commun, 2020

TUMI
Transformative Urban Mobility Initiative

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