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The “15-minute city”: the way forward or an ideological mirage?



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15 minutes City

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Texte

Introduction by Vincent Kaufmann

With the Paris agreements, signed by almost all nations, the development principles of cities, metropolises and, more generally, territories must be reviewed. If we look at mobility alone, which for several decades has been a poor performer in the fight against global warming, the switch to all-electric motorized transport by 2050 will only cover 45% of the journey to carbon neutrality^[1]. The remaining 55% must be

ensured by a modal shift, i.e., the use of means of transport other than cars, but also by a commitment to local life so as to drastically reduce private car travel. Beyond the environmental necessity, we know that half of the population would like to both live and work in their neighborhood, and 100% of Westerners want to work within 30 minutes of their home^[2]. To meet environmental challenges and fulfill aspirations, it is therefore necessary to rethink the way cities and territories are planned in order to allow for life to be conducted close to home and to establish this concept : daily life that takes place within a 15-minute radius on foot, by bicycle or by transport. In such a vision, the development of telecommuting would make it possible to avoid a large part of the daily commute; the development of shops, services (coworking, car-sharing, childcare facilities, etc.) and facilities (green spaces, urban gardens, neighborhood centers, etc.) in residential communities would make it possible to perform a good number of daily activities in proximity; and reduced automobile accessibility accompanied by pedestrian and bicycle facilities would encourage active mobility. This set of measures is intended to put an end to the car as a benchmark for mobility. It would send a strong message: access to daily activities should be first on foot, by bicycle (electric or not) or by public transport. Putting this into practice would imply a large-scale reduction in car speeds. Such changes would transform the territorial location strategies of commercial stakeholders, such as large retailers, and would challenge the principles of office planning based on geographic areas that can be reached by car from a specific point in a given time (elliptical road isochrones). While this concept does sound attractive, it raises a number of fundamental issues. The first concerns social inequalities: does the fifteen-minute city concern only a fringe of the affluent population in urban centers, while the workers who ensure its very existence would remain in far-flung outskirts? On the other hand, could it actually solve a number of access inequalities, for example by enhancing the mobility potential of people with reduced mobility? The question also arises for mobile workers: would the fifteen-minute city, one of whose cornerstones is telecommuting, be able to adapt to the constraints of professions whose travel needs are seemingly incompressible? The last question is a territorial one: is the fifteen-minute city likely to be applied in suburban and rural areas? If so, how? ^[1]: Maibach M., Petry C., Ickert L. et Frick R. (2020) *Verkehr der Zukunft 2060: Synthesebericht* Eidgenössisches. Departement für Umwelt, Verkehr, Energie und Kommunikation UVEK, Confédération Suisse, Berne. ^[2]: Survey « Aspirations for mobility and lifestyles », Mobile Lives Forum, 2016

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Everyone having everything within fifteen minutes of their home: this is the promise of the fifteen-minute city. The idea of a city that is peaceful because of the proximity it allows and ecological because of the reduction in travel that it entails has gained ground, and it is now part of media debates and political programmes. But are its promises really feasible? Is it fair? Is it even desirable? Carlos Moreno, the father of the fifteen-minute city, and Pierre Veltz, who questions its virtues, respond to these questions.

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