Cities included in this series

Antwerp
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[...]
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our work is to rapidly convert cities into places whose systems nurture human life. An important facet of this work is to share information and analyses of such experiments with a broad audience, from practitioners, advocates, and zealots, to newcomers who are curious or concerned about the future.

Each case study in this series is analyzed through the lens of how it benefits the health of young children and their caregivers, and details how it was carried out. These cases are one part of “Born Thriving,” a suite of publications created to mainstream infant, toddler, and caregiver-focused neighborhood planning in Tirana, Albania.

Born Thriving is carried out in collaboration with the Municipality of Tirana, with the support of Bernard van Leer Foundation’s Urban95 program. This research benefited from the work of TUT-POL (Transforming Urban Transport Political Strategies and Tactics) at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, led by professors Diane E. Davis and Lily Song.

We are also indebted to review from our Bernard van Leer Foundation colleagues, especially Julien Vincelot, Andrea Sansotta-Torres, and Ankita Chachra. As well as Taylor Reich and Iwona Alfred at Institute for Transportation and Development Policy. The cases in this series use comparative city data from ITDPs Pedestrian’s First Tool—specifically, data on weighted population density, people’s proximity to services, and average block size. For more information on the tool’s methodology visit: https://pedestriansfirst.itdp.org/.

Finally, we extend our gratitude to the many people we interviewed for these cases, and their generosity to candidly discuss the challenges in their work from which we can all gain so much.
In early 2020, Paris en Commun, the campaign group working to reelect Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, released a manifesto that made an important pledge for Paris’s planning future: the fifteen-minute city (ville du quart d’heure). In Hidalgo’s vision for Paris, all services and amenities necessary for daily life would be concentrated in each neighborhood. Proposed as both a greening strategy to improve the city’s climate resilience and a means of improving quality of life, the plan is a culmination of a series of ambitious and successful sustainable-mobility initiatives since the beginning of Hidalgo’s tenure in 2014. But that’s not all it promises to be: rather than simply a new take on city planning, the fifteen-minute-city concept is a formula for changing the experience of time in the city, and forming a new relationship to city life and its rhythms. Hidalgo adviser Carlos Moreno, who developed the project, argues that “time is the new notion of urbanism in the next two decades, because time, in general, has been lost as urban life has become more hectic.”

Yet as the fifteen-minute city promises to transform quality of life for the residents of Paris proper, the
question of how these benefits can be extended to the city’s immediate suburbs, where Hildago does not have jurisdiction, remains a challenge. What is clear is that not extending the plan risks exacerbating existing neighborhood inequities between the inner city and its suburbs. The fifteen-minute city will likely unfold in Hidalgo’s second mayoral term, and when it does, it will have to confront and respond to the challenges that have come to define twenty-first-century planning.

What makes this project supportive of infants, toddlers, and their caregivers?

- **Proximity:** The strategy seeks to reduce commute times for Paris residents by having all services and amenities within a fifteen-minute distance from home by foot or by bike, making the city much more accessible to young children and supporting children’s independent mobility.

- **Environmental health:** The strategy seeks to reduce congestion and air pollution by limiting motor-vehicle use in the preindustrial core and replacing existing space for cars with street greening, generating major environmental health benefits, for young children especially.

- **Play and rest:** The strategy builds on Hidalgo’s existing actions to replace vehicular parking and road space with pedestrianized public spaces that include street furniture and play areas.

- **Active transportation:** The strategy will expand Paris’s existing cycling network and upgrade pedestrian infrastructure, making these modes more viable and safe for caregivers travelling with infants and toddlers.

- **Multipurpose facilities:** The Paris strategy proposes multipurpose use of existing public, semi-public, and sometimes private facilities, thereby leveraging existing neighborhood assets to make recreational, cultural, and other spaces more accessible and inclusive to the community.
BACKGROUND

The fifteen-minute-city strategy is a key pillar of Mayor Anne Hidalgo’s reelection platform, aiming to ensure that all services and amenities such as parks, grocery stores, clinics, gyms, cultural centers, schools, and workplaces can be accessed by every resident by walking or biking no more than fifteen minutes. The plan goes further than others of its kind by including employment and cultural centers—which are often most likely to be concentrated in city centers—in its umbrella of necessary services. As Carlos Moreno notes, the strategy represents a paradigm shift that seeks to break from past models of city planning focused on spatial mono-centrism and segmentation, where the various functional spaces of the city—administrative areas, business areas, residential areas—are segregated. It emphasizes easy accessibility between six essential urban functions: living, working, supplying, caring, learning, and enjoying. The logic of the plan is to concentrate the functions that would normally be distributed across a megacity into a neighborhood, thereby reducing the tremendous social and environmental costs of commuting, and generating less overall stress and pollution. This represents a radical change in urban lifestyle. By putting all these functions within a fifteen-minute radius of one another, the plan seeks to improve quality of life based on three multiscalar indicators: individual quality of life, which involves oneself and loved ones; sociability, which involves one’s relationship with neighbors and colleagues; and the individual and the planet, which involves inhabiting a low-carbon and inclusive world.

Paris en Commun has already made concrete proposals to make the strategy a reality. Their manifesto includes a host of policies that will continue to make Paris less friendly to the car in the coming years, most notably the elimination of sixty thousand parking spots, the closure of main roads to private motor vehicles, and the banning of fuel cars from the city proper by 2024. Space normally occupied by cars will instead be taken up by play streets, pedestrian areas, street furniture, and a comprehensive cycling network that will expand to every street by the end of the mayor’s second term. Unlike a comparable twenty-minute plan in Melbourne, where existing projects have taken place in suburban neighborhoods far from one another, the Paris plan does not envision each neighborhood as a village within the city, but one node among many others in a dense, polycentric city.

The plan also emphasizes the multipurpose use of “polymorphic” spaces, which are some combination of public and semipublic (and in some cases private) facilities. One major component of this is opening schools and schoolyards to the public in the evenings, weekends, and holidays, so that public schools can double as spaces for sports activities, youth clubs, or cultural activities for youth. According to Moreno, major infrastructures like schools should not be left unutilized when there is a need for space. Other ideas for multipurpose spaces are using nightlife venues for daytime fitness classes, or sports facilities for a range of different activities.

Another proposal is the “citizen kiosk,” a new infrastructure in Paris based on the typology of street newspaper kiosks. Citizen kiosks function as booths where residents can fulfill administrative tasks, access information
about civic matters and events, drop something off for safekeeping over a short period, or learn about things happening in their area. These kiosks help create a sense of community in each neighborhood and serve to make the neighborhood a more convenient and accessible place for its residents.

Citizen participation is highly valued, and financial mechanisms are built into the plan to encourage citizen-led tactical-urbanism initiatives. Hidalgo’s current budget allocates 10 percent—or €800 million—to participatory projects, which citizens can propose and vote on before being implemented. The reelection campaign seeks to double this fund to 20 percent, or €1.6 billion over five years, giving citizens unprecedented freedom to change their neighborhoods through a democratic and participatory process. This participatory ethos extends beyond the planning of each neighborhood and into the ongoing work of maintaining it. Indeed, as Moreno argues, it is important that residents feel a sense of pride for their neighborhoods, as this will contribute to their long-term preservation, cleanliness, and safety.

From an economic-development perspective, the fifteen-minute-city strategy is focused on transforming supply chains to correspond to the hyper-proximate built environment, and to encourage a more circular economy. This means focusing on small local businesses and disincentivizing major retail chains or big-box development. Part of the plan is to create multipurpose shops that are not just for buying goods, but also for repairing them and for hosting workshops on how objects can be given a second or a third life. The plan hopes to bring more ground-level commercial spaces into the ownership of the city’s agencies so that the street level can be more of a “commons,” where the storefronts are not only focused on buying and selling, but also repurposing goods and hosting public events and gatherings.

One key challenge of the Paris strategy is extending it into the city’s immediate suburbs, where Hidalgo does not have jurisdiction. An outpouring of investment directed toward fifteen-minute neighborhoods in the central city threatens to exacerbate existing geographical inequities between the city proper and the immediate suburbs, which were incorporated into the greater Métropole du Grand Paris in 2016. “Of course we want to develop it in the suburbs, and we’ve discussed it with different mayors of different suburbs and have delivered several conferences and meetings. We’re working hard to propose a road map for the fifteen-minute city in the suburbs, but we don’t have real authority for that right now,” Moreno says. Moreno has previously argued that when it comes to medium- and low-density zones, the fifteen-minute model might need to be recalibrated to thirty minutes. Shifting car-centric built environments and their associated supply chains into more sustainable models will take time and a lot of innovation in policy and planning.
For now, the fifteen-minute city is a strategy that has yet to be implemented, and a concrete schedule or budget has yet to be announced. This is in part because the plan was contingent on Hidalgo’s reelection, and the Paris mayoral race had been postponed to June 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It should be noted, however, that the strategy builds on five years of consolidated work to reclaim Paris’s streets for pedestrians and cyclists, with the aim of building a more climate-resilient city with a better quality of life. Hidalgo’s tenure thus far has been defined by several major victories that have helped make a strategy like the fifteen-minute city appear to the electorate like less of a fringe idea. Her “Paris Breathes” initiative tackled air pollution in the city by closing various districts to motor traffic on Sundays and public holidays. She also worked to permanently ban cars on the roads along the Seine, in the face of serious resistance from motorist groups and representatives of suburban districts, with the matter finally being settled in court. Under her leadership, schoolyards, streets, and public spaces throughout the city have been remodeled to be more climate adaptive in order to battle Paris’s heat-island effect. With some of these achievements under its belt, the mayoral leadership is positioned to try something that goes a step further, and the fifteen-minute city is just that.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR TIRANA**

The fifteen-minute city concept centers around generating more time for urban residents by lowering the amount of time and stress associated with commuting. When it comes to making commuting easier, Tirana benefits from its compact urban form. Unlike megacities like Paris, where tackling the dominance of cars involves dealing with complex struggles to satisfy the needs of both downtown residents and suburban commuters driving into the city, these problems are less pronounced in Tirana, where sprawl in the city’s peripheries is not as drastic. Almost every neighborhood in the core contains fresh food markets, bakeries, cafés, pharmacies, small public health clinics and schools, though they tend to lack green space and recreational areas. This all means that there are few reasons for enabling daily driving in the inner city, particularly for multistop daily errands. Tirana faces three major obstacles to realizing the ideal commuting patterns of the fifteen-minute city: inadequate road infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, lack of shade, and a relatively unappealing public transport system.

The dominance of the car, coupled with inadequate infrastructure for travel by foot or by bike, makes choosing non-vehicular modes of transportation dangerous, both in the short term (in the form of risks of collision and injury) and in the long term (through the health effects of inhaling polluted air and ambient dust). Lack of shade from trees and awnings in many parts in the city can also make even a short walk on a hot summer day uncomfortable, and for some outright dangerous. For those that have the money, opting to take a car with air conditioning seems much more appealing. Public buses are often crowded and stuck in the same traffic as private motor vehicles because they lack their own lanes. When public transport is not prioritized, using it can become stressful—particularly for caregivers with strollers—and incentivize more driving.

Tirana’s mayoral leadership has developed a reputation for implementing ambitious pedestrianization and bike-lane expansion projects. The challenge now is to build on these successes and pursue these aims in a more systematic fashion by addressing the three issues listed above throughout the city. Projects from around the world already give us clear road maps for what needs to be done, and the phasing processes involved with each kind of initiative.

Small local neighborhood streets should be closed to motor traffic in order to give children space for stress-free play, and to enable more of the social and dynamic street life common
to Mediterranean cities. If public transport is to become a reasonable and favorable mode of travel, buses must have dedicated lanes and be more efficient than private motor traffic. Finally, broken and narrow sidewalks that are ubiquitous throughout the city should be repaired and expanded. In the case of very narrow streets (rrugica), a “shared street” design is more appropriate, and various design elements such as paving and bollards can be used to signal pedestrian priority.

Also important for the Tirana context is Paris en Commun’s idea to open local schools’ facilities to the public in the evenings and on weekends. In Tirana, schools are well distributed throughout the city and represent the greatest open public space available in neighborhoods, yet they sit unused most of the time. If schoolyards are repurposed to be public parks for the neighborhood, they can become crucial recreational park spaces in urban neighborhoods that are currently deprived of green areas. With access to school parks, infants and toddlers can be engaged in more active learning outdoors in nature, honing skills they will take with them into their school years and beyond. Caregivers and community members can have opportunities to socialize and rest while their children play close by, generating a more active and communal neighborhood life.

With the concept of the citizen kiosks, Paris presents a method of improving participatory urbanism, in terms of allocating specific parts of the city’s budget for democratically proposed and selected projects, as well as creating new street infrastructure for information sharing and community cohesion. This kind of infrastructure would be especially useful in Tirana, where there are many older residents who are not active online and have less access to information specific to their neighborhoods. Tirana should look to devoting a portion of its city budget toward neighborhood-based projects proposed by residents as a way of encouraging civic engagement and giving area residents a sense of ownership and belonging in their neighborhoods.
NOTES

1 Carlos Moreno, interview by Lorina Hoxha and Simon Battisti, May 19, 2020.
2 Moreno.
3 Moreno.
5 See the case study in this series, The Twenty-Minute Neighborhood (Tirana: Qendra Marrëdhënë, 2020).
7 Moreno, interview with Hoxha and Battisti.
8 Moreno.
10 O’Sullivan, “Its Time.”
11 O’Sullivan.
12 O’Sullivan.
13 Moreno, quoted in Elzas, “Can Paris Become a 15-Minute City?.
14 Moreno, interview with Hoxha and Battisti.
CASE STUDIES IN NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR CAREGIVERS

The Fifteen-Minute Neighborhood

Qendra Marrëdhënie (Relationship Center) collaborates with local institutions to build just spaces for children and those who care for them.

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Born Thriving’s written guidance consists of three volumes: neighborhood design guidelines (vol. 1); the neighborhood indicator baseline (vol. 2), and neighborhood planning case studies (vol. 3).

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