



Contested Places: Navigating the Politics of the X-Minute City

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of the ‘15-minute’ city (15mC) or ‘x-minute’ city has gained prominence in urban planning over recent years. Coined by Moreno in 2016, it aims to create places where residents can fulfil their daily needs (housing, health, education, food, work and leisure) within a certain walking and biking distance from their home, denoted as a specific number of minutes (e.g., 5, 10, 15 and 20) (Moreno, 2016). X-minute city urban planning strategies are expected to deliver a broad range of environmental, social and economic advantages. The benefits put forward include an improved quality of life and enhanced social cohesion; better health outcomes through promoting active travel and reducing air pollution; lower carbon emissions in the transport sector by shortening travel distances and developing sustainable mobility options; and, more broadly, a pathway towards climate-neutral, more liveable cities (Allam et al., 2022; Büttner et al.,

2022; Moreno et al., 2021; Pozoukidou & Angelidou, 2022).

The impulse to reinvent urban spaces to fight against urban sprawl and leverage the neighbourhood level has long been promoted and legitimised by policy and decision-makers across the world including in the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 (UN, 2015), in particular, the 11th Sustainable Development Goal to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. In addition, these ambitions are evident in the New Urban Agenda adopted in 2016 (UN, 2016) and the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European cities¹ (EC, 2020). Cities such as Paris, Melbourne, Milan or Barcelona have successfully put in place proximity-related policies. However, such urban agendas are often met by pushback and resistance against issues related to gentrification, housing

¹ https://territorialagenda.eu/wp-content/uploads/leipzig_charter_2007.pdf

affordability and social justice. Some of this has taken the form of unwarranted ‘conspiracy theories’. Furthermore, practical challenges from cities are numerous including providing adequate and accessible infrastructures and services, meaningfully engaging with residents and stakeholders as well as implementing this model beyond urban centres.

The chapter is based on a brief review of the current state-of-the-art research on the x-minute city. It first lays out the concept of the x-minute city and then examines the main critiques and limitations associated with it. The chapter then provides a critical analysis of the political, social and economic dynamics within which x-minute city policies and practices are situated. In short, this chapter argues that the x-minute city concept needs to move away from a narrow and often quantified focus on proximity to a broader approach addressing issues related to social justice. The chapter also contends that scholars should draw on the existing literature to question the established processes of post-political planning and participatory neoliberal governance in which the x-minute city model is embedded.

WHAT IS AN X-MINUTE CITY?

The 15mC concept reintroduces temporalities and urban rhythms at the centre of urban planning. Moreno (2016) argues that we need to change our relationship with time and bring essential urban functions – living, working, supplying, caring, learning and enjoying – closer to where people live. This approach, first developed by Hägerstrand (1975) in his Theoretical Time Geography Framework, is known as chrono-urbanism. Moreover, the 15mC concept draws on well-established urban planning concepts and ideas such as the neighbourhood unit concept developed by Perry (1929), the mixed-use urban development approach advocated by Jacobs (1961) and the compact city model

advocating for dense, mixed-use and walkable districts. More recently, it has drawn on the people-centred approach to urban planning advocated by Gehl (2013), new urbanism theories and the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) approach (see Khavarian-Garmsir et al., 2023a for a historical perspective on the concept).

Moreno (2016) argues that, for people to achieve a high quality of life, they should be able to fulfil their daily needs and access essential urban amenities at no more than a 15-min walk or cycle ride. Moreno et al. (2021) define six essential urban social functions to sustain a decent urban life – living, working, commerce, healthcare, education and entertainment. To achieve this, urban planners are encouraged to follow a set of urban principles centred around four pillars: Proximity, diversity, density and digitalisation. Moreno et al. (2021, p. 102) define ‘density’ as the ‘optimal number of people that a given area can comfortably sustain in terms of urban service delivery and resource consumption’ while ‘proximity’ is understood as the coupling of spatial and temporal dimensions in understanding and planning for urban living. ‘Diversity’ puts an emphasis on mixed land-use and mixed functions in a specific area as well as on diversity in culture and people. Lastly, ‘digitalisation’ is seen as an enabler of the three other dimensions, via the use of digital technology such as smart city management tools, digital platforms, digital participation tools or end-user applications (see Khavarian-Garmsir et al., 2023b for an overview).

Endorsed by Paris’ Mayor Anne Hidalgo’s re-election campaign in 2016, the adoption of 15mC and proximity planning was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, numerous cities introduced temporary urban infrastructures such as bicycle lanes, temporary street closures, open/play street initiatives and temporary urban services in outdoor areas (Deas et al., 2021). X-minute city strategies have come in various shapes and forms – 15mC, 20-min

neighbourhoods, 10-min city, 10-min town, 15-min community life cycles, 30-min city, the 45-min city, 5-min district and even 1-min city. Other urban planning frameworks are often associated with the x-minute city. For example, complete neighbourhoods, liveable neighbourhoods and healthy neighbourhoods share close similarities with the x-minute city. These place a strong focus on proximity planning, while the urban planning concept of the Superblock has a stronger emphasis on traffic management and restricting car access within the block (Büttner et al., 2024).

Cities across the globe have adopted an x-minute strategy, although it is predominantly found in the Global North (see Büttner et al., 2024 for an overview). Well-documented examples include Barcelona, Paris, Milan, Portland and Melbourne (Pinto & Akhavan, 2022; Pozoukidou & Chatziyiannaki, 2021; Rueda, 2019). Implementations that come under the umbrella of the x-minute city include street redesigns that give priority to active mobility and increase green spaces. These transformations can be permanent or can be more temporary, which often come under the umbrella term of tactical urbanism (e.g., pop-up bike lanes and use of paint to create new zones). Changes on the street are often combined with traffic management and calming interventions such as the creation of pedestrian zones, the development of infrastructures for active modes of transport, the restriction of speed limits and car access (Bertolini, 2020; Büttner et al., 2022, 2024; Leonardi & Distefano, 2024; Pozoukidou & Angelidou, 2022).

As the significant reconfiguration of public spaces, some x-minute city measures can encounter opposition from different groups, including car owners, local retailers, local politicians and residents, and can trigger conflicts due to opaque governance processes, lack of meaningful citizen participation or limited communication (Parajuli & Pojani, 2018; Verlinghieri et al., 2024; Vitale Brovarone et al., 2023; Zografos et al., 2020). Examples of pushbacks can be found in Paris against the pedestrianisation of the Seine

quayside (O'Sullivan, 2017), in Barcelona against the flagship project of Superblocks (Zografos et al., 2020) or in Brussels against the implementation of the Good Move initiative (Te Boveldt et al., 2023). Opposition has been fed by concerns relating to gentrification and the exacerbation of socioeconomic inequalities, feelings of distributional unfairness and exclusion of lower-income and minority group residents.

A part of this existing opposition has also been fuelled by the media backlash against road closures to create space for social distancing and active travel at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nello-Deakin, 2023) and by significant misinformation and conspiracy theories against the 15mC more broadly (Marquet et al., 2024). In this narrative, 15mC strategies and related interventions are portrayed as a global social engineering effort to restrict private freedoms, for instance, the incorrect claim that Oxford would restrict travel between neighbourhoods as part of their 15mC strategy (Marquet et al., 2024).

LIMITATIONS OF THE X-MINUTE CITY

Since 2016, scholars have refined the definition of the 15mC by incorporating public transportation alongside active travel modes such as walking and cycling (Borghetti et al., 2021; Calafiore et al., 2022; Wolański, 2023); by exploring how the 15mC concept interacts with work practices (Di Marino et al., 2022); and by categorising in a more granular way the different types of urban amenities required (e.g., primary ones such as schools or access to a pharmacy, secondary ones such as universities or specialised healthcare). These are considered in relation to travel times and geographical scales (Graells-Garrido et al., 2021; Sdoukopoulos et al., 2024).

The model put forward by Moreno (2016) has received important criticisms (see, for a comprehensive overview, Khavarian-Garmsir

et al., 2023b or Mouratidis, 2024). Most substantial critiques of the model include the overly simplistic nature of the framework and its focus on physical urban design, overlooking the intertwined social, economic and political issues, which cannot be ‘resolved’ by design and technological solutions only. Indeed, to achieve its ambitions, x-minute city planning strategies should be combined with political and systemic changes. Relatedly, the broad and ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach outlined in the framework does not take into account the specificities of neighbourhoods, communities and local heritage, nor does it acknowledge the complex and metabolic city systems in which places are embedded. In response, Moreno et al. acknowledged the flexible nature of their framework, which should be tailored (10-min, 20-min radii) to ‘individual cities based on both their morphology and specific needs and characteristics’ (2021, p. 106).

The uncertainty regarding the geographical scale of application of the framework – x-minute radius, neighbourhood, city-wide – also raises key questions. Does the framework actively consider how different neighbourhoods interact with each other or focus solely on a neighbourhood’s self-sufficiency? It is crucial not only to foster connections within a neighbourhood but also to broaden connectivity between urban centres and peri-urban areas (Pozoukidou & Angelidou, 2022, p. 1359). Relatedly, the question of the relevance of the x-minute city for peri-urban areas needs to be further addressed. These areas are often not very dense with a higher proportion of single-family housing and a tendency for single land use (residential, commercial, etc.) due to restricted zoning. This often results in more limited services than in urban centres and lesser access to public transport and active travel opportunities. For example, people living in peri-urban areas who need to commute to the centre for work are more exposed to transport poverty (no public transport and shared mobility options available, unaffordability, inaccessibility, long travel

times, lack of provision during nighttime and outside peak hours, etc.). This is compounded by the fact that low-income households tend to be pushed by housing prices to live on the outskirts of cities in more affordable and less dense neighbourhoods. They are also less likely to have access to flexible working hours as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic (Guzman et al., 2021). In peri-urban and more rural contexts, public transportation is a crucial leverage factor to alleviate car reliance. Wolański (2023) argues that the x-minute concept should be more clearly anchored in the TOD approach and include public transport nodes (e.g., railway stations) as ‘the central points of the walkable, multifunctional neighbourhoods’ (Wolański, 2023, p. 11; see also Borghetti et al., 2021 on 15-min station and Staricco & Vitale Brovarone, 2020 on implementing TOD in suburban contexts). A closer focus on public transport nodes would also allow planners to address the harder-to-realise element of proximity-based planning, which relates to the workplace location and work commutes (Borghetti et al., 2021; Pozoukidou & Angelidou, 2022).

Citizen participation is at the core of the x-minute city model. However, in practice, the design and execution of decision-making processes in which the model is embedded (or not) at local level are often questioned by scholarship and civil society, pointing to limited, curated and non-representative participative approaches (Anguelovski et al., 2023; Casarin et al., 2023). Another key point here is whether x-minute strategies found in city planning and policy documents worldwide are being implemented on the ground. To answer this, Gower and Grodach (2022) examined x-minute city planning documents in 33 cities worldwide and found a general lack of implementation and of statutory policy weight and planning legislation to support the take-up of the concept by relevant city officers. Furthermore, Gower and Grodach point to the lack of measurable targets to monitor and evaluate the development, operationalisation and benefits of the

x-minute city at the local level. For example, x-minute city policies often aim at reducing private car usage and emissions, encouraging instead citizens to use public transport, walk and cycle. It is important to develop models not only to measure the positive changes in mobility habits but also to better understand possible rebound effects or transfer from one sustainable mobility mode (e.g., walking) to another (e.g., public transport) rather than changes in car usage. Without such models, indicators and targets, it is hard to assess the actual benefits and the changes in mobility practices associated with x-minute city interventions, and the policy is at risk of becoming a normative framework, presented as unambiguously positive (Calafiore et al., 2022; Olsen et al., 2022).

Proponents of the x-minute concept contend that it ‘adds a strategic value’ to the variety of existing urban planning concepts, especially in emphasising the ‘environmental dimension’ (Allam et al., 2022, p. 1). This branding as ‘x-minute city’ is easily understandable and has gained momentum in policy-making. However, it could also be used as a city branding tool to advertise cities and attract people and investment, leading to processes of gentrification and pressure related to tourism (Cocola-Gant et al., 2020). Thus, it is important to question whether the framework will enable sustainable urban transitions or rather risk exacerbating existing urban inequalities. The next sections of the chapter will discuss in more detail the politics underlying the x-minute city policies and practices.

NAVIGATING THE POLITICS OF THE X-MINUTE CITY

A Focus on Proximity: The Quantification of the X-Minute City

Proponents of the x-minute city argue that it provides a holistic framework bringing

social, environmental and economic dimensions together and offers a way to rethink cities (Allam et al., 2022; Moreno et al., 2021). Proximity is at the heart of the x-minute city concept and its selling point for policy and decision-makers, a phenomenon described by Marchigiani and Bonfantini (2022) as ‘proximity syndrome’. However, the ideas behind the concept are much broader. Often, though ‘this holism and nuance is lost in the practical adoption of the 15-minute city. Within planning and policy practice, larger ideas of diversity and digitalisation are hard pressed to compete with more specific (and measurable) metrics of accessibility to consumption’ (Poorthuis & Zook, 2023, p. 4).

This is reflected in the literature, which has largely focused on the proximity dimension of Moreno’s framework (Papadopoulos et al., 2023; Poorthuis & Zook, 2023; Sdoukopoulos et al., 2024). Indeed, there is a large corpus of scholarship on measuring the performance of cities in terms of x-minute walk or bike proximity to urban amenities in a defined spatial area (called a catchment area) (see Sdoukopoulos et al., 2024, for a comprehensive review). The types, hierarchisation and aggregation of urban amenities vary substantially across the studies, ranging from care facilities, green spaces, grocery stores, education facilities, cultural facilities and transportation to civic institutions, places of worship, entertainment facilities, banks, health facilities, and sport and recreational facilities (see Bartzokas-Tsiompras & Bakogiannis, 2023; Knap et al., 2023; Murgante et al., 2024; Papadopoulos et al., 2023).

Furthermore, x-minute studies often adopt a quantitative approach, sometimes combining it with computational methods (see Lima & Costa, 2023, for an overview). The most common indicators include numbers, types and varieties of amenities, percentage of population with access to each type of amenity and diversity of reachable amenities per inhabitant (Sdoukopoulos et al., 2024). Based on these indicators, scores in different

geographical locations of the city are then presented on heatmaps. Here, critiques point to the scarcity of studies that explore the variations in these scores in relation to sociodemographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, ethnic background, class, income, disability) at the neighbourhood level within cities (Khavarian-Garmsir et al., 2023b; Knap et al., 2023). Another pitfall is that studies tend to consider, by and large, urban amenities associated with positive change, such as green spaces, education or health facilities. However, as Olsen et al. (2022) highlighted, research needs to adopt a more nuanced approach by also considering the proximity and impacts of destinations associated with negative health outcomes, such as, some takeaways or fast-food outlets.

More broadly, critics argue that this focus on quantifying and visualising proximity can be detrimental by reducing urban living experience to data points in relation to the proximity of urban functions (Marchigiani & Bonfantini, 2022, p. 54). With this emphasis, studies focus largely on the quantity of urban amenities present in the neighbourhood overlooking their characteristics, the quality of services and infrastructures they provide, and the extent to which they meet local needs and preferences (Mouratidis, 2024). However, evaluating the quality of services provided can be difficult as it depends on the local context and varies from user to user. Here, Olsen et al. (2022) suggest developing local quality assessment of places, drawing, for example, on the existing Place Standard tool used in Scotland, to capture qualitative aspects of services including maintenance and quality of infrastructures, perceived accessibility, safety and convenience of environments, or feelings of belonging. In this way, proximity needs to be conceptualised ‘not just a banal closeness to facilities and services’ but as ‘entangled in complex layers of meaning, such as the image of a city, its rhythms, and the ways of living together that enliven it’ (Marchigiani & Bonfantini, 2022, p. 12).

PROXIMITY TO DESTINATIONS: ACCESSIBILITY AND MOBILITY JUSTICE

Drawing on the x-minute city concept, research related to mobility has started to shift from being predominantly concerned with making transportation systems more efficient and providing higher travel speed to considering more actively accessibility to destinations for different population groups (Bertolini, 2023; Silva et al., 2023). Examples include studies on walkability to urban amenities (e.g., Ferrer-Ortiz et al., 2022; Gaglione et al., 2022; Rhoads et al., 2023; Willberg et al., 2023), on accessibility of cycling infrastructure (e.g., Hosford et al., 2022; Knap et al., 2023) or on accessibility and affordability of public transport in peri-urban and low-income neighbourhoods (e.g., Poorthuis & Zook, 2023).

Research has shown that social factors such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, class and income affect urban experiences. For example, we know that statistically women have distinct mobility patterns (i.e., chain trips, shorter distances) and use public transport differently (i.e., more use of off-peak hours and use of combined mobility modes). Women also have a gendered experience of being in public space, which is often shaped by safety concerns (Lehmann, 2020). We also know that people with additional support needs face various accessibility challenges with public transportation due to a lack of adequate infrastructure and the scarcity of accessible options (Park et al., 2023; Unsworth et al., 2021). Other factors, such as transportation service frequency and connections, work patterns and car dependency in peri-urban areas, also shape different users’ experiences. In short, there is no ‘universal’ experience of using the transportation system or moving through spaces. Therefore, concepts such as ‘average speed’ (walking, cycling) or ‘users’ as a broad category can reinforce a homogenous and

standardised category of ‘user’, failing to take into account the realities of experiences of different social-economical groups in moving around and the environmental conditions shaping their experiences (i.e., seasonal, night-time).

To address this, Büttner et al. (2022) offer the framework of accessibility justice, which considers how to create equal access from ‘the distribution of services and resources (availability, affordability and infrastructure) to the barriers that urban built environments present for certain users to access these main services and opportunities which produce inequality’ (Büttner et al., 2022, p. 24). Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, they identified recurrent challenges for different disadvantaged social demographic groups, including older adults, children, disabled people, women, people with a migrant background, carers and low-income groups and developed a user-needs-based assessment providing policy and urban design recommendations. The established streams of work on mobility poverty (Kuttler & Moraglio, 2021) and mobility justice (Sheller, 2018; Verlinghieri & Schwanen, 2020) could also strengthen x-minute city studies. Indeed, mobility justice is concerned not only with the physical and social barriers of infrastructure and built environments but also with the different experiences of moving, the socio-economic and technological structures on which transportation systems depend and the ways in which some places are connected to others, while others are disconnected (Sheller, 2018).

SPATIAL DISPARITIES: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND GENTRIFICATION

Research needs to further address socio-economic spatial disparities to better understand and contextualise the benefits of x-minute policies – and to identify who

benefits from them. For example, the development of x-minute city strategies is often associated with better health outcomes through promoting walking and healthy lifestyles, improving air quality through car traffic reduction, supporting better access to health and social amenities and/or increasing mental wellbeing through access to green spaces (Allam et al., 2022). Olsen et al. (2022, p. 1) nuanced this by showing that in Scotland ‘access to 20 min domains was greatest in areas where individual health status tends to be worse’. In other words, the most deprived areas with worse health outcomes had better access to key facilities and services than the least deprived areas. Conversely, Calafiore et al. (2022), in their study of the Liverpool City Region, found lower access to services in more deprived areas. This shows that proximity to services is not necessarily beneficial per se but only one component of a complex range of economic and social factors. Thus, careful considerations of the socioeconomic and spatial inequalities in a specific location are needed before improving access to urban amenities as prescribed by Moreno, as it might be ineffective in reducing inequalities or worse, exacerbate them (Calafiore et al., 2022; Olsen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, research casts doubt on whether social cohesion and sense of place will be enhanced by implementing proximity urban planning strategies. Casarin et al. (2023) point to the lack of evidence that social mixing policies – the ‘diversity’ pillar of the x-minute policy – can be achieved through mere proximity. They explain

...after a decade of austerity that has strengthened neoliberalism and the socio-economic inequalities with which it is associated, spatial and social divisions remain. [...] evidence demonstrates that spatial proximity – in and of itself – is insufficient to create “meaningful everyday interactions or mutually supportive relationships” (Elwood et al., 2015, p. 127), especially between groups that differ in fundamental ways such as income, ethnicity or social class. (Casarin et al., 2023, p. 3178)

Here, the broader point is that the x-minute concept, which heavily focuses on local interventions (as opposed to city-wide or even national systemic aspects), is unlikely to solely foster an inclusive city. As Casarin et al. put it, ‘an inclusive city need not necessarily be a 15-minute city [...] but it is a city where spatial as well as social injustice is tackled everywhere, with a focus on its causes rather than just its “symptoms”’ (Casarin et al., 2023, p. 3181). In this context, sustained investment in infrastructures, places and communities, including fair opportunities for education, housing, health-care, employment and access to services to all residents, is required to achieve the long-term structural transformations needed to ensure a fair transition to sustainability. This investment needs to come hand in hand with strong political measures and policies to counter gentrification processes, including, for example, regulating rents and encouraging community ownership of land and property, reforming and regulating parking, and developing local anti-displacement policies. Only then, the benefits and burdens of urban transformation and sustainable transitions advocated in urban agendas such as the x-minute city could be shared fairly.

Last but not least, gentrification processes linked to urban planning and greening initiatives have been well documented (see Anguelovski et al., 2022; Gould & Lewis, 2016). These processes are driven by movements of capital, market dynamics and land speculation, which in turn increase housing prices and exclude lower-income and minority group residents (Gould & Lewis, 2016; Lew, 2017; Van Criekingen, 2021). To address the real consequences and concerns at play in urban regeneration, social justice should be clearly put at the forefront of x-minute city policy, paying further attention to ensuring access to high-quality, affordable housing, addressing gentrification processes and countering other exclusionary development dynamics (Anguelovski et al., 2023).

PARTICIPATORY AND POST-POLITICAL PLANNING: REPOLITICISING URBAN POLICIES?

The x-minute city concept needs to be critically examined within the longer processes, which have defined urban agendas in the past decades. These include post-political planning and participatory neoliberal governance more broadly (Kębłowski et al., 2019; Legacy et al., 2019; Van Criekingen, 2021).

Firstly, urban agendas have increasingly been shaped by private interests and private developments and turned into strategies of public-private land rent valorisation and improving market conditions for investors and developers (Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020; Kębłowski et al., 2019; Van Criekingen, 2021). It is, therefore, crucial to reiterate the economic leverage of urban green agenda narratives in the global race to attract both people (i.e., tourists and middle-class residents) and capital into cities (Lew, 2017; Van Criekingen, 2021). In other words, x-minute city narratives can function as tools to attract investments, boost business activity and enhance cities’ reputations (Bonakdar & Audirac, 2020; Gower & Grodach, 2022), leading to well-known processes of gentrification and pressure related to tourism (Cocola-Gant et al., 2020).

The x-minute city agenda is also deeply embedded in established urban regeneration concepts such as co-production and experimentation, placemaking, and tactical urbanism and broader narratives on urban growth, liveability and sustainable development (Kębłowski et al., 2019; Van Criekingen, 2021; Verlinghieri et al., 2024). Such narratives can ‘allow for framing social and environmental underpinnings of urban policies [...] as predominantly technical issues’. Through this lens, complex urban challenges can be solved through the ‘implementation of “rational” solutions and technological “practices” developed through matter-of-fact tasks and procedures – rather than as a question

of facing inherently political choices regarding who benefits from urban development writ large' (Kębłowski et al., 2019, p. 25). In other words, these consensual narratives take urban transformations out of the economic, social and political relations in which they are embedded (Verlinghieri et al., 2024).

This phenomenon of depoliticisation can also play out in participatory processes when they are not conceived or conducted in a meaningful way. New urban initiatives, including the x-minute city, are often framed as participatory and people-centred. However, participatory processes in this context have received substantial criticism (Glimmerveen et al., 2022; Turnhout et al., 2020). They can be seen as poorly structured forms of citizen engagement due to a lack of representation of relevant communities and civil society organisations, a lack of integration with broader processes of governance and a disconnection with political institutions and/or a limited ad hoc consultation (Bussu et al., 2022).

Participation is also about who is participating, who is invited and who is excluded, who is seen as a legitimate 'de facto' representative of community groups, the scope of the engagement and the concrete influence participants can have on decision-making (Cornwall, 2008). As Cornwall (2008, p. 278) points out, 'being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice' (see also Glimmerveen et al., 2022 for an overview of exclusionary processes in public participation). Some of the pushbacks and critiques addressed to x-minute city urban transformations have precisely pointed to these exclusionary practices. For example, in Barcelona, critics have argued that citizen participation was limited to what was required by law and purely informative (Anguelovski et al., 2023). Similarly, in Turin, local stakeholders perceived that the community was not engaged in the decision-making about the changes in the use of space in the centre of the city and that the participatory process was a tick-box exercise (Vitale Brovarone et al.,

2023). Thus, participation can be used as a tokenistic process to acquire a stamp of legitimacy for already decided planning decisions and urban redevelopments. In this configuration, participatory processes act as a form of neoliberal and depoliticised governance deployed to legitimise urban policies and/or neutralise opposition (Anguelovski et al., 2023; Bussu et al., 2022; Glimmerveen et al., 2022; Legacy et al., 2019; Turnhout et al., 2020).

Finally, it is important to reiterate that urban agendas – and thus x-minute city policies and their impacts – cannot be separated from capitalist processes and how these shape urban spaces. Critical urban scholars have long identified and described the connections between urbanisation and capitalism (e.g., Brenner et al., 2012; Kębłowski et al., 2019), and how they both reinforce what Harvey describes as 'accumulation by dispossession' (2015, p. 6). In short, this refers to the concentration of wealth, lands and power in the hands of a few to the detriment of the many. In this way, it is urgent to build on this existing literature to repoliticise urban agendas as well as to revisit alternative models such as the commons (Foster & Iaione, 2019; Russell et al., 2023) in order to credibly address the issues of social and spatial injustice that are prevailing in (x-minute) cities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the emerging concept of the x-minute city and has reviewed the current state-of-the-art research, including how the concept was expanded upon and the main critiques. Subsequently, the chapter critically examined some of the political, social and economic dynamics within which x-minute city policies and practices are situated. It did so by embedding the concept within a long tradition of research on urban inequalities and social justice and by questioning the

processes of post-political planning and neo-liberal governance, which underpin the ideas and implementation of x-minute cities.

While scholars recognise the ‘good’ intentions and the potential to drive positive change through x-minute urban planning policies, they also question whether the framework can risk exacerbating existing urban inequalities. Indeed, x-minute city policies are far from magic bullet solutions as they typically seek to address a range of social, economic and ecological goals through limited physical interventions coupled with constrained statutory policy and planning legislation to support change. This shortfall often reflects the continuation of longstanding neoliberal urban governance practices. Thus, it is important to remind ourselves that such a framework can only work with political will and with significant and sustained investment in public transport and the creation of fair opportunities for education, housing, healthcare and employment so as to ensure the inclusion of all.

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