

Urban Aspirations and the 15-Minute City: Post-Pandemic Imaginaries in Ibero-America

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Abstract

This paper examines how urban imaginaries at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic aligned with the principles of the “15-minute city” across nine Ibero-American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, and Spain). Drawing on an original survey (n = 9,600) conducted in 2020, it analyses citizens’ desires and expectations for the post-pandemic city, with particular attention to proximity, green space provision, walkability, and urban governance.

A key finding is the structural gap between the city people desire and the city they expect will materialize. While aspirations point to more sustainable, inclusive, and human-scaled urban models, expectations are tempered by scepticism about the ability of institutions to deliver on these goals. This gap underscores the tension between civic imagination and perceived governance limitations, and invites reflection on how urban policy could bridge this divide in the pursuit of more equitable and resilient cities.

The study also highlights how these shared aspirations coexist with significant contextual differences: for instance, a stronger wish to return to pre-pandemic urban conditions in European countries contrasts with greater enthusiasm for structural change in Latin America. Another notable finding is that urban density—widely criticised during the health emergency as a vector of contagion—does not appear to shape citizens’ visions for the post-COVID city. On the contrary, respondents broadly express a desire for urban environments that embody the core principles of the 15-minute city: greener, more walkable, and locally accessible.

Keywords

15-minute city; Urban imaginaries; Post-pandemic cities; Ibero-America; Urban governance,

