

# FROM CONSUMPTION TO CONNECTION

## What the 15-Minute City Means for Retail and Retail Real Estate

FROM A SPEECH BY CARLOS MORENO



The 15-minute city is not a trend nor a slogan. It is the expression of a transformation in lifestyles, work patterns, mobility, and consumption. At its heart lies a simple but radical ambition: to reorganize cities around proximity, human well-being, and permanent access to essential services. Retail – and the real estate that hosts it – stands at the very center of this transformation. The objective is not to create a “perfect city for all” but a city for everyone, capable of responding to diverse needs across generations, cultures, and social conditions. This requires a shift towards permanent accessibility: access to services anytime, anywhere, within walking or cycling distance. It is a human-centered approach that places identity, social cohesion, and quality of life at its core. My research has focused on the idea of proximity – not as a nostalgic return to the past, but as a methodology to understand how cities can be reshaped. Proximity is not about reducing cities; it is about enriching them.

### THE END OF SEGREGATED CITIES

For decades, our cities have been shaped by a dominant paradigm of functional segregation. Living, working, shopping, learning, and leisure were separated into distinct zones, connected only by long commutes. This model, promoted particularly after the Second World War, produced cities organized around cars, shopping malls on the outskirts, and mono-functional business districts. Across continents we see the same urban form repeated: central business districts, peripheral shopping centers, and long daily journeys. This model has generated three major forms of obesity: the obesity of cities, of cars, and of people. Retail has been deeply affected by this. Large shopping centers became destinations accessible mainly by car, disconnected from daily life and neighborhood identity. Today, many of these centers face decline or abandonment.

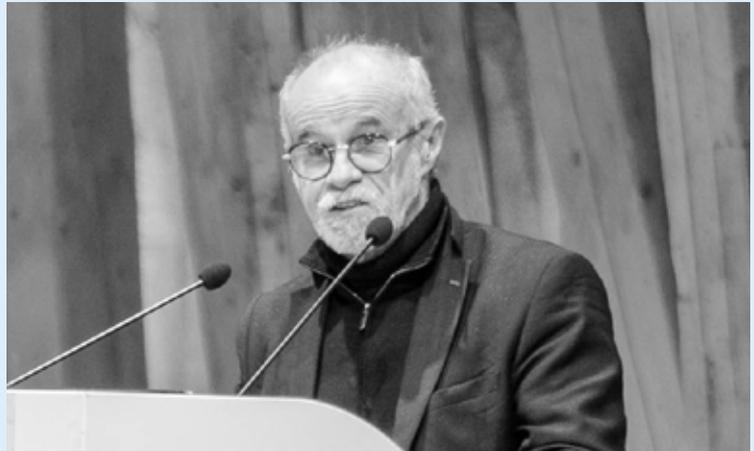


IMAGE: ACSP - AUSTRIAN COUNCIL OF SHOPPING PLACES

### ABOUT CARLOS MORENO

Carlos Moreno is Professor and Scientific Director of the Chair “Entrepreneurship – Territory – Innovation” at IAE Paris-Sorbonne Business School. Born 1959 in Tunja, Colombia, he is internationally recognized for his work on smart, sustainable cities and is the author of *The 15-Minute City*. His ideas have influenced urban policies worldwide. He was named Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor in 2010 and received the Medal of Prospective from the French Academy of Architecture in 2019.

Professor Moreno was keynote speaker at the ACSP-Congress 2025 in Vienna. The article features an excerpt from his speech at the congress.

This is not an accident – it is the consequence of an outdated urban and economic model.

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated changes that were already underway. Lifestyles, work patterns, and shopping behaviors were transformed. E-commerce expanded rapidly, while many shopping centers dependent on commuting flows were left vulnerable. In Europe, a significant proportion of shopping malls are now struggling or abandoned. This forces us to confront a fundamental question: should we continue with the consumption-driven retail model, or should we reinvent it? The 15-minute city offers a clear





answer. Retail must evolve from a logic of volume and distance to one of proximity, experience, from consumption to connection. Retail spaces are no longer just places to buy; they are places to meet, interact, learn, and belong.

Local commerce plays a decisive role in social cohesion. Streets with active shops are safer, more vibrant, and more inclusive. If commerce disappears, social life weakens, and cities lose their soul. Retail is a social infrastructure. Shops, cafés, bookstores, and services create daily interactions that anchor people to their neighborhoods. They foster the sense of belonging that is essential for resilient communities. For retail real estate, this implies a profound change in business models. The future lies not in mono-functional assets, but in mixed-use, multifunctional places embedded in everyday life.

## PROXIMITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is now the first global threat facing cities. Mobility based on long car commutes is a major source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, air pollution, and public health issues. Proximity offers a concrete and immediate response. When essential services — including retail — are accessible within short distances, cities reduce emissions while improving quality of life. Proximity is not a constraint on economic activity; it is a condition for sustainable growth. Retail located in proximity supports local supply chains, circular economy practices, and low-carbon logistics. It enables shorter delivery routes, local production, and reuse of ground-floor spaces. In this sense, retail becomes a driver of ecological resilience. For investors, developers, and operators, the implications are clear: Location is no longer about maximum catchment areas, but about integration into neighborhood life. Value creation comes from mixed uses. Ground floors become strategic assets, hosting social and economic life. Retail real estate must move beyond the traditional shopping center model and embrace a polycentric city, where multiple local hubs support daily life across the entire urban fabric.

Paris offers an example of this transformation. The 15-minute city has been implemented across the entire city, including peripheral districts. A key instrument has been the creation of a public

commercial property company, managing retail spaces to support local businesses at affordable rents. Bookstores, artisans, food producers, cultural venues, and health services have been prioritized. The result is a decentralized network of new urban centralities, where retail anchors social life and economic activity. Former industrial or abandoned areas have been transformed into inclusive neighborhoods, demonstrating the potential of proximity-based retail real estate.

## DESIGNING THE FUTURE

Today, it is possible to analyze cities block by block, identifying access to schools, healthcare, shops, culture, and services within short distances. Data allows us to adapt offerings to demographic realities. Whether families, ageing populations, or young professionals. Retail strategies must respond not only to today's needs, but to those of the next 10, 20, or 30 years. Retail becomes a strategic lever in rebalancing cities, reducing inequalities, and ensuring access for all. The future of retail in the 15-minute city relies on the combination of three forms of intelligence: artificial intelligence, supporting digital services, logistics, and omnichannel retail. Adaptive intelligence, enabling cities and businesses to respond to crises from heatwaves to economic shocks. And ancestral intelligence, rooted in local knowledge, crafts, culture, and community practices. Retail spaces integrating these intelligences become resilient, meaningful, and future-proof.

## RETAIL AS A SOCIAL BUSINESS

In the 15-minute city, retail is no longer just an economic activity — it is a social business. Shops are places of interaction, care, and identity. They contribute to public health, social inclusion, and democratic life. For the retail real estate sector, this represents an extraordinary opportunity. By embracing proximity, mixed use, and social value, retail assets can once again become engines of urban vitality. The choice is clear: continue investing in obsolete models or take part in the renaissance of cities through proximity. We can build more resilient, more sustainable, and more human cities. This transformation is already underway. The question is not whether it will happen — but who will lead it.

