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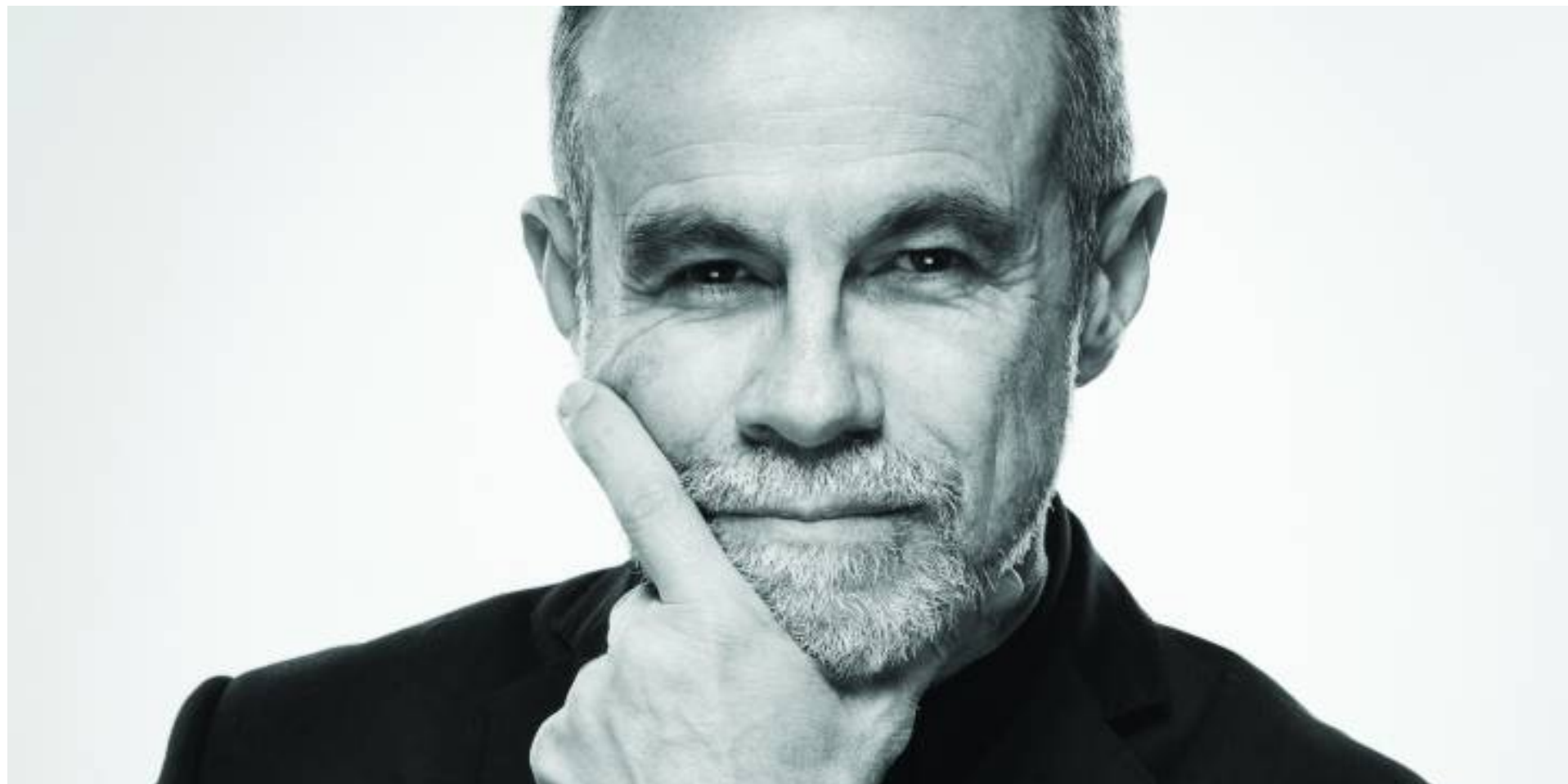
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## “The office towers must be vestiges of times that are going to disappear”

by [Bhavi Mandalia](#) — October 27, 2020 in World

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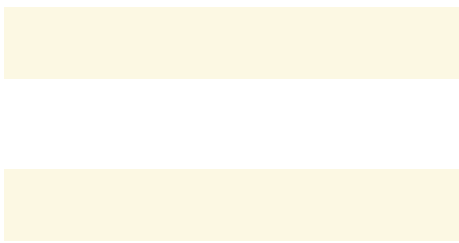


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The Franco-Colombian Carlos Moreno is a technologist by training, but he has made an international name by coining and developing an idea, that of the city of 15 minutes: dense and diverse neighborhoods in which buildings have different uses and the demand for mobility is reduced because all basic services are a maximum of a quarter of an hour from home. For more than four years he has served as Special Advisor for Urban Planning to the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, in addition to being Scientific Director of the Entrepreneurship, Territory and Innovation Chair at the Sorbonne University. From there he defends a radical urban model change that goes far beyond the restriction of private cars.

Hidalgo revalidated the mayor’s office in July with an ambitious program to restrict the use of private vehicles. How do you combine these policies with the growth of other transportation alternatives?

Paris has made huge investments in public transport, the network is quite dense. And, although we are not yet Amsterdam, we already have 1,000 kilometers of bike lanes, to which we must add 70 km of corona tracks [carriles para bicicletas creados por la pandemia]. But the question is more complex, it is not about opening or closing routes. The key question is which city do we want to live in, and how can we reduce mandatory journeys. To achieve this, cities should have a polycentric model, not a pendulum one. For decades we have had a model in which people are forced to live one hour from work, and the response of the public authorities was to take them the subway. That does not give more of itself, it is necessary to decentralize the work points. The great office towers must be vestiges of times that are going to disappear. The times of transportation considerably deteriorate the quality of life and are becoming a threat to urban health.

When did that growth model go awry?

When the world became more and more urban, and the model of cities did not change. That model, in which you have to get up at six to go to work and you never have time for anything, carries a systemic contradiction within it. Climate change put it on the table, and now the pandemic has amplified it. It is not a new crisis, it is an amplified crisis.

Defend a city where you live within a 15-minute radius, that is, with very little mobility. But there are those who say that this is not how the economy grows, as the confinement shows.

Wealth creation is not linked to mobility, but to the supply of services and how they are accessed. What the confinements have called into question is our way of producing and consuming. We have an unsustainable city model, we cannot continue living as if there were no climate change. The pandemic has put a huge magnifying glass on this situation.

But mobility restrictions due to the virus pose a problem for economies that depend most on tourism, such as Spain.

The cruises in Venice, the double-decker buses on Las Ramblas in Barcelona ... The tourism we have is not sustainable either.

And in all this mess, what role does technology play?

As the philosopher Bernard Stiegler said, technology is a *pharmakon*, in the Greek sense: it can be both the remedy and the poison. Technology must always be considered from the perspective of the common good. And governance must be exercised by municipalities, if we are talking about cities.

It is not a very liberal approach.

It is that something as important as technology in cities cannot be left to the market. It is the same with water; it has to be regulated. With the added difficulty that data control is more complex.

What do you think of the concept of *smart city*?

It is a downward trend. We must fight the *smart city* technocentric, and someone who comes from the world of technology says it. But you don't have to be anti-tech. What has failed most in cities is that technology has been left only to technologists, and that turns cities into business. It imposes its use, as a fashion, and is not part of an urban policy.

How can technology be a factor of social bond, promote urban life? A priori, it is cold, it can disconnect us socially.

It is true that technology can foster bubbles, *fake news*, social disconnection ... But also the opposite: for example, it allows us to promote citizen debate in projects and their vote in participatory budgets. Or the bike-sharing system, which has transformed the city in an unimaginable way. Digital offers new possibilities of connection to services. And you can also create neighbor links. In Paris we have a good example with the hyper-neighbors of the 14th district, a very active community of neighbors that organizes all kinds of activities with technology.

In mobility there has been an explosion of alternatives thanks to technology. How to sort out the possible clutter?

The oversupply can dehumanize the city. It is something that we have seen with the residential offer and Airbnb. You have to regulate thinking about the common good. For example, with scooters: in Paris we have a contest and we have chosen three alternatives. If there are more, they are pursued.

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**Bhavi Mandalia**

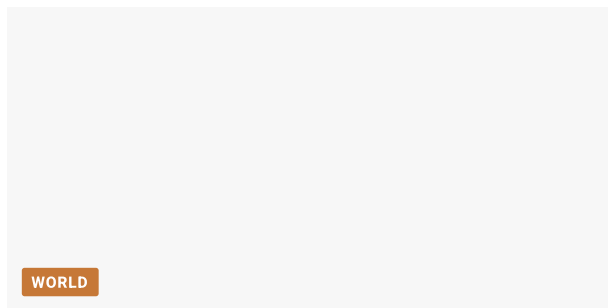
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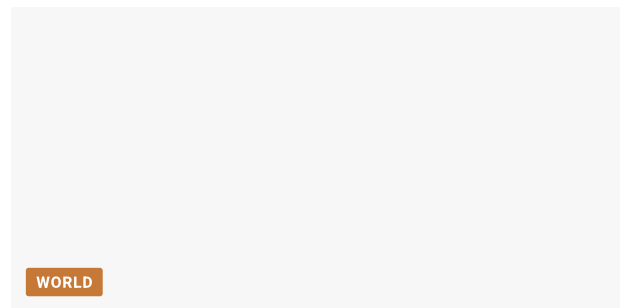
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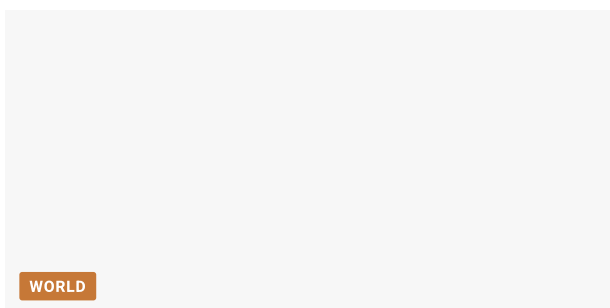
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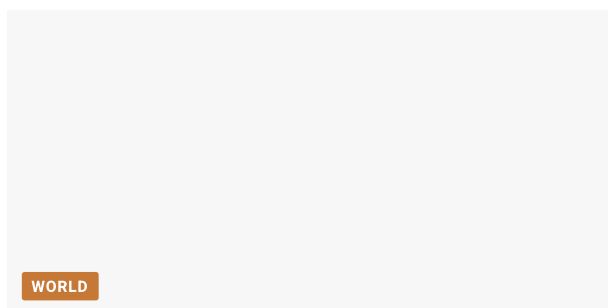
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