

## Evaluating the 15-Min City Concept in Ankara: Resident Perceptions of Accessibility in Çankaya and Keçiören

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### Abstract

The concept of 15-minute cities has gained global attention as a sustainable urban planning model aimed at creating cities where residents can access essential services and amenities within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from their homes. This model emphasizes accessibility, reducing reliance on cars, and fostering more livable and inclusive urban spaces. This study explores the perceived accessibility of two districts in Ankara, Türkiye (Çankaya and Keçiören) through the lens of the 15-minute city framework.

The findings contribute to the growing discourse on sustainable urban mobility and the practical realities of implementing the 15-minute city concept in diverse urban environments.

**Key Words:** 15-Minute City, Resident Perceptions, Ankara Urban Planning, Çankaya District, Keçiören District

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The 15-Minute City concept focuses on ensuring that residents can reach key services—such as employment, shopping, healthcare, education, and recreation—within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from their homes (Moreno et al., 2021). Rooted in long-standing urban planning principles, including human-scale development, density,

diversity, adaptability, proximity, digital integration, and connectivity, the model supports social, economic, and environmental sustainability (Khavarian-Garmsir et al., 2023b; Jiang et al., 2024). It seeks to improve urban liveability, resilience, and public health, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic and in line with Smart and Green Transition goals (Allam et al., 2022; Shoina et al., 2024; Moreno et al., 2021).

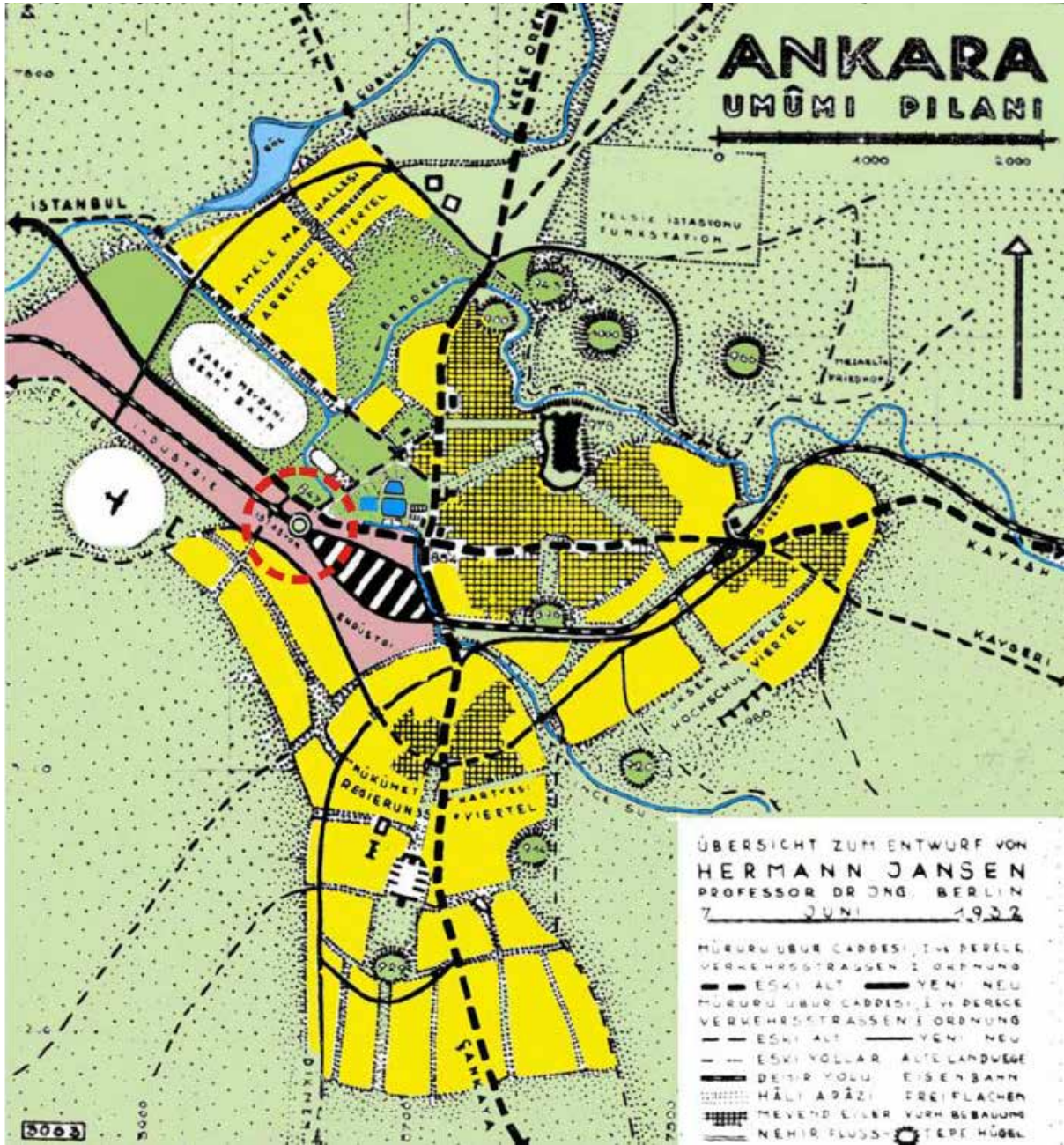
A growing number of cities are embracing the 15-Minute City model, customizing it to align with their specific urban histories and requirements. Case studies emphasize the need for contextual adaptation, highlighting that successful implementation depends on cross-disciplinary collaboration, strategic resource management, and active citizen participation (Pozoukidou & Chatziyiannaki, 2021; Shoina et al., 2024; Di Marino et al., 2022). For instance, cities like Oslo and Lisbon have experimented with integrating flexible workspaces and improving public transport access, although challenges persist in achieving an equitable distribution of services and amenities (Di Marino et al., 2022).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: In Chapter 2, the applicability and perceived relevance of the 15-Minute City concept within the context of Ankara, Türkiye, focusing on two socio-spatially distinct districts: Çankaya and Keçiören are given. Drawing on historical planning precedents such as the 1927 Jansen Plan, the research examines how the 15-Minute City concept framework—which emphasizes accessibility, proximity, mixed-use neighborhoods, and human-scale development—resonates with Ankara’s evolving urban form and contemporary challenges. In Chapter 3, the preliminary resident perceptions in both districts are assessed through a contextual lens where we expect that residents in Çankaya to support the model but raise concerns about affordability and digital expectations, whereas Keçiören’s residents are expected to view the 15-Minute City concept as a much-needed strategy for equity, though tempered by skepticism over implementation and accessibility. The paper concludes with the Chapter 4, where reinterpreting the 15-Minute City concept through Ankara’s planning history provides an opportunity for inclusive, sustainable, and resilient urban transformation, particularly when guided by neighborhood-specific strategies and participatory approaches.

## 2. THE 15-MINUTE CITY CONCEPT IN ANKARA’S PLANNING HISTORY

Revisiting the 15-Minute City framework offers an opportunity to reorient Ankara’s urban development toward more human-scaled, sustainable, and resilient patterns, particularly through the revitalization of inner-city neighborhoods, integration of transit-oriented development, and promotion of local services. In this way, the concept can serve both as a critique of past deviations and a strategic lens for future planning.

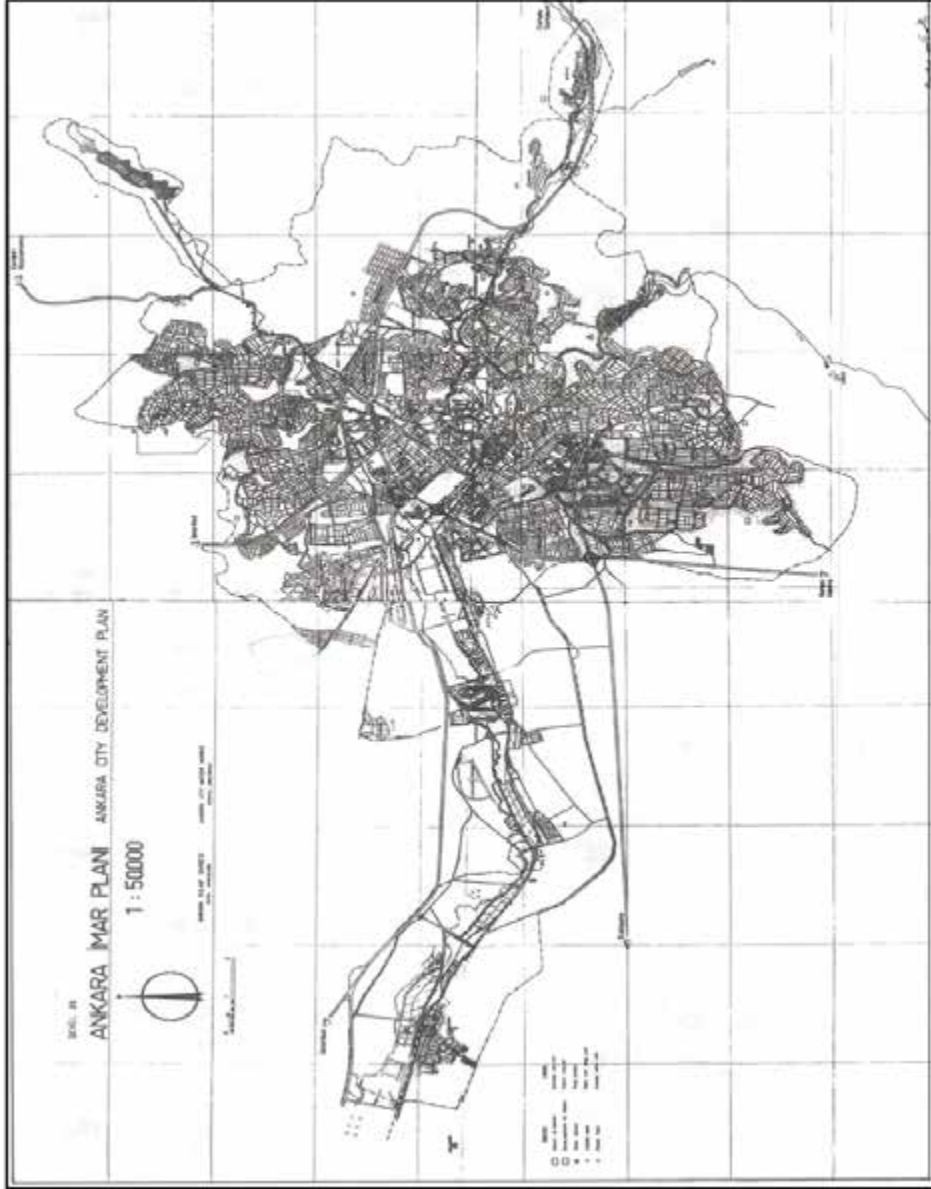
The 15-Minute City concept, with its focus on proximity, accessibility, and mixed-use neighborhoods, resonates with key aspects of Ankara’s historical urban planning—particularly the early Republican-era visions that emphasized planned growth, functional zoning, and neighborhood units.



**Plan 1.** The 1927 Jansen Plan of Ankara (Source: Jansen Plan)

In the 1920s, as the newly founded Republic of Türkiye designated Ankara as its capital, the city was envisioned as a modern, efficient, and rational urban center. The 1927 Jansen Plan exemplified this vision by proposing a well-structured capital featuring green areas, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, and accessible public services—an approach that resonates with contemporary 15-minute city principles. As one of Ankara's earliest and most significant planning initiatives, the plan aimed to establish a polycentric layout defined by functional zoning, integrated green networks, and mahalle-based neighborhood units that fostered walkability and community interaction. The foundational ideas behind this plan—particularly the focus on human-scale design, spatial proximity, and public infrastructure—closely align with the core concepts of the 15-Minute City model.

However, despite these promising foundations, Ankara's urban development over the 20th century gradually veered towards mono-functional zoning, and sprawling expansion, leading to increased car dependency. The city's growth was increasingly characterized by automobile-oriented suburbs, fragmented urban patterns, and rising spatial inequality—departing significantly from the original planning vision.

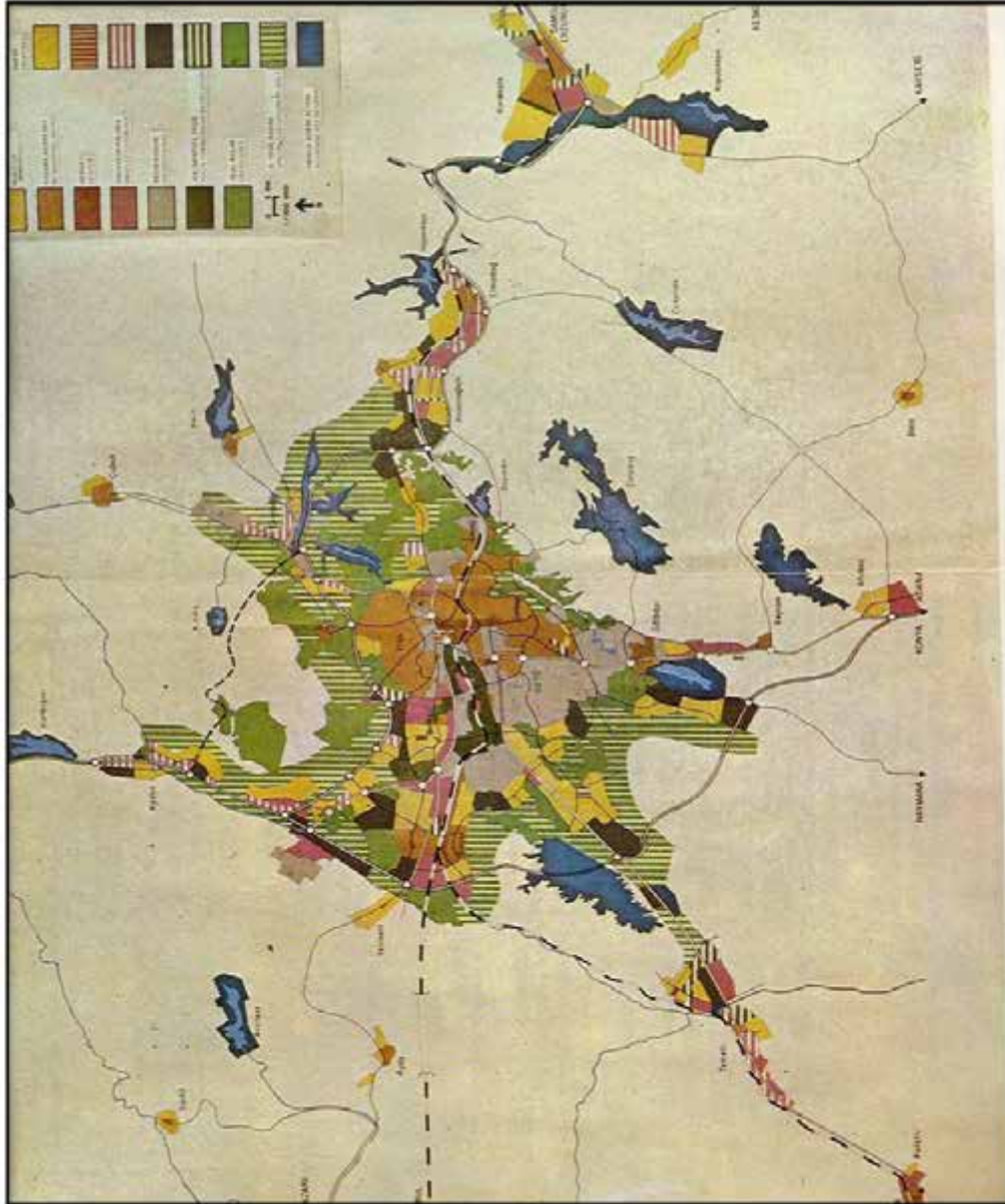


**Plan 2.** Yucel-Uybadin Plan of Ankara-1950 (Günay, 2012)

The rapid urbanization of Turkey that followed the 1950s, along with speculative land practices and the widespread emergence of gecekondu (informal housing) areas, eroded the initial vision of an integrated and accessible urban fabric.

The third plan sought to preserve the culturalist vision established in the first plan. It aimed to halt further urban growth and densification but ultimately failed by disregarding the underlying societal dynamics, leading to the city's transformation. As a result, the city's dual social structures began to shape its physical form. Apartment buildings in formally planned housing areas and informal, low-rise squatter settlements emerged as the dominant urban patterns, reflecting socio-economic divides. The once-envisioned garden city gave way to a city of

apartment blocks, while the intended green belts were overtaken by informal housing, marking the beginning of a conflict between planned and unplanned development. Over time, this tension led to a complete overhaul of the urban fabric, where the ideal of a modern, orderly city was replaced by a more disordered and chaotic reality. (Günay, 2012).



**Plan 3:** The structural plan of Ankara-2015 (Günay, 2012)

The Ankara 2015 Structural Plan introduced policies aimed at guiding urban growth toward the city's outskirts. It is notable for its clear definition of the urban center, its recognition and integration of squatter settlements, and its strategy to allocate urban land for the middle class. The Metropolitan Office Plan also sought to address the needs of middle- and lower-income populations by promoting a balance between residential areas and employment opportunities. In contemporary Ankara, however, increasing car dependency, fragmented urban infrastructure, and unequal access to public services have led to pronounced spatial and social disparities—particularly between well-connected central neighborhoods and marginalized peripheral zones. As a result, many residents face long daily commutes, limited access to green space, and a lack of local services—challenges that the 15-Minute City approach is specifically designed to overcome (Günay, 2012).

### 3. PERCEPTIONS IN ÇANKAYA AND KEÇİÖREN DISTRICTS ABOUT 15-MINUTE CITY

We conducted so called Walk-Along Interviews (WAI) in two districts of Ankara to have a better insight into local perceptions about accessibility and walkability within these districts. WAI are part of the methodological repertoire of empirical social and geographical research which focus on the spatial and social environment. As a mobile method, they allow to gain valuable insights into experiences, perceptions and impressions of different target groups. With an interviewer and one researcher, capturing the observer's perspective, the method of walk-alongs interviews obtain a variety of impressions to analyse perceived accessibility within the framework of the 15-Minute City (Van Hecke et al., 2016; King & Woodroffe 2017; Amaya et al. 2024). Before doing that, some visits to the districts gave some preliminary perceptions about the Çankaya and Keçiören, two of Ankara's most prominent and contrasting districts, are likely to generate different perceptions and responses to the 15-Minute City concept, shaped by their socio-economic characteristics, urban form, topography, accessibility patterns, and service distribution.

In the rest of the study, some preliminary results are presented shortly.

#### 3.1 Çankaya: Supportive but Selective Perceptions

Çankaya is one of the most central and densely populated districts of Ankara, serving as a key administrative, residential, and cultural hub of the city. Characterized by a diverse urban fabric, the district includes a mix of governmental institutions, educational facilities, residential neighborhoods, and commercial zones. While Çankaya offers relatively better access to public services and infrastructure compared to many peripheral districts, the findings of this study reveal that significant barriers to walkability persist, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the elderly and families with children.

The district's varied topography, including steep slopes and elevation changes, presents considerable challenges for pedestrian mobility. Despite its centrality, many neighborhoods within Çankaya exhibit damaged sidewalks, obstructed walking paths, and insufficient pedestrian infrastructure. These issues are further exacerbated by a lack of accessible public amenities—such as parks, rest areas, and recreational spaces—which limits the appeal and practicality of walking, especially for older residents. Families with children also reported concerns regarding safety and comfort when navigating the urban environment on foot, often citing inadequate integration between pedestrian paths and public transportation.

Overall, while Çankaya remains a vital part of Ankara's urban landscape, the district's walkability is hindered by a combination of physical, infrastructural, and planning-related challenges. Addressing these concerns through inclusive urban design and integrated mobility planning is essential for enhancing the quality of life for its diverse population.

#### The preliminary results for the implementation of 15-min city concept in planning

**Lifestyle Compatibility:** Many residents — particularly those living in central neighborhoods — already enjoy key features of the 15-Minute City, such as pedestrian-friendly environments, local cafés, bookstores, and cultural venues. As such, the model may be viewed as an affirmation of their existing urban lifestyle and values.

**High Awareness and Receptivity:** Given the districts highly educated and often progressive demographic, the group tends to support sustainability-focused, human-centered urban strategies.

**Concerns Around Gentrification and Affordability:** Despite general support, there are reservations that enhancing amenities and public spaces could accelerate gentrification, leading to increased housing costs and reduced affordability for existing residents.

**Expectations for Smart Urban Solutions:** Within a tech-literate population, there is an expectation that implementation will incorporate digital tools such as mobile mobility platforms, real-time public transit updates, and intelligent urban infrastructure.

Emphasis on Green and Cultural Connectivity: Particular attention may be given to improving access to green spaces and cultural amenities within walking distance – especially in older neighborhoods where such features are unevenly distributed or deteriorating.

### 3.2 Keçiören: Mixed and Needs-Based Perceptions

Keçiören is one of the most populous and socially diverse districts, with a predominantly residential and conservative profile. Keçiören is one of Ankara's largest and most vibrant residential districts, home to a diverse community with varied mobility needs. The district's topography includes gentle slopes and some elevation changes, which, together with its evolving pedestrian infrastructure, shape residents' everyday walking experiences. While many neighborhoods in Keçiören offer walkable areas, some aspects of the pedestrian environment present opportunities for enhancement to better accommodate all users.

The certain sections of sidewalks could benefit from maintenance and occasional widening to improve accessibility and comfort. The integration of pedestrian pathways with public transportation is an area where further development may support more seamless mobility, especially for families with children. Additionally, while Keçiören offers a range of public spaces, increasing the availability and accessibility of parks, resting areas, and recreational facilities would further enrich the pedestrian experience.

Despite these areas for growth, there is an interest in sustainable transportation options and expressed openness to improvements such as safer cycling routes and pedestrian-friendly crossings. These insights highlight the potential for thoughtful, community-informed planning initiatives to strengthen walkability and enhance quality of life in Keçiören.

The preliminary results for the implementation of 15-min city concept in planning are as follows:

**Call for Equitable Service Provision:** The 15-Minute City concept is slowly gaining recognition among citizens.

**Skepticism Rooted in Past Experience:** Given a history of underinvestment and top-down planning processes, there may be widespread skepticism about the feasibility of implementing the model effectively.

**Prioritization of Core Infrastructure:** There is a technological innovation center in Keçiören. It helps embracing advanced technological tools. Residents are likely to prioritize tangible improvements in public transport, pedestrian safety, street maintenance, and basic infrastructure.

**Need for Accessible Social and Cultural Facilities:** There may be a pronounced demand for community-oriented spaces that support family life, youth engagement, and religious or cultural activities – spaces that foster everyday social interaction and cohesion.

**Affordability as a Central Concern:** A key expectation is that any new amenities or services introduced as part of the 15-Minute City approach remain financially accessible to all residents, avoiding cost-driven exclusion or displacement.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The study highlights the importance of considering local context and resident perceptions in urban planning, and it calls for a more inclusive approach to designing cities that truly prioritize accessibility for all citizens.

Reintroducing the core principles of the 15-Minute City into Ankara's current urban planning framework presents a valuable opportunity to tackle longstanding urban challenges. Enhancing the function of neighborhood centers as versatile hubs for essential services can help reduce travel distances and stimulate local economic development. Strengthening infrastructure for active transportation – such as pedestrian pathways and cycling routes – and integrating these with public transit systems aligns with both the foundational ideas of the Jansen

Plan and today's sustainability imperatives. Furthermore, leveraging digital technologies, including GIS-based accessibility assessments and participatory planning platforms, can support more responsive, data-informed decision-making that addresses neighborhood-specific needs.

The 15-Minute City also offers timely solutions for Ankara's climate adaptation and post-pandemic recovery efforts. By fostering compact, inclusive, and mixed-use urban forms, the model can help lower carbon emissions, improve public health outcomes, and reinforce social cohesion. In this context, it serves not only to rectify previous shortcomings in urban development but also as a strategic framework in alignment with global priorities such as the Smart and Green Transition and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

At the district level, applying a context-sensitive lens is essential. Planning narratives must reflect the distinct needs, perceptions, and lived realities of each district.

In sum, the 15-Minute City should not be viewed as a novel planning doctrine for Ankara but rather as a contemporary reinterpretation of the city's historical planning aspirations. Grounding this concept in the values of proximity, accessibility, and resilience offers a promising path toward a more just, sustainable, and livable future for Türkiye's capital city.

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