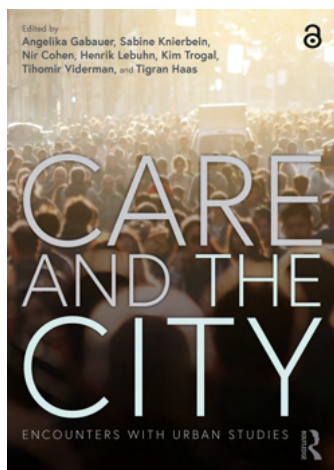


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# Book Reviews

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**Angelika Gabauer, Sabine Knierbein, Nir Cohen, Henrik Lebuhn, Kim Trogal, Tihomir Viderman and Tigran Haas (eds.) 2022: *Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies*. New York: Routledge**



Within urban sociology, the juxtaposition of diverse strangers living in close proximity with each other has always been viewed as a defining characteristic of urban life. The resultant weakening of mutuality, depth and emotional charge in urban encounters has fed visions of the city as a space of indifference, while recent analyses of austerity urbanism and its devastating effects for institutional carescapes in the city have highlighted a conflation of the urban with neglect. However, an emerging body of work on urban care complicates this image, as exemplified by *Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies*, edited by Angelika Gabauer, Sabine Knierbein, Nir Cohen, Henrik Lebuhn, Kim Trogal, Tihomir Viderman and Tigran Haas.

The volume brings together urban scholars to explore conceptual links and empirical connections between care and the city, and to provide an urban(ized) understanding of care. Featuring contributions by sociologists, geographers, architects and urban planners, among others, the book grapples with different manifestations of care at various scales and in numerous contexts. It also offers an extensive overview of what can emerge from mutually formative encounters between urban studies and contemporary care debates. The book is divided into 21 chapters organized in four sections: ‘Conceptualizing Care: Encounters Critique, and Commons’; ‘Social Inequalities, Uneven Space, and Care’; ‘Everyday Struggles and Contestations around Care’; and ‘New Care Arrangements and Civic Innovation’. Each section begins with an introduction by the editorial collective which ties the different focus areas of the individual contributions into the four overarching themes. Taken together, these introductory essays also represent an attempt to systematically integrate the various approaches to care that exist within urban studies. In these essays, the editorial collective argues that care should become an important focus of urban research, and also a conceptual lens that allows for a better understanding of the urbanizing world. Moreover, the editors suggest that it could be taken up as a moral principle to drive any (productive and ethical) engagement with the urban and its transformations.

An empirical focus on care guides most of the contributions to the volume. These range from analyses of the certification of LGBT-friendly eldercare in the Netherlands (Roos Pijpers), and platformization of private care provision in Germany (Eva Mos), to self-care outdoor practices performed by people living with dementia in Canada (Samantha Biglieri), and migrant/refugee solidarity initiatives emerging in Greece (Isabel Gutiérrez Sánchez).

Two contributions in particular scrutinize the potential for using the care perspective as an analytical framework in urban research. In her chapter on gendered urban safety in Argentina, Anna Bednarczyk shows how the notion of sisterhood-based care can help us better understand how girls and women in Argentinian cities keep each other safe—and in so doing, reclaim their right to the city by overcoming restrictions on access to urban space related to gender-based violence. Similarly in the chapter ‘Heritage as a matter of care, and conservation as caring for the matter’, Loes Veldpaus and Hanna Szemző demonstrate how using care as a lens changes the way in which we conceptualize urban phenomena. Their discussion about framing conservation as a practice of care shows how this lens opens up new perspectives that are not being taken into account by other theorizations. For example, they propose a relational quality of conservation, understood on the one hand as the relationship between people and the built heritage, and on the other as being formative of relations between people through heritage: that is, relations established between those who lived in the past and their contemporaneous peers via the maintenance (or otherwise) of materializations of particular historical legacies.

The chapter ‘Care from the beginning: Birthing collective origins, interdependent cities, and new community economies’ by Katharine McKinnon, Stephen Healy and Kelly Dombroski provides a conceptual foundation for the idea of urban studies as a moral project informed by the ethics of care. In arguing for a necessary turn from individualistic views on (urban) societies, it introduces Joan Tronto’s notion of *homines curans* (caring people), which encapsulates a view of social (urban) ontology that presupposes vulnerability, interdependency and mutual responsibility as fundamental features of social relations. Standing in opposition to the prevalent figure of *homo economicus*, *homines curans* foregrounds dependency (rather than self-interest and self-sufficiency) as the default human condition. It positions care as an ontological *a priori* and suggests that care ought to be, and in fact is, an organizing principle of urban life.

How this might be translated into a ‘caring’ urban research practice is illustrated by the chapter ‘Careful rearrangements: Experiments with neglected “things” in architecture’ by Micol Rispoli. In this contribution, she demonstrates how embracing care as an organizing principle has influenced and transformed her architectural design practice into a continuous willingness to be affected by other ways of being and knowing—and thus becoming vulnerable—as well as a commitment to be moved by what matters for others—and thus to share the responsibility for these matters. The chapter ‘Critical reflections on care’ is also worth highlighting. In this theoretical contribution, Ali Madanipour provides an analytically inspiring definition of care. In proposing that care be understood as a relationship between need and ability (to meet that need), he brings a fresh perspective to the already existing conceptualizations of care as a kind of labour, relationship or ethical practice.

Overall, the volume is to be commended for its breadth of themes and topics that seek to tie contemporary debates around care with issues discussed in urban studies. What could be considered a missed opportunity is the fact that no cohesive conceptualization of urban care emerges from the collection. The editorial collective's argument that the distinctly urban character of care consists in its spatiality is not entirely convincing. Moreover, the editors' commitment to providing an urban(ized) understanding of care does not seem to be shared by the contributing authors, given that the majority of their considerations are informed by Bernice Fisher's and Joan Tronto's famous universalistic conceptualization, which views care as a 'species activity' and includes within it everything that we do to maintain our world. The introductory essays hint at what, in my opinion, might be regarded as an urban manifestation of care—that is, caring encounters between strangers in the city—but this line of thought is not developed further. Thus, in my opinion, *Care and the City* leaves the question of what is 'urban' about 'urban care' open.

This leads to another minor critique, which is that the volume reads, at times, as if consisting of two parallel narratives—one provided by the editorial collective's essays, and the other emerging from the individual contributions—which do not always speak to one another. Consequently, the volume works better as an illustration of different ways of understanding conceptual links and empirical connections between care and the city than as an outline of a systematic approach to care in urban studies. Nonetheless, *Care and the City* is highly recommended to everyone who shares the editors' conviction that this goal is worth pursuing, as it opens up multiple interesting avenues for the realization of this important endeavour.

**Natalia Martini**, Jagiellonian University in Krakow