

Caring—with Cities

Project Report

CARING—WITH CITIES: ENACTING MORE CARE-FULL URBAN APPROACHES WITH COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENTS AND POLICY-MAKERS

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<https://caringwith.city>

Caring—with

Caring—with rather than —about or —for moves beyond understandings of care as a provision from institutions to individuals, or from individual to individual, which positions the cared—for as passive recipients.

Caring—with names a different and more holistic way of envisaging care as “an ongoing system of caring acts in which we’re sometimes on an extreme end of the giving–receiving scale, and sometimes in the middle” (Tronto, 2015, p. 16).

Achieving a caring city needs to emerge and be sustained through care-full interfaces between city dwellers and policy-makers. The project Caring—with Cities set out to understand how care is embedded into community-led and policy-led urban development, exploring the interface between the two and the potential for designing caring—with into future urban policy at a systemic level.

We developed a framework to explore caring—with in urban practice and policy.

This was achieved through an interdisciplinary partnership between six scholars from environmental psychology, human geography, architecture, urban design, planning, public participation, and engineering.

We applied the caring—with cities framework to reveal how care is implemented in urban practice and policy. The case study examples we examined concerned the articulation of caring—with in relation to environmental issues, societal wellbeing, material heritage, and the housing crisis and showed that care can manifest in a multitude of ways, across different scales.

This work was guided by the following questions:

1. How is ‘care’ conceptualised and operationalised by policies and community-led practices in the cities? How does it inform visions and practices towards a ‘good city’?
2. What are the individual and collective psychological processes involved in generating a sense of care towards urban environments?
3. What forms of caring—with practices, across policymakers and community-led initiatives, successfully recognise, value, support and amplify care within cities?
4. How can care be embedded and designed in cities’ infrastructures? How could we design more holistic strategies to bring care into the heart of urban decision making?

Tronto, J. C. (2015). *Who Cares?: How to Reshape a Democratic Politics*. Cornell Selects.

Case Studies

Working with participant-researchers across three main case studies embedded in different urban policy contexts across England, we used participatory mapping, in-depth interviews and facilitated group conversations with policy officers and members of community organisations, to understand opportunities for caring—with, where these dynamics are already present, and to suggest directions for policy design.

TRANQUIL CITY

Tranquil City is a collective of environmental, built-environment, psychological and data-science practitioners and researchers with the common aim of using their knowledge for human and environmental benefit. Tranquil City's mission is to drive positive behaviour change that enables people to lead healthier and more balanced lives in cities.

For the purpose of Caring—with Cities project, our research was focused on Tranquil City's work in Lewisham, London. This area of Tranquil City's work included collaborations with Lewisham City Council, local schools, and community-led green space action groups, leading to the co-creation of the Tranquil Pavements Map, a platform for people to share and discover tranquility within London. Tranquil Pavements map was the main objective and outcome of the Tranquil City's work in Lewisham and was one of 43 experiments funded and supported by OrganiCity between 2016 – 2018.

LANCASTER CIVIC VISION

The Lancaster Civic Vision case study builds on the previous collaboration between the Lancaster City Council, Lancaster County Council, and the University of Lancaster (LICA). Previous engagements included participants exploring areas of urban matters, policy, and design using participation methods. The Caring with cities project brought about the opportunity to engage community-led organisations in conversations with the Community Conversations team within Lancaster City Council (LCC). Lancaster Civic Vision (LCV) is part of the Community Groups aiming to promote and encourage initiatives—relating to quality of life, architecture and planning, heritage, and economic development and regeneration. LVC forms a bottom-up approach, supporting initiatives in the area administered by LCC. Lancaster Civic Vision have positioned themselves as a community resource to assist and nudge LCC with campaigns on urban matters.

For the purpose of the Caring—with Cities project, our research focussed on the mechanisms through which the organisation attempts to influence urban planning and policy.

PORTLAND WORKS

Portland Works is a grade II* listed integrated metal works on the outskirts of Sheffield city centre, built in 1879. It was the birthplace of stainless steel cutlery manufacturing, making it one of the outstanding examples of Sheffield's industrial heritage. Today it is home to a mix of artists, musicians, small scale craftspeople as well as metalworkers, continuing a tradition of innovative manufacture. In 2009 an application to turn it into studio flats placed Portland Works' tenants under threat. In 2013 Portland Works was successfully purchased by the community, through a share issue. It is now owned by over 500 community shareholders and governed through an elected board of up to 12 directors.

For the purpose of the Caring—with Cities project, our research focused on its operations following the purchase of the building by the community.

AUAR (AUTOMATED ARCHITECTURE)

The case studies opposite) were complemented by a mapping activity with AUAR. AUAR uses modular building systems and robotics to provide affordable, sustainable housing solutions. AUAR is a spin-out company from AUAR Labs at the Bartlett School of Architecture, London.

For the purpose of the Caring—with Cities project, our research focused on spaces, tools and processes for experimentation within community projects in Bristol and the London borough of Hackney.

Key Insights

The qualitative analysis of the participatory mapping of relations, interviews and group conversations generated the following key themes: Caring values and relations; Holistic approaches and interfacing; Analogic and digital caring—with practices; and Caring—with over time.

CARING VALUES AND RELATIONS

Multiple Visions: Local authority officers and community organizations articulate visions of a caring city that incorporate different elements and values; in some cases, the city as a whole is conceptualised as a receiver of care, in others care involves specific groups and locales.

Relations: Caring—with practices are based on the creation, recognition and maintenance of webs of relations between multiple communities and public institutions. Collaborative relational mapping was a constructive way of discussing and revealing these caring systems across different scales. The way caring—with practices have been defined ranges from dynamics between actors (policy and community) to changing behaviours; from improving connections, health, inclusivity, economics and resources, to transforming knowledge and perspectives as well as physical environments.

HOLISTIC APPROACHES AND INTERFACING

Holistic Approaches: Most community-led organisations that implement care-full practices tend to understand cities and their work within them in a holistic manner. This is sometimes in contrast to siloed policy areas and local authorities' ways of working.

Siloed Thinking is recognised during interviews as a barrier to caring in the city both by community-led organisations and by officers within local authorities.

Becoming Interfaces: For this reason, community-led organisations may act as interfaces between local governments - and between multiple departments within a local authority - and the wider community, on issues such as planning, public awareness raising and education, especially around local knowledges.

ANALOGIC AND DIGITAL CARING-WITH PRACTICES

Caring—with practices range from managing community assets to raising awareness and monitoring characteristics of urban open spaces, to participating in planning processes. Whilst digital tools appear instrumental to the development of many of such practices, in-person practices also play a key role.

Communication: All participants remark on the importance of a range of digital tools and social media platforms for care-full engagement with publics, albeit with various degrees of interactivity and capacity for democratic participation in decision-making. Social media and digital communication tools (such as Zoom), important in a pre-pandemic context, have become crucial during the pandemic for broadening engagement.

Community Reach and Building: Participants across the case studies comment that digital mailing lists and social media followers/users gave clout to issues they were championing/lobbying for. These digital communications are seen (both by community organisations and council officers) to reach audiences that the council could not normally reach.

Bespoke Digital Tools: The use of bespoke apps is discussed in relation to care within multiple case studies. Bespoke platforms are often developed by intermediary organisations (e.g. Universities and SME's) and sometimes also by local authorities directly, to enable conversations to take place between communities and local authorities. For example, one of the case studies developed an experimental interface between communities and a local authority, supporting an interconnected understanding of environmental issues.

In-person Interaction: Some participants speak explicitly of the importance of face-to-face communication and listening when dealing with communities with a strength of feeling against a particular project.

CARING—WITH OVER TIME

Long-Term Perspective: Both policy officers and members of community organisations remarked on the importance of managing boundaries and expectations of care over time. Caring—with practices were frequently described as being long-term projects, requiring significant personal commitments. Interviewees from community-led organisations and within policy making roles described several strategies to make these practices more sustainable, for example by opening-up and closing off; stepping-in during key moments; and striking a balance.

Legitimacy of Community-Based Expertise: In some instances, the outsourcing to community groups can transform – with time – into a more dialogic process that changes and challenges formal externalisation and consultancy roles. Community organisations can assume a role beyond that of stakeholders and can gain legitimacy to be commissioned for specific consultancy services as experts.

Experimentation: Caring—with is, in some instances, seen as a process of open-ended experimentation with planning and implementing a more care-full city: a set of practices that test and iterate fluidly, garnering new knowledges and developing community expertise.



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