

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/165477/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Davis, Juliet 2023. Book review: Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies. *Urban Studies* 60 (2) , pp. 398-400. 10.1177/00420980221144200

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980221144200>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



Angelika Gabauer, Sabine Knierbein, Nir Cohen, Henrik Lebuhn, Kim Trogal, Tihomir Viderman, and Tigran Haas (eds), *Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies*. New York and London: Routledge, 2022; 235 pp.: ISBN: 978-1-78938-132-0, £65.00 (hbk)

Key words: built environment, governance, inequalities, urbanisation

Care and the City is a powerful edited collection which sets out to establish and illustrate the approaches needed to foreground, study and conceptualise care practices, issues and crises in contemporary cities. In assembling it, the editors have boldly embraced the significant challenge of linking existing wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary debates on the nature and ethical dimensions of care together with long-standing debates in Urban Studies on the ethical and political significance of patterns and processes of urbanisation. Throughout, key areas of focus are on how to identify and analyse geographies of care in cities and how to employ care ethics to interpret such topics as the urbanisations of precarity, inequality and vulnerability which have often been 'dominated by conceptual frameworks of rights and justice' (p. 6).

The book represents a timely contribution to Urban Studies given that the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn fresh attention to uneven patterns of vulnerability in cities. Emerging since 2020 has been a growing awareness of how patterns of risk of contracting and experiencing adverse impacts of COVID-19 align with patterns of pre-existing social disparity worldwide. The pandemic has of course also brought to light the vital role of care practices and relations of diverse kinds in the processes of adaptation that cities and societies have had to undergo in endeavouring to cope, continue and, ultimately, contain it, and hence to the critical role of care more widely in societal resilience.

Care and the City engages with a wider set of care contexts and issues than those emergent during the pandemic, however. It is an ambitious attempt to recognise and situate the complex and multiple ways in which care between people takes place in contemporary cities, and by which caring comes to characterise the making and maintenance of specific places. It reveals the contingency of places and spaces of care in spatial and material terms on broad economic and policy contexts, including those leading to welfare state retrenchment and the rise of privatised forms of care in Western market economies. In doing so, it introduces in parallel to reflections on the nature of care, the concepts of 'uncare' and 'carelessness', seen as evident in various aspects of the contemporary crisis care and ecological crisis, and often as products of liberal political thought (pp. 15-16). Throughout, it embraces the complexity of care as a disposition as well as a practice, characterising political struggle on behalf of those disadvantaged within particular care relations or excluded from the care required to address conditions of vulnerability. As the editors write in the introductory chapter, care can be seen as an 'analytical scope for understanding the urbanizing world' and also, in a more positive, hopeful sense, 'as a potential for altering social conditions' and forging better social and material futures (p. 7).

The editors of the book are a group of academics from different universities and disciplinary backgrounds encompassing political science, urban geography, design and urban/ regional studies. It is clear that the success of the book in integrating different debates from moral and political philosophy to urban design and urban geography has stemmed from the strength of this collaboration.

The book is structured in four thematic parts. Reflecting the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the book's production, all introductory chapters are co-authored by at least two editors from different disciplines. Different ways of thinking about care are offered across the chapters, with some drawing on established definitions such as Joan's Tronto's (1993) well-

established ethic of care framework and others linking care to other concepts such as solidarity and mutual support. A rich variety of urban environments and places form the focus of case studies in the empirical chapters – the reader is transported from Athens to Argentina, from Trieste to Toronto, and to many other cities besides. Similarly, the chapters explore care/ uncare in relation to many different needs, vulnerabilities, forms of inequality, social relations and materialities. The reader is left in no doubt of the broad scope of care and of the relevance of care to all citizens, while also being made aware of the frequent ambivalence and variable quality of care in practice.

The first part of the book deals with concepts of care, positioning care and uncare in urban debates, framing the intersections of contemporary crises as crises of ‘carelessness’, offering an historical perspective on the emergence of different places of care through urban, political and economic history, and offering new ways of thinking about cities as communities of care.

The second part of the book considers relationships between care, social inequalities and uneven development. Inequalities of power and responsibility have, of course, frequently been observed in the context of specific care relations. Within the material fabrics of cities and regions, inequalities related to care can also be recognised, however. These are revealed through analyses of the different levels of access that different citizens have to care-focused services, of differing levels of safety experienced by different communities in public space, and of the complex social dynamics of care in retirement communities.

The third part focuses on various practices of struggle and contestation aimed at enhancing the visibility of care issues/ needs or improving access to services and resources. Such practices are shown to include efforts to imagine alternatives to slum redevelopment that, rather than breaking existing social networks, support livelihoods and existing infrastructures of care, and

innovative architectural education practices that draw design students' attention to different ways of seeing and experiencing place.

The fourth and final part explores the surfacing of 'new arrangements' of care resulting from social and political processes including the restructuring of the welfare state and the transformation of traditional family structures. The contemporary care crisis is seen as an outcome of these processes, and yet, amid crisis, it is clear that new forms of 'civic innovation,' including new or previously under-recognised ways of organising care work and/or providing care, can be identified. Each chapter offers an example of innovation related to care in a particular setting, including the enhancement of practices of care for vulnerable citizens in a library, community-building work through the conservation of dilapidated heritage buildings, the formation of social spaces in a refugee camp and the provision of digital care within the home.

My only regret, therefore, at the end of this intriguing journey with all its richness and insights, is a lack of conclusions. Turning over the final page of Chapter 21, I wanted to return to definitions and questions that had been opened up at the start of the book – around the relationship between care and of 'uncare', around the nature of emergent geographies of care. I wanted to know what the authors thought had emerged from the varied chapters and how, between them, understandings of care at different scales may have been advanced. But even without this, it is clear that *Care and the City* is an important, novel contribution to knowledge in Urban Studies, creating a valuable reference for scholars from many different disciplines and providing a clear conceptual framework to make use of and develop in ongoing research on the unfolding realities and politics of care and also on its potential to transform cities for the good.

Professor Juliet Davis

Cardiff University

davisjp@cardiff.ac.uk

References:

Tronto, J (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. New York and London:
Routledge.