

GOLD VII Multimedia Journal: Economies of Equality and Care

Care as aspiration and inspiration

Local and regional governments are promoting caring cities and territories. This document draws from more than 50 contributions developed by city governments, civil society groups and research organizations for the GOLD VII Multimedia Journal. It discusses what care means for the municipalist movement, why we need caring cities and territories for more just, democratic and sustainable societies, and how to advance care as an aspiration and inspiration.

A municipalist movement driven by care

"We care" – that is the commitment of UCLG's Pact for the Future, which centers on people, planet and government. "We care" is a testament to how the municipalist movement has been at the forefront of local transformations that address current and future global challenges. "We care" is a powerful statement, which both builds on the long-standing feminist effort to center the care agenda, while also encouraging a renewed lens to reclaim the role of public action in the multiple dimensions that shape the reproduction of life. This GOLD VII Multimedia Journal takes the "We care" commitment forward, by exploring further and in collaboration with local actors how to advance **Economies of Equality and Care**.

In this first stage of the GOLD VII research process, we have explored together with diverse actors and initiatives how to understand **care as an aspiration and inspiration** in ways that recognize diverse lived experiences. Each of the contributions to this journey provides a unique entry point to this question, from thematic reflections about participatory budgeting, universal healthcare, culture, time use and feminist agendas, to grounded experiences from cities and regions all over the world. In this summary document, we share some of the key lessons emerging from these contributions, reflecting on why we need caring cities and territories, and drawing some principles about ways forward to the realization of this aspiration, as promoted by those governments that are closer to people and territories.

What is care?

"Care" is a polysemic concept, with multiple related meanings that can change according to communities, place, and time. Activists and feminist academics have used the idea of care to highlight the centrality of the often invisibilized and unpaid work that sustain the reproduction of life, which has been historically carried out by women. For the municipalist movement, care is a central concept to highlight the role that proximity governments have in supporting and enabling the health and wellbeing of people, particularly by collectively recognizing, redistributing and reducing the burden of care work, and highlighting the role of the public sector in such an endeavor. Care, as a relational and reciprocal act, is about promoting reparative measures both to secure the wellbeing of those groups that have been systematically and historically marginalized or discriminated against, and towards those who have historically carried the burden of care work.

In this sense, for local and regional governments, care is not a 'sectorial' agenda related exclusively to healthcare or caregivers support, but rather an approach that cuts across municipal competencies and actions. It is a *lens* that invites us to move from a profit- and consumption-led economy to one that centers on social needs and aspirations, and that puts at the center the reparative duty of the public sector towards groups and people that lie at the intersection of inequalities and exclusion.

For more reflections on care as a pathway to equality for local and regional governments, see GOLD VI, Chapter 5: Caring.

Key Messages

Why do we need cities that care?

Cities and territories that care enable transformation and reparatory processes that put people and the planet at the center, moving beyond purely market logics to prioritize instead collective wellbeing and shared prosperity. Local and regional governments that promote caring cities and territories are also enabling more just and equal, more democratic and more sustainable societies:

Cities that care are more just and equal

In aiming to ensure the wellbeing of all populations, tackling inequalities is a key priority in caring cities and territories. They make societies more just and equal by:

- **Reaching people who have disproportionately borne the brunt of social and economic inequalities or have historically been discriminated against.** There are examples of local initiatives that have adapted physical and social infrastructure to respond to the needs of different groups: from childhood-friendly construction to increase traffic safety in Xianning, to the implementation of a domiciliary care system for the elderly in the Dominican Republic. Innovative programs spearheaded by local and regional governments strengthen economic opportunities, as demonstrated by Sao Paulo's *Tô Legal* initiative for the registration of informal traders, Gwangju's Care Service Delivery System reaching out to those in need of care, or the PAZOS strategy in Palmira to address economic empowerment as a key form of violence prevention. Importantly, one of the most fundamental principles of a caring society is one that recognizes, alleviates and redistributes the burden of care that has historically fallen on women (most notably women of colour and migrant women). Bogotá's "care blocks" do not just provide services for women that are caregivers and those who receive care, but also promote care work by men.

- **Reaching territories that are underserved or have historically been left out of the reach of public efforts.** By intervening vulnerable areas, caring cities and territories address the spatial dimension of inequalities and exclusion and transform the lived experiences of residents directly in their neighbourhoods. Examples include mobile clinics and telemedicine, as well as the *Saúde nos Bairros* program in Salvador, to provide medical care directly to communities. In Recife, community peace centers provide sports facilities, classrooms, libraries and parks in different neighbourhoods. In Kenya, the Tharaka Nithi initiative offers childcare for women traders inside the markets.

- **Adapting systems to the diverse needs of their populations so that public efforts are not just accessible but also adequate and effective.** This begins with ensuring universal access to services, notably universal health coverage, but also going one step further to ensure the services provided respond effectively to the needs of different groups. In Krasnoyarsk, parks use sensory mechanisms to support the visually impaired navigate spaces. Innovations like Recoleta's "popular pharmacies" and Plymouth Energy Community work with communities to offer more affordable and accessible public services. Some cities incorporate lessons learned from care programs into broader policies and strategies, like Rotterdam's integration of talent building and health initiatives into school curriculums, or Gwangju's health monitoring to ensure adequate and timely healthcare coverage for all.

Cities that care are more democratic

Cities that care also ensure that the needs and aspirations of diverse populations are met through democratic and decentralized forms of decision-making. They make societies more democratic by:

- **Bringing decision-making close to those who have been systematically excluded** and therefore supporting processes of agency-building across diverse populations. Examples of this are the extensive collection of experiences of participatory budgeting initiatives that enable the creation of caring communities and put care "at work". The analysis of participatory budgeting as an enabler of care-based local development demonstrates that caring cities and territories are more effective when bringing decisions closer to local communities, their lived experiences and their immediate environments. Examples such as Terrassa's Water Observatory in Spain are also about fostering local decision making and increasing accountability. Likewise, the Rural Women's Forum in Gaza bridges academics with pioneering women on the ground, fostering the production of scalable and applicable community-based knowledge and making them part of decision-making.

- **Expanding the knowledge base from where decisions are made, recognizing diverse perspectives and visions,** especially from those at the forefront of exclusion. The acknowledgment and recognition by local and regional governments of community-led data is an essential component of caring cities and territories, highlighting the different lived experiences within knowledge systems and embracing the subjective dimension of care. Examples of efforts in this direction include the incorporation of Geospatial Based Persons with Disabilities Card and Services in Bontang.

In Australia, embracing the notion of “Caring for Country” that Aboriginal people undertake as a cultural obligation implies engaging with a complex web of Aboriginal shared authority, management and knowledge. Likewise, recognizing and supporting the extensive networks of women-led cooperative kitchens that collectivize care in several cities across Latin America invites governments to challenge current understandings of service provision.

- **Fostering mutual trust and solidarity to secure the right to participate in public life.** By distributing care work, cities and territories that care promote gender equality, which is central for democracy. Transparency and accountability are key ingredients for expanding the notion of care, which in turn strengthens trust. Then, centering care is crucial for peacebuilding, by fostering democratic institutions and practices. When a dignified infrastructure like the *Centro Colibrí* in Iztapalapa’s Utopias gives space for the non-judgmental care of people with problems of drug abuse in vulnerable neighbourhoods, it opens a window of trust towards institutions even for those who feel they have been systematically mistreated by the public sector. A perspective of care also includes cultural practices that foster intergenerational solidarity and a sense of responsibility towards future generations. Public services that embrace caring principles, as many of the contributions expand, thus allow a sense of belonging, encouraging participation and, in turn, the exercise of citizenship and democracy.

Cities that care are more sustainable

The most effective caring approaches foster environmental sustainability, as they recognize and act upon the interconnection between people’s wellbeing and their relationship with the environment. Caring approaches invite us to rethink how we take care of people and the planet. They make societies more sustainable by:

- **Redefining and integrating the relationship between people and nature.** Infrastructures of care can be guided by principles of stewardship like care for nature or a better synchronization with natural regeneration processes by re-thinking the use of time. Caring cities and territories mainstream these principles across sectors, as reflected in the centrality of green public spaces in the development of the Istanbul Master Plan, and the use re-municipalization of services to employ policy tools like leasing farmland at reduced rates that incentivize all actors to follow sustainable methods, as done by Eau de Paris.
- **Enabling a better adaptation to shocks by reducing the uneven distribution of risks,** notably through enhancing the capacity of those who are at the forefront of climate disasters and other crises. There are several forms in which local

action cares for people and the planet, and that promote more climate-resilient health systems and public services. In Gaza, the Urban & Peri-urban Agriculture Platform advocates for social justice in urban agriculture policies, and in Cairo the collaboration with the Zabaleen community to deprivatize waste services contributed to a more circular economy.

- **Mitigating the impact of shocks, with a particular focus on securing a healthy planet for future generations.** From tree planting in Freetown to ultra-low-emission zones in London, cities can adopt mechanisms to increase resilience, improve health, and mitigate their impact on environmental degradation. Establishing participatory budgeting processes that link environmental with social priorities and cultural practices that foster care for the planet also strengthen and sustain a collective sense of duty to protect the environment for the future.

As outlined above, the experiences and reflections collected through the GOLD VII Multimedia Journal demonstrate the capacity of local and regional governments to care for people, democracy, and the planet to ensure the wellbeing of society.

Recommendations

The commitment that local and regional governments have expressed to care represents a crucial opportunity to undertake bold steps towards securing the wellbeing of all people. Ensuring that this political will and leadership results in true change requires moving **from practices towards infrastructures**, so that principles of care are mainstreamed and systematically shape decisions across sectors and thematic priorities. In doing so, caring cities and territories respond to the need to renew the social contract by **restoring the role of the “public”**, prioritizing innovative public service provision, or what the municipalist movement has termed ‘New Essentials’. It is also about reinvigorating the protection and shared management of the commons.

Their experiences point to some key avenues to advance care as an aspiration and inspiration:

- **Mainstream care as a cross-cutting lens and embrace the diversity of policy tools to develop holistic approaches to it.** This includes breaking silos within the different functions of local and regional governments, by integrating care into land use planning and zoning; ensuring universal health coverage and access to services; applying feminist and care lenses to budgetary processes to allocate sufficient investment in care infrastructures; investing in peacebuilding processes that enhance safety and social cohesion; and employing time policies to address economic inequalities. Holistic approaches also require the establishment of effective coordination mechanisms across sectors and actors.
- **Identify, support and empower caregivers and care structures** as a mechanism to redistribute the burden of care and institutionalize infrastructures of care. Providing caregivers (including formal and informal workers, those undertaking unpaid care work, as well as local and regional governments staff themselves) with benefits and compensations is an

important element, but it should be accompanied by supporting their educational, economic, and social resilience, and the expansion of care networks so that other actors in society undertake care responsibilities.

- **Use of data and technology:** Evidence-based decisions require data gathering that reflects the different interactions of diverse groups of people with public services, allowing for adequate responses. Similarly, using adequate technology that is embraced by local communities can facilitate reaching previously excluded populations and territories. Partnerships with civil society, academic and research actors offer great potential to improve service delivery.
- **Meaningful engagement from stakeholders & deliberative democracy:** from participatory budgeting processes to citizen assemblies and trainings for both citizens and public officials in decision-making, local and regional governments can ensure that citizen engagement is not a one-off or tokenistic initiative but rather it becomes a central step in the policy-making process.

List of Stage 1 contributions

Guangzhou Award, coordinated by Nicholas You. *Towards Caring Cities + videos of 16 best practices.*

Yves Cabannes (University College London). *Local democratic innovations expanding the notion of care: Participatory Budgeting as an enabler of care-based local development.*

Carlos José Celis, Aratrika Debnath and Amogh Arakali, directed by Michael Cohen (Observatory on Latin America - The New School). *Embedding Care in Urban Institutional Response during Crises.*

Bethia Pearson, Lavinia Steinfors, Jerry van den Berge and Andrew Cumbers (University of Glasgow and Transnational Institute). *Care, public services and the importance of integrated local public ownership.*

Marta Junqué and Marc Martorell (Time Use Initiative). *Using the time factor to improve cities well-being and caring societies.*

Jordi Baltà and the UCLG Culture Committee. *How cultural rights can enable practices of care.*

Ana Barrero and Tica Font (AIPAZ). *Care-based public policies and services for peacebuilding.*

Barbara Holtmann and Emma de Villiers (Fixed Africa). *Urban Safety Monitor: Knowledge Systems that Care.*

United Cities and Local Governments. *Six feminist perspectives on Care, Community, and Democracy.*

Magda Robalo and Pamela Cipriano (UHC2030). *Caring cities: Calling local leaders to the forefront of universal health coverage progress.*

Romina Rodela (Södertörn University) and Miriam Williams (Macquarie University). *Care-full City Planning: insights across contexts.*

Maite Pavón (Consorci de Salut i Social de Catalunya). *Model of domiciliary care for elderly people in a situation of dependency in the Dominican Republic.*

Habitat International Coalition (HIC). *Learning from feminist approaches to habitat: The role of care systems in addressing social and territorial inequality.*

About this Summary Document

This document is part of the **GOLD VII Multimedia Journal**. Its aim is to summarize the main messages and content of stage 1 of GOLD VII, "Care as aspiration and inspiration". It has been prepared by Camila Cociña, Paula Sevilla Núñez and Alexandre Apsan Frediani, researchers from the Housing Justice team at the International Institute for Environment and Development, IIED, with the support of the UCLG Research team, Anna Calvete Moreno and Matteo Fabris.