
Dialogues on caring cities. Spaces, infrastructures and territories

Diálogos sobre ciudades cuidadoras: espacios, infraestructuras y territorios

Diálogos sobre cidades que cuidam. Espaços, infraestruturas e territórios

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Abstract

This article analyzes a series of thematic productions resulting from the collaboration between CLACSO, through its Working Group on Bodies, Territories, and Feminisms, and the Postgraduate Program in Geography at UESB, as well as members of the Global Platform for the Right to the City, researchers from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada), the National University of the Northeast of Argentina, the Autonomous University of Sciences and Arts (Chiapas, Mexico), and the Autonomous Metropolitan University (Iztapalapa, Mexico), among others. The central focus of the analysis was the dialogues on caring cities: spaces, infrastructures, and territories. The objective of this dossier is to demonstrate how contemporary society addresses the problem of access to the right to the city and to care within the urban-rural continuum as a long-term urban condition.

Keywords: Urban space, right to the city, care.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza una serie de producciones temáticas fruto de la colaboración entre CLACSO, a través del Grupo de Trabajo sobre Cuerpos, Territorios y Feminismos, y el Programa de Posgrado en Geografía de la UESB, así como miembros de la Plataforma Global por el Derecho a la Ciudad, investigadores de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, la Universidad Autónoma de México, la Universidad de Carleton (Ottawa, Canadá), la Universidad Nacional del Noreste de Argentina, la Universidad Autónoma de Ciencias y Artes (Chiapas, México) y la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Iztapalapa, México), entre otras. El eje central del análisis fueron los diálogos sobre ciudades que cuidan: espacios, infraestructuras y territorios. El objetivo de este dossier es demostrar cómo la sociedad contemporánea afronta el problema del acceso al derecho a la ciudad y al cuidado en el continuo del espacio urbano-rural como una condición urbana a largo plazo.

Palabras clave: Espacio urbano, derecho a la ciudad, cuidado.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa uma série de produções temáticas resultantes da colaboração entre o CLACSO, por meio de seu Grupo de Trabalho sobre Corpos, Territórios e Feminismos, e o Programa de Pós-Graduação em Geografia da UESB, bem como membros da Plataforma Global pelo Direito à Cidade, pesquisadores da Universidade Autônoma de Barcelona, da Universidade Nacional Autônoma do México, da Universidade Carleton (Ottawa, Canadá), da Universidade Nacional do Nordeste da Argentina, da Universidade Autônoma de Ciências e Artes (Chiapas, México) e da Universidade Autônoma Metropolitana (Iztapalapa, México), dentre outras. O foco central da análise foram os diálogos sobre cidades que cuidam: espaços, infraestruturas e territórios. O objetivo deste dossiê é demonstrar como a sociedade contemporânea aborda o problema do acesso ao direito à cidade e ao cuidado dentro do contínuo urbano-rural como uma condição urbana de longo prazo.

Palavras-chave: Espaço urbano, direito a cidade, cuidado.

Introdução

The notion of care represents a polysemous and interdisciplinary concept. In this sense, feminist literature uses it as an analytical category that has the capacity to reveal important dimensions of women's lives, while also capturing more general properties about the social organization of collective well-being needs. "Care consists of the daily management and maintenance of people's lives, health, and well-being. It is essential for the existence of life and its sustainability, as well as for social reproduction, and in this sense; it is not at all marginal. All human beings need care

throughout their lives, and therefore, care also has a social dimension, since it is an indispensable condition for the very existence and continuity of society” (Comas, 2017, p. 61). It therefore encompasses taking charge of material care – which implies work –, economic care – which implies an economic cost – and psychological care – which implies an affective, emotional and sentimental bond – (Aguirre et al. 2015, p. 10).

However, feminist theories of care do not necessarily consider its territorial dimension. From this perspective, care, as a set of actions aimed at sustaining life, must be understood as a situated, relational, and spatially embodied practice through which links are configured between subjects, bodies, and environments, and at the intersection of material, spiritual, and affective dimensions.

Despite this, we can recognize that there are points of convergence between space, territory, and care. For Fisher and Tronto (1990), care is “an activity of the human species that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, or repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it in the best way possible. This world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, which we seek to weave into a complex web that sustains life” (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p. 40). We can analyze care in terms of micro-spaces of attention, such as a bed where an elderly person is bedridden, a hospital room, or a classroom. Care is woven into the fabric of the city through homes, streets, and transportation, and in rural spaces through gardens, orchards, backyards, cornfields, mountains, forests, and rivers. Furthermore, we recognize that transnational care manifests itself both in remittances from migrant families—reflecting deep economic ties—and in a global dimension in the face of crises such as climate change and pollution.

In this context, which places care at the heart of the discussion, the notion of caring cities has given rise to interesting academic debates, focusing on the question: what does it mean to think about care from an urban perspective? We believe that this question opens up emerging analytical possibilities that would help us construct

an approach to urban care. Along these same lines, some authors have argued that we are facing a new urban model that “places people at the center of decisions, taking into account the diversity of experiences and breaking with the standardization of subjects, bodies, experiences, and desires. Spaces must be flexible and adapt to the different needs of people, rather than people adapting to the conditions of the space. This new urban paradigm is embodied in the model of the caring city, envisioning cities that care for us, that care for our environment, that allow us to care for ourselves, and that allow us to care for others” (Valdivia, 2018, p. 79).

Despite these ideas, territorial dimensions remain scarce, which underscores the relevance of this special issue. The aim of this dossier is to contribute to the development of the spatial dimensions of care and to problematize at least three dimensions that are intertwined in the contributions of the articles:

1. We explore how urban spaces and territories facilitate, foster, mediate, and co-constitute care relationships. This way of understanding care reveals its embodied nature, where care, while a human matter, is also involved with a series of agents with whom we cohabit the world and who sustain these practices (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).
2. The materialities of urban care research identify how things, artifacts, and objects can be interpreted in sync with the material turn (Latour, 2017), since this interpretive perspective allows us to observe how the very materiality of environments necessarily mediates care relationships and ultimately shapes what it means to care in the city.
3. How life is sustained within and with the city, considering the immobilities that characterize urban life and understanding that the practice of care flows through cities (Soto-Villagrán, 2022). Thus, care unfolds in public, community, mobile and moving spaces, making visible the spatial character that the

practice of care can have and shedding light on the interaction between practices and places.

The articles gathered in this dossier offer new conceptual frameworks, empirical cases, and political discussions to situate urban care research, challenging disciplinary boundaries and identifying the multiple forms—human and more-than-human—embodied and embedded in the world, environments, landscapes, territories, and infrastructures that both mark and are marked by this care.

The dossier opens with an article by Delmy Cruz-Hernández and Paula Soto-Villagrán, who study the interaction between territories and care, using a methodological approach—the collective mapping of care practices. The authors describe a collaboratively developed tool that allows for a profound understanding of how territories are constructed through care practices. They begin with the idea that care unfolds a series of movements within a territory to sustain the lives of other dependent individuals, to care for the land, and for the non-human living beings that cohabit it. This article analyzes the results of a care mapping project developed with women defenders of urban and rural territories who are members of the Mesoamerican Network for the Defense of Territory. These results aim to highlight, on the one hand, the inequality in the distribution of care; and on the other, reveal community-based eco-territorial strategies that allow us to rethink the meaning of care-based territorialities.

For their part, Karol Yáñez Soria, Lorena Zárate, and Jill Wigle examine the multifunctional community centers known as Utopias (Units of Transformation and Organization for Inclusion and Social Harmony), which were implemented between 2019 and 2024 in the Iztapalapa borough of Mexico City. These public infrastructures represent a territorial commitment to socio-spatial justice, the right to the city, and feminist urbanism, offering free cultural, recreational, and social programs and services to residents of historically marginalized areas, thus reconfiguring daily relationships with and within the territory. The article traces the emergence and

evolution of the Utopias, from their socio-political origins in Iztapalapa to their connections with similar urban experiences in Medellín, Barcelona, and Bogotá. Soria, Zárate, and Wigle (2026) propose that the Utopias incorporate feminist proposals for “caring cities,” exploring their potential to transform existing conditions. urban and to make visible and enable collective care practices in the social, temporal, spatial and socio-ecological dimensions of everyday life.

Sandra Mendoza Hernández's work presents the University as a territory. Indeed, her reflection situates action within the Faculty of Higher Studies Iztacala-UNAM, where spaces for encounter and dialogue were built with students in the face of patriarchal violence, placing the body-territory at the center of struggle, sharing care and collective knowledge for dignified resistance within academia, but above all, beyond it. The article recovers this experience and argues that these spaces of openness are necessary and must be strengthened from an ethical-political, relational-dialectical, and complex perspective, in order to envision and construct an emancipatory horizon within the University.

From another perspective, socio-environmental care is examined by Ana Luisa Sánchez-Hernández through the care practices that emerge in response to environmental dispossession and the accumulated effects of waste infrastructure on Nahua and peasant territories, alongside the socio-environmental defense and care practices articulated by the Cholula communities. The study shows that the landfill in question functioned as a civilizing device for waste disposal, and that its community closure analyzes how the remains/waste, far from being merely discarded matter, configure spaces of care that challenge the civilizing logic of waste. This allows us to consider the territory not only as a stage for conflict, but also as a place of affective, political, and communal construction, where the boundaries between public and private, domestic and communal, urban and rural, and life and death are reconfigured (Sánchez-Hernández, 2026).

Another dimension of care practices is explored by Laura M. González Foutel, who addresses care within the trans community. The author analyzes how care tasks transcend the merely instrumental, configuring physical and emotional environments that enable identity affirmation and the construction of support networks, where the tensions between vulnerability and interdependence are explored. The relational nature of care is considered key to understanding resilience and the creation of spaces of connection and activism. The findings reveal how the trans community, through its own care practices, challenges hegemonic norms and forges new ways of being and inhabiting society. Faced with obstacles, challenges, and hostility from state and societal actions, such as the absence of sensitive policies, these embodied experiences demonstrate a potential capacity for organization and social affirmation.

Non-central spaces and territories are analyzed by Margarida de Cassia Campos and Dayane Nascimento Sobreira in Brazil, specifically the care practices resulting from the struggle and resistance to the coloniality of power that emerge from the experiences of women organized around the Marcha das Margaridas (Marches of the Daisies). The authors propose the construction of a “Geography of Good Living” by acting in the protection of their communities, territories, and Nature itself. This collective resistance and these ways of life ensure the continuity of their own existence.

The dossier concludes with an article by Blanca Valdivia and Sara Moreno Colom, who approach long-term care resources from an urban and architectural perspective, based on case studies in three municipalities in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area. The article shows that population aging, as a global demographic phenomenon, puts cities to the test, insofar as they are not designed to allow older people to lead autonomous lives within them. Specifically, care facilities such as residences or day centers, designed for long-term care, are not integrated into the urban fabric. They are located in isolated areas, in single-purpose environments

(services or industrial), and with significant deficiencies in both environmental comfort and connectivity. This lack of urban planning that supports the care of older adults and their support network causes an abrupt disruption in their life cycle and increases social isolation. (Valdivia and Moreno-Colom, 2026)

However, our cities are not designed to allow older people to live independently. Similarly, specific resources, such as nursing homes or day centers, designed for long-term care, have not been designed with the urban context in mind. Many centers are located in isolated areas, in single-purpose environments (service or industrial), and suffer from significant deficiencies in both environmental comfort and connectivity. This lack of urban planning that supports the care of older people and their support networks causes an abrupt disruption in their life cycle and increases social isolation (p. 2).

Final Considerations

The articles gathered in this dossier underscore a feminist perspective on care that recognizes a relational ontology as the basis for rethinking the social, the meaning of being human, and the interdependent relationships between nature and society. Each contribution engages with a territorial dimension, demonstrating that the spatial category allows for multiple readings and frameworks of interpretation. Beyond being a simple location or setting for care practices, territory can be seen as resistance, action, and social creativity.

This dossier aims to contribute to the discussion of a field of recent exploration in both Mexico and Latin America, while also opening a reflection on care studies at a global level. In an urban space marked by profound crises such as violence, precarity, and insecurity, among others, studying care becomes imperative for developing a territorialized ethics of care that emphasizes justice and epistemology, and invites us to consider that all living beings need care to survive in accessible, habitable, and inclusive urban and rural spaces.

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Author 1: Preparation, discussion of results, literature search, text review

Author 2: Preparation, discussion of results, literature search, text review

Author 3: Supervision, standardization, text review

Data availability

The research data are available in the body of the article.



