

(Re)producing everyday life: urban commoning through care

Chiara Belingardi

LAPEI University of Florence
chiara.belingardi@gmail.com

**Gabriella Esposito
De Vita**

IRISS CNR
g.esposito@iriss.cnr.it

Stefania Ragozino

IRISS CNR
s.ragozino@iriss.cnr.it

Tihomir Viderman

BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg
viderman@b-tu.de

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The rationale behind the theme

This issue of *Contesti* (no. 1/2024) explores the complex interconnections between everyday life, commoning, and care, drawing on epistemological approaches that highlight the dynamic and non-static nature of urban space. It emphasizes how the political, social, and cultural conditions in urban contexts often lead to the fragmentation of the urban fabric, increased commodification, and the reinforcement of power structures, which in turn exacerbate social inequalities and advance individualism (Viderman et al., 2023). Against these fragmenting tendencies, and with a focus on everyday life—where lived experiences and material practices merge—this issue suggests that commons can act as the glue that binds urban spaces together. By engaging with the politics of the commons, which are “perpetually made and remade, created, eroded and defended” (Chatterton, 2010: 626), the production of urban fabric is revealed as an everyday negotiation across a wide range of differences, aimed at fostering harmony in shared space and time. The commons illustrate how societies strive for cohesion and seek to address and overcome conflicts, mobilizing both individual and collective resources in everyday life. In connecting commons with care, this is-

sue specifically examines how locally embedded caring practices—those that create and sustain collective relationships fostering mutual support and solidarity—disrupt established power dynamics, reclaim urban space, and reappropriate everyday life in opposition to structural forces that fragment society (Gabauer et al., 2022). This perspective positions care as a shared social practice, rather than an individualized responsibility, making it a fundamental element of the politics of the commons (cf. Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

The thematic framework of this issue builds on the research and insights shared during the international conference “Urban Conflicts and Peace: Everyday Politics of Commons” (5-6 October 2023, Naples, Italy), of the AESOP Thematic Group “Public Spaces and Urban Cultures”, organized by the National Research Council of Italy, Institute for Research on Innovation and Services for Development (CNR-IRISS), and hosted by the University Federico II, Department of Architecture and the Lido Pola Urban Common.

How everyday life, commons and care relate

Capitalism produces urban spaces through expansion, commodification, and resource exploitation. The drive for centralized accumulation and competition at its core results in uneven development, fostering inequalities while destabilizing the very foundations on which capitalism relies, such as social repro-

duction, nature, and social cohesion. Shaped by capitalist growth and regulation, urban spaces become sites of contested relationships, and time is experienced through accelerated rhythms and routines (Viderman et al., 2023). Henri Lefebvre (2014 [1946]) proposes that everyday life is the quintessential site for understanding the material and social dimensions of urban development. According to him, systemic conditions and power relations are embedded in everyday life, which, in turn, serves as the foundation upon which social relations are reproduced, contested, and reimagined. Everyday life is both affective and transformative—bodies are not simply affected by external conditions but act as interfaces between private worlds and urban environments, transforming passions into actions (Hardt, 2007, drawing reference to the work of Curley (1986) on Spinoza). This makes everyday life a site of both capitalist alienation and potential resistance. It is impacted by systemic forces like commodification of space and time, as well as power structures that affect people’s ability to experience urban spaces as shared places of belonging and care. At the same time, everyday life nurtures opportunities for resistance, allowing people to challenge systemic forces, enact radical transformations, and reclaim space and time (Viderman et al., 2023). Everyday life is simultaneously a site of struggle and potential transformation. It is permeated with asymmetrical, complex, and contested relationships, which are indicative of and inter-

twined with challenges of political representation, ecological and economic crises, social and cultural exclusion, as well as discriminatory access to healthcare, education, social services, and resources. Yet, it also channels hopes, needs, and desires for collectively negotiated social orders (ibid.). The examination of care practices offers insights into how capitalism extracts value from everyday life through the commodification and reconfiguration of social reproduction and its spatial expressions (Fraser, 2022). Value generation and extraction occur through a hierarchical division in which production is tied to capitalist, patriarchal society, while reproduction is associated with care activities mainly undertaken by women (Patel and Moore, 2017; Rossi, 2022). Nancy Fraser (2022: 53) emphasizes that capitalism is also a “guzzler of care,” suggesting that it not only commodifies caring practices by transforming them into a marketable commodity but also individualizes and invisibilizes the struggles associated with caregiving. By doing so, capitalism exploits caring relations and undermines the collective dimensions of care that are fundamental for building social bonds, thereby eroding communal forms of life. The result is widespread social exhaustion and time poverty—conditions that stem from the systemic pressures of the capitalist mode of social reproduction. She expands: “The fact is, our social system is sapping energies needed to tend to families, maintain households, sustain communities, nourish

friendships, build political networks, and forge solidarities. Often referred to as carework, these activities are indispensable to society: they replenish human beings, both daily and generationally, while also maintaining social bonds. In capitalist societies, moreover, they assure the supply of commodified labor power from which capital sucks surplus value. Without this work of social reproduction, as I shall call it, there could be no production or profit or capital; no economy or culture or state”. (Fraser 2022: 53)

Due to commodification processes, care is increasingly atomized and individualized under capitalism. It has shifted from being a collective responsibility to a highly individualized burden, often relegated to the private sphere and primarily undertaken by women (Patel and Moore, 2017). This privatization of care not only turns care into a market commodity but also isolates the responsibilities of caregiving, disconnecting it from its communal nature. Feminist thinkers have emphasized the political, economic, social, and urban importance of care, as it lies at the heart of the reproduction of life (Federici, 2004; Held, 2005; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Tronto, 2020; Cavallero and Gago, 2021; Gabauer et al., 2022; Miraftab, 2024). Despite being commodified and disrupted by systemic forces, care remains integral to sustaining communal bonds and supporting individuals as they face uncertainties and pressures in urban environments. It offers a foundation for creating collective spaces of solidarity and resistance against the frag-

mentation of everyday life brought on by capitalist dynamics. Fraser (2022: 152) argues that a collaborative mindset can counteract “capitalism’s tendency to institute zero-sum games, which take away from nature, public power, and social reproduction what they give to production”. Therefore, care should be understood as a shared responsibility supported by collective infrastructures and common actions.

The concept of ‘commons’ has become broadly accepted across various fields and public debates as a term to describe the appropriation of collective space and action that promotes interdependencies between collective modes of care and individual well-being. Commons, in a narrow sense, are collectively cultivated and shared resources, but the concept expands to include a wide range of material and imagined practices that challenge the commodification trends imposed by capitalist urban development. These practices aim to benefit society as a whole. In this understanding, commons and care are mutually intertwined in urban contexts, as urban commons, in their multiple configurations, embrace forces and practices that pursue novel forms of just and inclusive society (Chatterton, 2010; Belingardi, 2015; Bianchi, 2018; Sato and Soto Alarcón, 2019; Ragozino et al., 2022; Vittoria et al., 2023; Sciarelli, 2024). As Silvia Federici (2012) argues, referencing the commons is not just symbolic but also a call to raise awareness of the inaccessibility of territorial and urban resources except through monetary arrange-

ments of the free market. It highlights new forms of social cooperation and the importance of placing care at the center of domestic and political life. In such a context, commoning describes actions or struggles that promote overall well-being, such as inclusive access to infrastructures and social networks, as well as public resources such as water, clean air or education. It fosters care as a form of mutual support and collective inclusive shaping of everyday life.

A broader understanding of the concept of commons allows for a nuanced view of contemporary urban space and time, as regards the desired dimensions of sociability, difference, and collective living. This approach moves beyond seeing action and institutions as binaries, instead examining their interrelation to understand the daily dynamics of how people negotiate their relationships with urban environments and each other. Urban commons express the entanglements among spaces, communities, and governance models, and recognize the ways in which institutions adapt to social demands. In this regard, institutions and other structures of power position themselves as responsible for delivering provisions aimed at fostering the common good (see for example EU’s strategic document “New Leipzig Charter- The transformative power of cities for the common good”). Although framing the commons as resources managed by the State might imply a flawed hierarchical perspective, it underscores the recognition of importance of commons in

shaping collective well-being across Europe. At the same time, a critical perspective emphasizes the daily struggles of individuals and groups engaging in commoning, thereby driving social and spatial transformation.

A critical perspective links urban commoning closely to grassroots practices of social and socio-ecological reproduction. While social movements cultivate emancipatory potential in response to capitalism's exploitative framework, caring practices to answer basic human needs nurture a collective political subject that acts in a shared effort (Fraser, 2022). The Care Collective (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) defines commons as 'infrastructure of care' through which social bonds are established and strengthened. These collective practices not only encompass the 'affective labour' of social reproduction but are also representative of broader resistance towards subjects' emancipation and space appropriation (Tanyildiz et al., 2021). Urban commoning is thus an action that seeks to reconfigure dominant power relations and redistribution patterns, and mitigate the adverse spatial impacts of capitalist-driven appropriation and associated environmental degradation. It is an inherent part of everyday life, manifesting not only in large-scale actions but also in the daily negotiations that individuals and groups undertake to reshape social, cultural, and material aspects of their living environments, ultimately fostering 'social reproduction and resistance in the city' (Boler et al. 2014).

Essays and Research

Building on the themes of urban commoning and care explored in relation to urban space, the articles collected in this issue of *Contesti* provide plural perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for (re)producing everyday life in urban contexts. They draw on a range of perspectives, fields of interest and backgrounds to examine how social reproduction, urban commons, and care infrastructures shape our cities and address contemporary social issues.

This issue is structured around three interconnected themes: (1) the production and everyday politics of urban commons, (2) care as a social activity and public responsibility, and (3) enabling strategies to enhance urban resistance. These themes, though distinct, often overlap in practice, research and policy, demonstrating the interdependence between commoning, caring, and everyday life in urban environments.

Production and everyday politics of urban commons

The first set of articles focuses on the creation and management of urban commons, the values generated through commoning, and the role of (agro)ecologies in territorial regeneration. These articles engage with discussions inspired by Elinor Ostrom's (1990) theories on common pool resource management, which emphasize the effectiveness of appropriate self-governance and collective agreements. This perspective stands in contrast to Garrett Hardin's (1968)

concept of the ‘tragedy of the commons,’ pointing to an inevitable overexploitation and depletion of shared resources as individuals act in their own self-interest. By reporting and reflecting on recent experiences of commoning, the articles in this section illustrate how urban commons can serve as experimental grounds for fostering new forms of getting together, and creating collective values and visions.

The contribution by Pappalardo and Saija poses key questions about who is responsible for public spaces and who, in practice, actually cares for them. Their case study, set in a public park on the northern outskirts of Catania, Italy, offers a critical perspective on commoning processes and reflects on the “collective effort to take care of a neglected space”. By bringing to the forefront commoning as a “process through which individuals ‘get organised’ for the purpose of protecting, caring, enhancing, and mobilising around the actual status and/or future prospects of a certain space of shared interest,” the case is analyzed through the combination of Argyris’ theory of organizational learning and Esposito’s concept of ‘instituting thought’ applied to urban planning. This instituting-organizational approach allows for the conceptualization of organizational models, ways of accessing resources, and the relationships between formal and informal dynamics.

Lanteri, Montanaro, Spinelli and Vassallo conducted an empirical study of the ‘failed’ project La Place des Possibles in Saint-Laurent-en-Roy-

ans, Drôme (France), which involved the Collectif Etc. They reflect on the dialectical relationship between the designer and the space throughout the commoning processes, drawing insights from the concept of designing for care. The project, which began in 2017 with the goal of transforming a former factory into a care-oriented space through a self-organized construction process, highlights challenges and opportunities of such initiatives. The unique approach to producing spaces and creating places typical of commoning pushed the designers beyond their comfort zone, prompting the question: What role does space play as a medium of negotiation within a collective process that unfolds in slow and uncertain ways?

Oubad’s analysis of the failures and struggles of commoning practices that often do not stand the test of time underscores that the production of commons is not always a peaceful process. Through embedded activist-ethnography, Oubad reflects on the dynamics of exclusion and solidarity within the complex dynamics of squatting in Brussels, identifying a recurring pattern: the ‘(re)production and negotiation of mobile commons’. By actively engaging with squatters’ collectives and undocumented individuals in Brussels, the author presents a threefold case study demonstrating that squatting serves not only as a space “for commons (re)production but also platforms for migrants’ and activists’ social becoming”. These commoning experiences, extending beyond their primary

function as shelters, emerge as “dynamic spaces where negotiation and social transformation occur, conventional humanitarian assistance models.” The study thus explores the impact of urban commons in creating alternative dwelling infrastructures for undocumented migrants and their impact on the everyday urban politics of solidarity.

Care as a social activity and public responsibility

The concept of care, which intersects multiple topics, is rooted in discussions within the feminist approach to addressing the everyday challenges of social reproduction (Cavallero, Gago, 2021; Graham, 1991). Under the broad framework of care in the city, of the city, and for the city and the territory (Gabauer et al., 2022), a rich debate has emerged, underscoring the need for care infrastructures and policies that are inspired by a caring approach.

Antonucci, Demurtas and Proia approach the topic of urban commons as an expression of community needs and a means of providing non-institutionalized social services. They examine anti-violence centers in Italy from a feminist perspective, with a particular focus on the *Lucha y Siesta* practice in Rome. *Lucha y Siesta* defines itself as a feminist and transfeminist urban common where anti-violence is a collective activity which engages the community through cultural and political initiatives, using an innovative methodology to support women on their

journey to self-determination against domestic violence. The authors, therefore, demonstrate the generative potential of urban commons, specifically in terms of care and gender dynamics. The relational hubs that emerge from urban commons initiatives offer the opportunity to experiment with innovative care experiences “of women for women” outside of, and in parallel with, traditional institutional care infrastructures. By focusing on anti-violence centers as a framework for women, the authors emphasize the need to treat these centers as social places and recognize them as commons. The significance of this contribution also lies in its positioning within the ongoing debate regarding the institutionalization of spontaneous, successful commoning initiatives, which have emerged to address gaps in social services.

The interplay between commons and public responsibility in territorial regeneration and environmental awareness lies in the focus of Caruso’s article, which describes the long process of adopting a River Contract for the Ombrone River (Tuscany, Italy). Using a five-year action-research approach, the author captured the potential of engaging with schools to understand territorial needs. Beyond adults, children were actively involved in the process, providing unexpected insights into the co-design experience. This extended mutual learning process empowered the children, giving them the role of active agents in shaping and caring for the territory. Recognizing children as producers, not merely

users, of public spaces could be applied in community-led regeneration projects, thus enhancing collaborative design initiatives.

Considering that public institutions also have a responsibility to regulate economic initiatives, political disputes regarding the public realm in port regions and special economic zones (SEZs) frequently result in decisions which affect communities' everyday life. Di Ruocco and D'Auria discuss how SEZs are often on the brink of becoming sites of conflict or, under specific rules, could be transformed into commons that benefit the community. However, the establishment of SEZs frequently exacerbates spatial injustice and land-use conflicts when stakeholders prioritize corporate interests over those of the community. The cooperative assessment approach proposed in this article emphasizes the evaluation of local needs, resources, and investment goals to ensure they are suitable for the region and benefit both local communities and global investors.

Enabling strategies to enhance urban resistance

Urban movements dedicated to resisting and counteracting the current mainstream economic model—still predominantly characterized by a linear production-consumption approach despite attempts to shift towards circularity—are actively addressing the impacts of care and ecological crises on everyday life through various strategies. These strategies are grounded in

the politics of relationships and the networks of mutualism and care that emerge from collective action (Kern, 2022; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Boller et al., 2014).

From this perspective, Perreault studies the production of commons through two practices in Montreal, examining how these practices can generate positive side effects for people not directly involved. Drawing on the three forms of social capital theorized by Putnam (2000), the author focuses on the 'ricochet effect', through which commons can transform cities into caring cities. Collective action, whether positively or negatively perceived by those not directly involved, influences the social environment surrounding the community, thereby affecting the practice itself and the recruitment of new activists. Furthermore, the ricochet effect can stimulate the creation of new grassroots initiatives and commons. The central role of cities within Canadian federalism offers the possibility to explore an open governance model guided by the ethics of sharing and commoning, in which the benefits of commoning practices can converge in local enabling strategies.

Places play a crucial role in the commoning experience, as they can either facilitate or hinder interactions among various people or support various functions for both human and non-human actors. Iannizzotto, Paio and Perrone direct their attention to urban spaces that are in flux or not yet assigned a specific use, making them more open to transformative possibilities.

These 'empty spaces' are significant for grass-roots and informal urban modifications, as they present opportunities for new uses. The authors propose a shift in the conception of empty places from 'Terrain Vague' to 'Vague Farm,' suggesting that when these spaces, characterized by temporary availability, are utilized by different communities spontaneously and informally, they become fertile grounds for transformation. By observing community gardens in five European cities, the authors develop a theoretical framework for community-enabling strategies in dilapidated interstitial urban spaces, incorporating sustainable land-use practices.

While an abandoned patch of inner-city land might readily offer the opportunity for creative reuse, the coastal areas of a densely populated city face economic interests and social and environmental challenges. In Italy, access to the seaside is often regulated with a preference for commercial uses rather than prioritizing citizens' 'right to the sea'. Pica's case study of the Neapolitan coast reveals the potential of grass-roots movements to reclaim seaside access and involve a broader population in resisting urban extractivism. Referring to Ostrom's theories on the ability of organized communities to effectively manage common pool resources, the article presents the case of Donn'Anna Beach in Naples, which was opened to the public due to the mobilization by the Comitato Mare Libero, Gratuito e Pulito. This case is framed within the broader national debate on the management

of beaches, with the author suggesting that a model similar to the Collective and Civic Uses adopted by the Municipality of Naples could be applied nationally to regulate public access to the seaside.

Outlook and reflection

The contributions collected in this issue of *Contesti* underscore the pervasiveness of collective care action in urban environments, where the issues of urban degeneration are becoming increasingly urgent and concerning for the quality of life of communities. They show that the conceptualization of commoning through care is applicable both at the theoretical and practical levels, widening its scope and impact, and maturing into new fields of research, novel approaches, alliances, levels of awareness, and habits in the use and production of public space. The collected works also encourage new ways of doing research, emphasizing cross-pollination and mutual learning between researchers and activists, thereby subverting traditional scholarly observation and theorising. We hope that these contributions will inspire scholars, activists, and practitioners engaged in the complex and ever-evolving fields of commoning and caring practices.

To deepen this reflection, a significant reading has been included in this issue—Walter Benjamin and Asja Lăcis's groundbreaking essay on Naples, originally published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on 25 August 1925. This essay, which

employs the concept of porosity in describing everyday life in Naples, is significant not only for its impact on how the city was perceived but also for establishing a new conceptual framework centred on porosity. Since Benjamin and Lācis first used the term nearly a century ago to describe what they saw as the defining aspects of Neapolitan life, numerous scholars have adopted it to explore Naples, Italian culture as a whole, the analysis of other cities, and the dynamics and complexities of urban living more broadly. This organic expression has been considered the origin of the definition of models of 'liquid modernity', which addresses the perceived impacts of economic globalisation on society.

The concept of porosity, both successful and controversial, was developed to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of Naples and has since become a topos extended to the understanding of cultural stratifications and layered everyday life. In a few pages written with the aim of moving beyond the traditional 'Baedeker approach' to traveling, the metaphor of porosity has been an essential interpretive tool in exploring the cultural expressions of Naples—ranging from noble palaces and chapels to cinematic representations of the interaction between interior and exterior spaces. Despite the risk of reinforcing stereotypes about the Neapolitan way of life, the vibrant narrative by Benjamin and Lācis has transcended its original context, inspiring effective fieldwork on public spaces and everyday urban life far beyond the southern Italian city.

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