

Special contribution to the 7th Global Report on Local  
Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD VII) on the  
**Economies of Equality and Care**

# Towards “Caring Cities”

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### 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 lockdowns revealed several structural weaknesses in urban environments, highlighting systemic issues across various dimensions of city life. The most visible weakness was healthcare system vulnerabilities that saw emergency rooms overwhelmed even in well-equipped cities, while underserved areas struggled with even simple testing availability. These vulnerabilities affected all people regardless of income or social status.

Other less visible weaknesses, however, affected the poor and the vulnerable disproportionately. Inadequate housing resulting in overcrowding made social distancing impossible for many, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods. People living in slums and informal settlements lacked safe spaces to quarantine or access basic hygiene. As one resident of a Nairobi slum said: “I don’t have access to enough water to drink and cook and feed my children; how am I to wash my hands frequently?” Existing social divides were exasperated by the digital divide, with many children unable to adequately pursue stay-at-home education.

Even affluent cities in the global north witnessed neighbourhoods without access to fresh food, green space and opportunities for socialization, all of which were theoretically overcome with public transit under normal times. Loneliness and isolation proved to be major contributing factors to mental and emotional problems for many.

The pandemic caused significant turmoil in the formal economy, but it was low-wage, gig, and informal workers who were the hardest hit. Many lost their jobs and income due to shutdowns and supply chain disruptions. Unpaid caregivers – such as family

members caring for loved ones or relatives at home – faced an additional layer of stress due to fears of virus exposure. These informal caregivers often struggled to balance their caregiving responsibilities with the need to earn a living, all while trying to protect themselves and their families from the virus, frequently without access to adequate personal protective equipment.

## 2. Towards “Caring Cities”

These weaknesses underscore the need for cities to build more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable systems to withstand future crises and challenges. They also underscore the pressing necessity for cities to prioritize the well-being and quality of life of all of their residents – in other words, to become a city that leaves no one and no place behind. This concept of a “caring city” extends beyond the traditional role of caring for the physical and mental well-being of relatives and friends in need – it encompasses social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

The idea of “caring cities” aligns with the concepts of “caring economies” or “caring societies,” which emphasize the importance of social well-being and human flourishing alongside economic considerations. The discourse surrounding these concepts underscores the imperative that care work – encompassing activities aimed at promoting the well-being of individuals, communities, and the environment – must be acknowledged, valued, and incorporated into economic frameworks as a fundamental component of both economic development and social advancement.

A “caring city” is ultimately about putting people first, creating an environment that nurtures their physical, mental, and emotional well-being while ensuring everyone has access to opportunities and resources to thrive. It requires continuous effort, adaptability, and commitment from both leadership and the community. Creating “caring cities” thus becomes indissociable from good urban governance – it involves collaboration among government, businesses, and community organizations to address in a responsive and transparent manner the diverse needs of the population and to create an environment that nurtures the overall welfare of its inhabitants.

The 6th cycle of the Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation provided a wealth of use cases on the “caring cities”. These use cases showcase how cities from around the world are trying to overcome the structural weaknesses that became evident during the pandemic. They fall into four broad categories: (i) social inclusion (ii) quality education, (iii) health and well-being, and (iv) equal economic opportunities. All of the 16 use cases presented here address more than one category. They also

comprise compelling examples of how the concept of a “caring city” can help accelerate the local implementation of the SDGs.

Each of the 16 use cases is briefly presented in the following paragraphs. Each of the 16 cases is linked to other material, including photos, charts and graphs, and in some cases, videos and other forms of testimonials by key actors and stakeholders.



This study seeks to contribute these practical examples and broader reflections to United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)’s GOLD VII research process on the Economies of Equality and Care, offering a comprehensive exploration of how caring cities can address systemic urban challenges while promoting social, economic and environmental well-being for all. By analyzing these real-life innovative approaches, the study aims to contribute to the current debates on the economies of care and the promotion of more equality-based cities and territories, providing actionable insights and guiding principles for building inclusive, resilient and equitable urban futures.

### 3. Social Inclusion

A caring city promotes social cohesion and inclusivity, ensuring that all members of the community feel valued and have equal access to opportunities. While all 16 of the use cases address the issue of social inclusion, the examples of Gwangju, Republic of Korea and Salvador, Brazil are compelling in that they directly address vulnerabilities in

the healthcare system, while the cases of Bontang, Indonesia and Krasnoyarsk, Russia are catering to those with special needs.

### 3.1 Bontang, Indonesia: Geospatial-based Persons with Disabilities Card and Services



The Indonesian city of Bontang, with over 180,000 residents, is an industrial hub on Borneo Island that faces challenges in supporting individuals with disabilities. For years, the city lacked accurate and accessible data on its disabled population, complicating access to essential services. In response, the Geospatial-Based Persons with Disabilities

Card and Services initiative was launched in 2021 to collect, map, and manage data using geospatial technology.

Trained local volunteers survey individuals with disabilities, entering real-time data on locations, disabilities, and needs into a publicly accessible WebGIS dashboard. Unique e-disability cards are issued to facilitate access to programs like financial assistance and job training. The initiative has improved social welfare services and promoted equal opportunities, benefiting over 900 individuals.

Confirmed by a mayoral decree and annual budgets, this model has inspired other local governments in Indonesia. Bontang's approach aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 1 (No Poverty), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), ensuring the rights and inclusivity of people with disabilities.

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2021

**Basic City Data:**

Population size: 183,161

Surface Area (sq.km): 161.88

Population Density

(people/sq.km): 1,131.48

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 22,970

Main Source of Prosperity:

Natural Gas and Petrochemical,

Oil Refining, Fishing and Seafood

## 3.2 Gwangju, Republic of Korea - GwangJu Community Care



Gwangju, the seventh-largest city in South Korea, has now entered an era of aging. With a total population of 1.48 million, there are 350,000 residents aged over 60. The previous caregiving system in Korea limited support to beneficiaries based on age and income, only assisting those who qualified to apply and with stringent application and

identification processes. To rectify this, Gwangju introduced the GwangJu Community Care model, which is available to anyone in need. Care managers from local Dong offices visit individuals at home to assess their situations and help them access necessary services.

Gwangju has launched 16 new care services and plans to allocate US\$7.74 million annually to assist citizens facing economic challenges. The "Care Call" program provides a single application channel for convenience. A dedicated division has been established, appointing 320 care managers and collaborating with 38 private care service providers.

This initiative differs from the previous model by ensuring care coverage for all, regardless of age or income, embodying the "Leave No One Behind" ideology. It positively impacts the city's population with its well-organized and comprehensive approach, engaging the community and various stakeholders to address ageing issues.

The GwangJu Community Care initiative enhances accessibility to diverse care options, contributing directly to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, which aims to promote

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2020

**Basic City Data**

Population size: 1.48 million

Surface Area (sq.km):501.1

Population Density

(people/sq.km):2,944

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 82,408

Main Source of Prosperity: Eco-friendly automotive industry, AI industry, Energy industry, Clean air industry.



well-being for all ages, and SDG 11, which focuses on making cities inclusive, safe, and sustainable.

### 3.3 Krasnoyarsk, Russia: Svetly Park as a Supportive Space for Open Communication between Every Social Category of Residents



Krasnoyarsk, Russia's second-largest city in Siberia with nearly 1.2 million residents, aimed to become "city friendly to all" ahead of the 2019 Winter Universiade by installing tactile paving. However, this wasn't enough for visually impaired residents, who often lacked essential navigation skills. This led to the creation of Svetly Park, a unique 0.9-hectare public space designed as a training ground for orientation and mobility skills.

Developed through collaboration between the city administration, organizations for the visually impaired, and the local community, Svetly Park features tactile paving, audible landmarks, aromatic plants, and engaging sensory experiences. Linden trees, spirea shrubs, and herb gardens enhance accessibility and sensory engagement.

The park also offers various inclusive activities – orientation training, workshops for sighted visitors, and community festivals – encouraging integration and skills development among diverse participants, including local youth.

Svetly Park has significantly improved the quality of life for visually impaired residents, with over 600 positive responses from the community. In 2022, it hosted 56 events with 916 participants, promoting well-being and community cohesion while supporting

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2021

**Basic City Data:**

Population size: 1,197,659

Surface Area (sq.km):379.5

Population Density

(people/sq.km): 3,132

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$):

12,704.9

Main Source of Prosperity:

Metallurgy, Power engineering,  
Mechanical engineering

Sustainable Development Goals related to health, reduced inequalities, and sustainable cities.

### 3.4 Salvador, Brazil: Saúde nos Bairros (Health in the Neighbourhoods)



Salvador, Brazil's fourth most populous city with over 2.4 million residents, faces significant healthcare challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the Saúde nos Bairros (Health in the Neighbourhoods) project was launched in April 2023 to provide free medical care directly to communities.

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2023

**Basic City Data**

Population size: 2,418,005

Surface Area (sq.km): 693.442

Population Density (people/sq.km): 3,486.96

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 4,093

Main Source of Prosperity: Services

This initiative aims to address the backlog in healthcare created by the pandemic and reduce long wait times for basic services.

Saúde nos Bairros is set to cover all 12 Health Districts of Salvador, offering services like dental consultations, X-rays, specialized medical consultations, and vaccinations. A distinctive feature is the attached regulation team that ensures residents not only receive immediate care but also appropriate referrals for more complex procedures.

Despite challenges such as team organization, staffing, accessibility due to the city's topography, and security concerns, community involvement and careful planning have driven the initiative's success. In its first four months, Saúde nos Bairros served over 70,000 people and conducted more than 300,000 procedures across 14 neighbourhoods, also introducing educational programs based on community needs. This project is a significant step towards improving healthcare access and aligns with

the Sustainable Development Goals focused on health, reducing inequalities, and promoting sustainable communities.

## 4. Quality Education and Lifelong Learning

A caring city invests in education and lifelong learning opportunities to empower individuals and enhance their skills, contributing to personal and collective growth. Each of the four examples highlighted in this section provides a different entry point or angle to education. In the case of Recife in Brazil, the impetus is to combat violence through social transformation in what was often referred to as one of the most violent cities in Brazil. Combatting loneliness and isolation is the focus of Ramallah’s initiative for the elderly, by providing opportunities to socialize and engage in physical and cultural activities. The case of Rotterdam in the Netherlands uses a holistic approach by bridging health with education and involves the family. It not only includes health in the curricula but has been successful in bringing about behavioral change. The entry point in Xianning, China is a multi-partnership and participatory planning approach to solving an environmental issue that plagues many cities in China and elsewhere – that of the school run that causes not only congestion and pollution but also negatively affects the safety of children.

### 4.1 Recife, Brazil: COMPAZ Recife - Community Peace Centers



Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, Brazil,

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2016

**Basic City Data:**

Population size: 1,488,920

Surface Area (sq.km): 218

Population Density (people/sq.km):  
6,830

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 4,043.67

Main Source of Prosperity:

Services

has a population of around 1.5 million, with approximately 70 percent living in low-income conditions. The city's suburbs and favelas experience significant poverty, unemployment, and violence, often linked to gangs and drugs. In response, COMPAZ Recife was established to address these critical issues through an innovative approach focused on social transformation.

COMPAZ, or Centro Comunitário Da Paz (Community Peace Center), emerged from a 2013 security plan prioritizing violence prevention. It consists of community centres that provide various services and opportunities to vulnerable populations. Each centre features sports facilities, classrooms, libraries, and parks, fostering access to essential resources for empowerment.

A key aspect of COMPAZ is its community involvement. Residents actively participate in planning and executing programs, ensuring their needs are met. The first centre opened in 2016 after extensive consultations, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the centres expanded their missions to distribute food and protective gear.

Currently, COMPAZ serves over 65,000 people monthly, primarily children and youth, and has significantly reduced homicide rates in its areas. The initiative has helped many young people return to school or work and has rebuilt trust between residents and the government. Due to its success, the federal government plans to replicate COMPAZ nationwide.

In a world grappling with inequality and violence, COMPAZ Recife demonstrates how innovative policies and community engagement can lead to a more peaceful future. It aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 3 (Good Health), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), and SDG 16 (Peace and Justice).

## 4.2 Ramallah, Palestine: Forum of Expertise, A Community-led Active Aging Initiative that Empowers Seniors to Thrive through Voluntarism and Life-long Learning



The "Forum of Expertise" is a community centre in Ramallah focused on enhancing the lives of older adults through social activities and well-being programs. It offers four core initiatives: a cross-generational knowledge exchange platform, a tailored voluntary engagement process, a capacity development program, and comprehensive well-being services.

The Forum emphasizes accessibility and aims to reduce social isolation among older adults by fostering both formal and informal interactions. Its decentralized structure promotes community involvement in decision-making and evaluation, supported by regular feedback for continuous improvement.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Forum launched innovative online initiatives, including a documentary series featuring Palestinian musicians and interviews with creative writers. These programs were shared online, effectively engaging the elderly during lockdown.

The Forum's impact demonstrates a commitment to innovation with a holistic approach that can be adapted to other communities, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 (Health and Well-being), 4 (Quality Education), and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2018

**Basic City Data**

Population size: 85,000

Surface Area (sq.km): 19

Population Density

(people/sq.km): 4,474

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 3,789.3

Main Source of Prosperity: Trade and tourism

### 4.3 Rotterdam, Netherlands: Growing Up Healthy in Rotterdam Beverwaard – A Multiannual Action-Research to Improve the Lifestyle of Children and Their Families



Rotterdam, with a population of 663,000, faces increasing inequality among its neighbourhoods, significantly impacting residents' health. Issues like obesity are on the rise, particularly among children. Current interventions often focus solely on lifestyle factors, overlooking interconnected challenges such as unemployment, safety, and social isolation.

In response, Rotterdam's Field Academy launched a three-year program called "Growing Up Healthy in Rotterdam Beverwaard." This initiative aims to understand the many factors affecting children's health in the Beverwaard area and to tailor interventions for nearly 60 families, many of whom are disadvantaged. The program employs various research methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the health of children aged 9 to 12 and their families.

Key components of the initiative include introducing family coaches, expanding social service networks, and implementing health-focused educational programs in schools. Weekly lessons cover topics like nutrition, exercise, and social connections in the first two years, while the third year focuses on identity and career options. Family coaches serve as a consistent link between families and support professionals, addressing the challenges caused by changing service providers.

The initiative has yielded positive outcomes, including a decrease in overweight children and improvements in emotional health and social skills. Partnerships formed during the project have remained, leading to the integration of talent-building programs into the

#### Start Date of the Initiative:

2016

#### Basic City Data

Population size: 663,900

Surface Area (sq.km):324.14

Population Density (people/sq.km):  
2,048.18

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 55,665

Main Source of Prosperity: Port  
Industry

school curriculum. Data collected was compared with national figures to identify the potential for scaling similar interventions in other neighbourhoods.

Overall, the program provides valuable insights into addressing health inequities and supports the Sustainable Development Goals related to health, education, and sustainable communities.

#### 4.4 Xianning China: Enhancing Traffic Safety Near Schools through a Child-Friendly Collaborative Construction and Sharing Approach



In Xianning, China, inadequate infrastructure has created conflicts between vehicular and pedestrian traffic, particularly during school drop-off times. To address safety concerns, the city launched a "government + enterprise + community" cooperation program aimed at

improving infrastructure around schools. This initiative, led by the municipal government, involves seven departments, design institutes, teachers, parents, local estate management offices, and the students themselves.

Key measures include adjusting land use, separating pedestrian and vehicular traffic, introducing walking-bus routes, and establishing waiting areas. The initiative transformed surrounding streets into safe community spaces and gardens. As a result, the percentage of students walking to school increased from 30% to 95%, and traffic accidents dropped significantly from over 50 annually to just one in 2023.

The program has led to the opening of local shops, and a local management company improved pedestrian access by enhancing walkways and removing walls. Its success

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2022

**Basic City Data**

Population size: 3,036,100

Surface Area (sq.km): 9,752

Population Density (people/sq.km):  
268

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 8,590

Main Source of Prosperity:

Agriculture, tourism, and Public  
Health related Services

has prompted expansion to 20 other schools and inspired similar initiatives in Hubei Province and Guangzhou. Recognized by UN–Habitat and UNICEF, this initiative demonstrates how a youth–centered approach can enhance urban safety and create vibrant public spaces. It requires low investment and has a short implementation timeline, making it easily replicable. The project aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

## 5. Health and Well-being

Health and well–being in a “caring city” extend beyond mere health services. They emphasize the creation of a healthy and supportive environment that includes access not only to healthcare but also to recreational spaces, as well as a clean and sustainable living environment. A “caring city” takes a holistic approach to urban health, connecting it to planetary health.

The four cities – Guangzhou, China; Istanbul, Türkiye; Iztapalapa, Mexico; and Kazan, Russia – each represent different strategies for fostering care. In Istanbul, the focus is on creating spaces for children to play, which is essential for their socialization and emotional development. In Iztapalapa, a “right to the city” approach aims to provide equitable access to quality public spaces that target socially excluded groups, emphasizing the principle of a healthy mind in a healthy body through sports and recreation. Guangzhou's initiative centres on the health of mothers and newborns, aiming to prevent serious and prevalent illnesses. Meanwhile, Kazan integrates social and environmental efforts by utilizing a restored water body to create both a green space and a healing environment.



## 5.1 Guangzhou, China: Integrated and Smart Neonatal Health Management System – Empowering Mothers, the Family, and the Community



Guangzhou, the third largest city in China, has a rapidly growing population of over 18 million, with approximately 160,000 newborns each year. It's common for 60 to 80 percent of these newborns to develop jaundice. While jaundice is often a benign condition, it can sometimes indicate serious underlying diseases. Due to a

lack of knowledge and experience, parents often rush to hospitals without consulting community care providers. Conversely, some parents may fail to recognize the symptoms in time, which can lead to morbidity or even mortality.

This situation has highlighted the need to empower caregivers within families and communities and to reduce unnecessary worries and hospital visits. In response, the Integrated and Smart Neonatal Health Management System was developed.

Upon being discharged from the hospital after a successful delivery, parents are informed about this system and instructed to monitor their baby's bilirubin levels for the week following birth. The system, presented as an online platform, provides guidance on how to measure bilirubin levels and explains the significance of different jaundice levels. Once the newborn's bilirubin data is logged, the system automatically generates an evaluation of jaundice and offers specific recommendations, including directions to the nearest community health centre or district children's hospital if necessary. If the healthcare providers at these facilities require further assistance, they can refer the

### Start Date of the Initiative:

2020

### Basic City Data:

Population size: 18,734,000

Surface Area (sq.km): 7,434.4

Population Density

(people/sq.km): 2,530

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$):

20,943.8

Main Source of Prosperity:

Advanced Manufacturing

Industry, High-technology

Industry

case to a tertiary hospital, where paediatricians can access the baby's health records in real time through the system.

The system also integrates data from families, community health centres, district children's hospitals, and tertiary hospitals into a comprehensive knowledge base on growth conditions for children up to the age of 18. Enhanced by AI, it analyses trends and correlations between health challenges and various factors, including social determinants of health and well-being.

Since its launch in 2020, the system has significantly impacted newborn health in Guangzhou. The proportion of newborns with elevated bilirubin levels nearly halved, from 19.91% in 2018 to 10.78% in 2022, while the incidence of severe jaundice dropped from 0.57% to 0.30%. Over 200,000 families have benefited from this initiative, and its success in Guangzhou is paving the way for a potential rollout across metropolitan China.

By emphasizing prevention rather than treatment, this initiative optimizes healthcare resources and, most importantly, empowers parents and grassroots healthcare practitioners to actively participate in assessing the health of newborns. It particularly aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

## 5.2 Istanbul, Türkiye: Istanbul Play Master Plan



Istanbul, Türkiye's largest city with over 16 million residents, faces several challenges in its recreational landscape, including limited green

### Start Date of the Initiative:

2021

### Basic City Data:

Population size: 15,907,951

Surface Area (sq.km): 5,461

Population Density

(people/sq.km): 2,994

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 15,666

Main Source of Prosperity: Trade

space, unequal access to playgrounds, and barriers to play diversity and accessibility. These issues can contribute to a sedentary lifestyle among children and weaken community bonds.

In response, the Istanbul Play Master Plan was created to enhance the city's playfulness by recognizing outdoor play as a child's right. Developed with input from over 60 experts and community representatives, the plan aims to increase access to quality play spaces, promote health and well-being, and foster spontaneous play.

The plan specifically targets five objectives: transforming Istanbul into a playable city, enhancing nature-human interaction, ensuring equal play opportunities, creating a play culture, and providing safe play areas. Key initiatives include establishing "pop-up playgrounds" in underserved neighbourhoods, repurposing old play equipment, and involving children in park design.

To implement these initiatives, the "Play and Recreation Chieftaincy" was established in 2021 to coordinate efforts across municipal departments and engage the public. While primarily focused on children, the plan will ultimately enhance recreational opportunities for all inhabitants and ensure equitable access for everyone. This initiative aims to redefine the city's urban planning approach, emphasizing the fundamental right to play and aligning with Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

### 5.3 Iztapalapa, Mexico: UTOPIAS – Urban Transformation and Organization for Social Inclusion and Harmony



**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2018

**Basic City Data:**

Population size: 1,835,486

Surface Area (sq.km): 116.67

Population Density

(people/sq.km): 16,219.6

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 5,467

Main Source of Prosperity:

Trade, services and  
 manufacturing industry



Iztapalapa is the most populous municipality in Mexico City, with nearly 2 million inhabitants. Forty–three percent of its population lives in poverty, and 33% are between the ages of 15 and 34. Additionally, 23% of residents work in the informal economy. Socioeconomic and territorial inequalities pose significant challenges for the local population.

The UTOPIAS initiative aims to promote social and urban transformation to reduce these inequalities and associated violence. It embodies a "right to the city" approach, focusing on the regeneration of deteriorated public spaces and the creation of a network of large, comprehensive, high–impact public facilities designed to improve the health and well–being of disadvantaged communities. The primary objective is to ensure equitable access to public spaces and facilities that offer free social, cultural, sporting, and recreational activities, as well as social services available to people of all ages and genders. Special attention is given to providing activities for the elderly, people with disabilities, women who have experienced abuse or violence, individuals struggling with addiction, and at–risk youth.

The initiative employs an innovative approach to urban management that integrates a participatory, transdisciplinary, and cross–sectoral perspective. To date, it has successfully recovered and transformed over 540,000 square meters of degraded public space and established 12 UTOPIAS in just four years. As a result, more than 100,000 people benefit from these facilities each week. The UTOPIAS initiative represents Iztapalapa’s commitment to achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 3 (Good Health and Well–being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

## 5.4 Kazan, Russia: Eco-rehabilitation of the City Park



**Start Date of the Initiative:**  
2021

**Basic City Data:**

Population size: 1,314,685

Surface Area (sq.km):638.4

Population Density

(people/sq.km): 2,232

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$):  
9.300

Main Source of Prosperity:

Machinery, chemical and petrochemical industry, light industry, food, construction, trade, tourism

During the COVID–19 pandemic, medical staff and patients at a hospital near Chaikovoye Lake in Kazan became increasingly aware of the lack of open–air public spaces that could facilitate

patient recuperation and provide a place for medical staff and hospital employees to relax. The area surrounding the hospital was neglected, and the lake was heavily polluted.

In response, an initiative was developed to create a unique multi–purpose public park near the hospital, aimed at promoting recovery, recreation, and relaxation. The main objectives of this initiative were to establish a rehabilitation zone with various functions adjacent to the hospital and to preserve the lake’s ecosystem. The project was executed in close collaboration with representatives from relevant ministries and departments, the health industry, hospital staff, patients, and local residents, all of whom actively participated in planning, design, and implementation.

The park was partially landscaped in 2021 and became fully operational in the following year. Facilities have been installed to accommodate people with disabilities and those with limited mobility. The park is designated as property of the Kazan municipality and is managed and maintained by the Directorate of Parks and Squares in Kazan.

The park and the now pristine lake have brought significant social, health, and environmental benefits. Patients can undergo therapies such as aromatherapy and

reflexology in the park while enjoying the picturesque scenery around the lake. Carefully selected plants and shrubs serve therapeutic purposes, aiding in patient recovery and enhancing the well-being of nearby residents. Hospital staff now have a dedicated area for relaxation and sports activities. The lake has been rehabilitated, and aquatic plants have been chosen to encourage natural self-cleaning.

Moreover, the park serves as a hub for social interaction, featuring an outdoor cinema where public events and classes are held. Local residents living near the lake can now enjoy an eco-friendly environment. As a result of this initiative, economic activities in the surrounding areas have also increased.

This initiative effectively addressed health concerns with a sustainable environmental solution, enhancing community welfare in the process. It supports several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

## 6. Economic Opportunities

A caring city creates economic opportunities for all residents, aiming to reduce inequalities and offer pathways for personal and professional development. For example, Bogotá demonstrates a commendable approach to supporting those who provide care, equipping thousands of women care providers with the resources to overcome “time poverty.” In Palmira, Colombia, initiatives for at-risk youth offer a chance to break free from the cycle of violence and gang life. Additionally, in São Paulo, Brazil, the group Legal showcases how a caring city can embrace informality and provide opportunities for informal vendors to conduct their business while accessing a variety of services. Lastly, Tharaka Nithi in Kenya features a unique crèche for working mothers, which also includes specialized educational opportunities for children under five.

## 6.1 Bogotá, Colombia: Bogotá Care Blocks - How a city is reorganizing itself for women and achieving the SDGs



**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2020

**Basic City Data:**

Population size: 7,834,167

Surface Area (sq.km): 1,776

Population Density

(people/sq.km): 21,276

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 12,117  
(2022)

Main Source of Prosperity:  
Services

It has long been recognized that women's "time poverty" is a structural cause of gender inequality. The unpaid burden of caregiving falls disproportionately on women, which leads

to a lack of economic autonomy for them. Women who are primary caregivers often abandon higher education and are more prone to chronic mental and physical illnesses. Additionally, they face a higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence. In Bogotá, 30% of the female population engages in unpaid caregiving full-time, with 91% belonging to low-income households, and 33% lacking sufficient free time for self-care.

In 2020, Bogotá, Colombia's capital, launched its Care System to recognize, reduce, and redistribute caregiving responsibilities. This initiative primarily operates through Care Blocks, which provide accessible educational, leisure, and income-generation services for caregivers, while also offering professional assistance to those being cared for, including children, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly. The initiative incorporates a cultural change strategy, such as a "Care School for Men," which aims to help men recognize and share caregiving responsibilities more equitably within the household. As a result of this initiative, caregivers have gained an average of four hours a day to study, earn income, or rest.

This initiative enhances gender equality, promotes environmental sustainability, and serves as a replicable model that (i) acknowledges the vital role of care and the contributions of caregivers to society; (ii) redistributes caregiving responsibilities more

equitably among community members; and (iii) reduces the unpaid care work performed by women, allowing them more time to pursue education, formal employment, well-being, and social and political activities. Furthermore, civil society participation was crucial in the design and implementation of Care Blocks.

The initiative also contributes to global goals by supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 (Gender Equality), 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

## 6.2 Palmira, Colombia: PAZOS: Peace and Opportunities for Palmira



The Colombian city of Palmira was once recognized as one of the world's most dangerous cities due to its high homicide rate. More than half of these homicides involved

young people aged 16 to 29, who represent approximately 22 percent of the city's population of 360,000. Recognizing the root causes of the violence—namely uncoordinated and punitive responses, a lack of economic opportunities for youth, and eroded trust in the government—Palmira launched the initiative PAZOS (Peace and Opportunities for Palmira) in 2020. This comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach aims to provide alternatives to youth recruitment by criminal groups and to prevent youth violence.

PAZOS targets the seven most affected clusters among the city's 42 neighborhoods, which are home to 30 percent of the population. The initiative addresses

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2020

**Basic City Data:**

Population size: 361,375

Surface Area (sq.km): 1,123

Population Density (people/sq.km):  
311.04

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 6,104.14

Main Source of Prosperity:

Trade and agriculture



socioeconomic factors through a variety of preventive interventions organized around five main pillars:

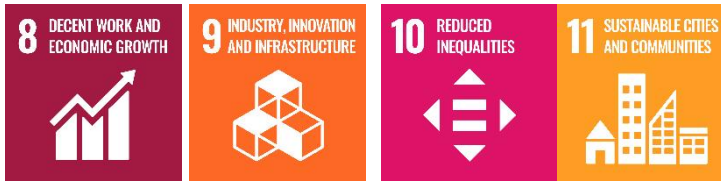
- Disruption: Prevents conflicts from escalating into violence through mediation and community leadership.
- Intervention: Offers psychosocial assistance and legal alternatives for high-risk youth.
- Prevention: Focuses on building life skills and creating opportunities for youth through health, education, sports, culture, and other programs.
- Safe Environments: Aims to recover and remodel public spaces that have been affected by crime.
- Improved Access to Justice: Enhances restorative practices and support for the juvenile criminal justice system.

Partnerships are crucial for the success of this strategy. The city collaborates closely with various foundations to build on existing efforts to reduce violence. This collaboration not only optimizes the city's spending but also ensures the sustainability of these initiatives, even as government priorities change. Additionally, the city seeks support from the business sector to provide job opportunities for high-risk youth who complete the program. Given the low legitimacy of government institutions in Colombia –often affected by guerrilla warfare – the city actively involves residents in the implementation of programs and encourages their participation in decision-making.

Impact evaluations show that the strategy has directly reduced homicides, leading to Palmira's lowest rate in 17 years. As PAZOS approaches the end of its four-year cycle, it is being developed into a ten-year public policy for institutionalization and sustainability, with support from UNODC.

PAZOS employs an "umbrella" approach to maximize resources for data-driven, community-engaged violence prevention. It particularly aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

## 6.3 São Paulo, Brazil: Programa Tô Legal



Programa Tô Legal’s primary goal is to streamline and expedite the issuance of authorizations and permits for individuals who work and provide services informally in public areas and on sidewalks. This initiative has created opportunities for those who cannot access the formal job market, encouraging entrepreneurship while enhancing transparency, efficiency, and location monitoring (GIS). It also helps reduce corruption through controlled payment processes.

**Start Date of the Initiative:**

2019

**Basic City Data:**

Population size: 11.23million

Surface Area (sq.km): 1,521

Population Density (people/sq.km):  
7,383

GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 11,906

Main Source of Prosperity: Public  
Power - Government

Tô Legal is an electronic system funded and utilized in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. This initiative allows citizens who currently work illegally and insecurely on the streets to gradually transition to formal employment. In some cases, this could lead them to move away from public areas and formalize their activities as registered businesses or microentrepreneurs. Tô Legal provides an expedited Authorization Ordinance for Commerce and Service Provision (PCS), which is approved within four days of application. This permit allows its holder to engage in economic activities in public spaces, thereby promoting entrepreneurship among the unemployed, young people, and senior workers who lack job opportunities. In the last four years, 19,000 small and micro-enterprises obtained 65,000 licenses through the Tô Legal and generated US\$ 14 million in municipal revenue.

Additionally, the Tô Legal portal offers users information about what other vendors are selling along a specific street, enabling them to make informed decisions about their business locations. The portal also serves as a one-stop shop for accessing other municipal services.

The system has significantly improved the lives of street entrepreneurs, as they no longer need to visit a sub-prefecture office to apply for documents, change their registration, or pay municipal fees; everything is available online. Civil servants can easily access permit information, which expedites inspection procedures. Revenue collection has been streamlined, with funds going directly to the Municipal Treasury.

This initiative represents an innovative approach to governance, utilizing technology to support those in the informal sector by providing pathways to formalization and enhancing their agency. Tô Legal contributes to the global urban agenda by granting legal identity and standing to urban residents and reinforcing their economic and social rights, in line with the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

### 6.4 Tharaka Nithi, Kenya: Enhancing Women's Livelihoods & Labor Force Participation through the Crèche Programme



Tharaka Nithi County in Kenya is home to approximately 400,000 residents, with women making up more than half of the population. Despite an increasing presence of women in the workforce, they still face a disproportionate burden of family responsibilities, particularly regarding childcare. This societal imbalance limits women's participation in the labor market and hinders their economic opportunities.

**Start Date of the Initiative:**  
2021

**Basic City Data:**  
 Population size: 400,000  
 Surface Area (sq.km): 2,609  
 Population Density (people/sq.km): 153  
 GDP Per Capita (U.S.\$): 1,352  
 Main Source of Prosperity:  
 Agriculture

In response, Tharaka Nithi launched the

"Enhancing Women's Livelihoods & Labor Force Participation Through the Crèche Programme" in December 2021. The initiative aims to alleviate the childcare burden on women, promote their psychosocial well-being, and support children's growth and development.

The Crèche Programme involves the construction of specialized daycare centres, or crèches, located within or near busy marketplaces. These facilities provide a safe and nurturing environment for working mothers to leave their children while they engage in various economic activities, such as selling fruits, vegetables, and other goods at the markets. The first crèche has already been built and is operational near Chuka Market, with active participation from local stakeholders and the community, incorporating mothers' insights regarding services, ideal locations, and reasonable pricing.

The crèche is staffed with trained childcare personnel who oversee the care and well-being of the children. A special curriculum has been developed in partnership with Kenyatta University to meet the unique needs of children under the age of five, providing them with valuable educational opportunities. Additionally, the crèche is constructed with transparent glass, allowing mothers to monitor their children without leaving their work.

Currently, this first crèche accommodates 20 children. A study is underway to evaluate the precise impact of this initiative, with research indicating it could lead to a 30% increase in women's labor force participation. The county government has also drafted a Child Care Policy and presented it to the county assembly, with plans to institutionalize the crèche programme and expand it throughout the county over the next five years.

By providing quality childcare services and educational opportunities for children, this initiative empowers women to enhance their economic independence, psychosocial well-being, and the overall well-being of their children. It aligns particularly with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of No Poverty (SDG 1), Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11).

## 7. Lessons Learned and Ways Forward

The 16 use cases presented provide strong evidence that governance is a fundamental pillar in shaping and sustaining a caring city. A caring city prioritizes the well-being of its residents through policies, infrastructure, and programs that promote inclusivity, equity, and sustainability. Effective governance ensures that these priorities are translated into actionable and measurable outcomes in a transparent and accountable manner.

### 7.1 Beyond Participation

In a caring and inclusive city, it is essential to implement participatory governance frameworks that empower residents and stakeholders in decision-making processes and their outcomes. We recommend adopting community engagement mechanisms, such as participatory planning and design, which enable individuals of all ages – ranging from children to the elderly – to actively voice their concerns and contribute to the development of policies and actions that impact their lives.

A key operational concept should be “engagement,” which transcends mere participation. For instance, in Xianning, schoolchildren were actively involved in designing pedestrian spaces leading to their school, ensuring a child-friendly and safe urban space. Similarly, engaging family coaches in Rotterdam to collaborate with parents, teachers, and children led to innovative approaches for promoting better health, effectively linking theory with practice. In Ramallah, Palestine, the “Forum of Expertise” empowers senior citizens to engage in voluntarism, lifelong learning, and physical and mental well-being through community-led initiatives.

We advocate for local authorities to embrace the principle of engagement to restore and strengthen civic trust. This approach not only enhances representation, transparency, and accountability but also grants inhabitants a tangible stake in outcomes through co-creation and co-design. By prioritizing these strategies, cities can enhance the quality of life for all residents and create more equitable urban environments.

## 7.2 Policy Integration – towards a holistic approach

To create a caring city, it is crucial to adopt a holistic approach to policymaking that acknowledges the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors. Policies should be crafted to enhance residents' well-being by addressing various aspects of their lives in an integrated way. Drawing inspiration from successful initiatives like Bogotá's Care Blocks, Recife's Community Peace Centers, and Palmira's PAZOS community peace initiative, we recommend establishing cross-sector collaboration. This collaboration should leverage resources from different departments, including for example, education, local economic development, planning, safety and security, and social services.

A caring city also relies on collaboration among stakeholders, including government entities, non-profits, businesses, and community groups. These partnerships combine resources and expertise to tackle complex social challenges more effectively. Intergovernmental coordination ensures aligned goals and efficient resource utilization, amplifying the impact of governance efforts and enhancing the city's ability to support its residents. As shown by successful cases, collaborative partnerships are crucial for scaling good practices.

By breaking down barriers between sectors and fostering collaborative partnerships, a caring city can more effectively address complex challenges, optimize resource use, and create seamless experiences for all inhabitants. A "caring city" cultivates a culture of collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility across all levels of governance and within the community. Therefore, we advocate for a systems approach that comprehensively addresses the interconnected social, economic, and environmental challenges—often referred to as the "holy trinity"—to build inclusive, livable, and safe neighborhoods.

## 7.3 Public Space and Place-Making

To foster vibrant and inclusive urban communities, we must prioritize the creation of accessible public spaces dedicated to play and recreation. Inspired by initiatives like the "Istanbul Play Master Plan", "Iztapalapa's UTOPIAS project, Kazan's eco-

rehabilitation efforts, and Krasnoyarsk’s Svetly Park”, we can develop healthier, more equitable and sustainable environments for all residents.

The keys to a more sustainable “caring city” include: (i) ensuring that all demographic groups can access recreational facilities, particularly marginalized populations; (ii) encouraging community participation in the planning, design and implementation of recreational initiatives.

By adopting these recommendations, municipalities can foster inclusive, sustainable urban spaces that empower residents through enhanced access to recreation. This focus on equity and well-being will enrich community life and contribute significantly to achieving sustainable development goals.

### 7.4 Social and Economic Justice and Intersectionality

One of the foundational principles of the caring economy is the intersectionality of care work with social justice issues, particularly those concerning gender, race, and class. Historically, care work has fallen disproportionately on women, often within marginalized communities and under conditions that are low-wage or unpaid. This unequal burden is exacerbated by systemic barriers such as gendered expectations, racial inequalities, and economic structures that devalue care work. A “caring city” aims to address these disparities by advocating for policies that promote the equitable distribution of care work and resources. This is exemplified by initiatives like the “Gwangju Community Care Initiative for the Elderly” in Korea and Salvador’s “Health in Neighbourhoods Initiative” for low-income communities in Brazil, both of which seek to rectify earlier exclusionary practices rooted in bureaucratic criteria and procedures. Similarly, the Crèche Programme in Tharaka Nithi, Kenya, assists working mothers in balancing their reproductive and productive responsibilities. Local authorities worldwide should learn from these initiatives and ensure that caregiving roles are not confined to specific groups based on gender, race, or social status.

## 7.5 Enhancing Citizen Engagement and Service Delivery through Digital Tools

In order to foster a caring city in the digital age, local authorities should prioritize the integration of technology to enhance citizen participation and improve service delivery. This can be achieved by implementing accessible digital platforms that facilitate communication and engagement among citizens, and by leveraging data analytics to make informed decisions, monitor community needs, and address issues proactively. This will enable local governments to respond effectively to emerging challenges and trends.

Investing in technology that improves access to services for all residents, especially vulnerable populations include supporting initiatives like Sao Paolo's Tô Legal, which aids informal vendors, and programs in Bontang, Indonesia, that help those with physical challenges obtain necessary services. While the neo-natal health management system of Guangzhou is more sophisticated, it has proven cost-effective by reducing the need for expensive medical interventions and fostering a preventative approach to healthcare.

Local authorities and their partners stand to benefit substantially by recognizing the potential of simple digital tools to make significant impacts on community wellbeing. They should actively seek and adopt such innovations to enhance the quality of life for residents. By embracing these recommendations, local governments can effectively harness digital tools to create an inclusive, efficient, and caring city environment for all residents.

## 8. Concluding Observations

In conclusion, governance is the backbone of a caring city, enabling the implementation of policies and practices that prioritize collective well-being. A city thrives when its governance structures are designed to be inclusive and participatory, allowing residents to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods. Participatory governance encourages active engagement from citizens, ensuring that policies reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of the community. This involvement not only



empowers individuals but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards local issues.

Policy integration is another critical component of effective governance in a caring city. By harmonizing various policies across sectors, cities can address interconnected challenges such as housing, transportation, health, and education more effectively. This holistic approach ensures that resources are allocated wisely, and initiatives are aligned to produce maximum impact, leading to improved outcomes for all residents.

Strong leadership is essential to guide and inspire communities towards a shared vision of well-being. Leaders who demonstrate integrity, empathy, and transparency can cultivate trust among citizens, which is vital for collaborative efforts. Such leadership involves not only setting goals but also empowering local action by supporting and recognizing leadership at all levels in the community and encouraging civic engagement.

Social and economic justice must be foundational in any governance framework aimed at building a caring city. This means prioritizing resources and opportunities for marginalized communities, addressing systemic inequalities, and working to eliminate barriers that hinder equal access to services and opportunities. A commitment to justice ensures that all residents, regardless of their background, have a chance to succeed and contribute to the community.

Collaboration among various stakeholders – government, community organizations, businesses, and residents – enables a more effective governance model. By leveraging the strengths and resources of diverse groups, cities can create innovative solutions that cater to the specific needs of their communities. This collaborative spirit not only enhances service delivery but also builds social networks that strengthen community bonds.

A rights-based approach is also crucial in governance, as it emphasizes respect for human rights and dignity. Ensuring that every resident's rights are recognized and protected fosters a culture of empathy and support within the community. It requires that policies are designed with an understanding of their impact on individuals, leading to more mindful decision-making processes.

Sustainability plays a pivotal role in caring city governance. By prioritizing environmental stewardship and responsible resource management, cities can create spaces that are not only livable today but also resilient for future generations. Sustainable practices contribute to the long-term health of both the environment and the inhabitants, ensuring that urban growth does not come at the expense of nature or community welfare.

In an increasingly digital world, embracing digital innovation can enhance governance in a caring city. Technology can facilitate better communication, streamline services, and provide platforms for civic engagement, allowing residents to connect more easily with their leaders and with each other. By leveraging technology thoughtfully, cities can improve transparency and accountability, empowering citizens with information and tools to actively participate in governance processes.

Ultimately, the success of a caring city lies in its ability to balance the needs of its residents with a forward-looking vision for future generations. By cultivating a governance landscape that values inclusivity, equity, and accountability, cities can transform urban spaces into compassionate, vibrant, and sustainable communities. When governance prioritizes the well-being of all residents, it lays the foundation for a thriving urban environment where everyone can flourish, today and in the years to come.