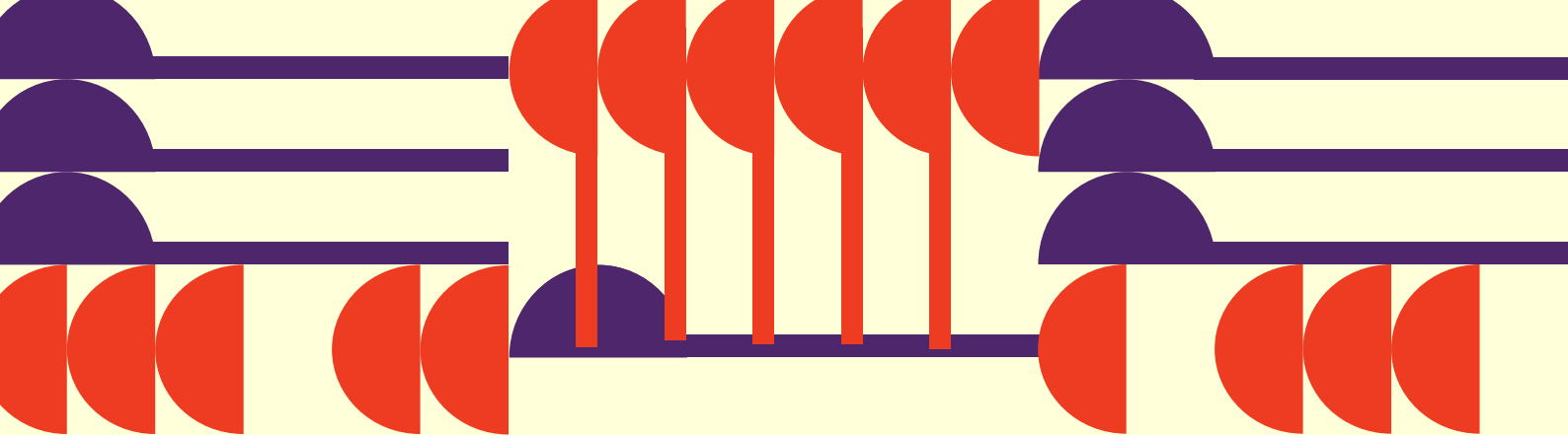




**Manifesto
for a caring
economy**



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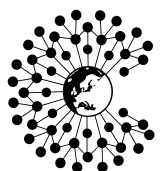
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Manifesto for a caring economy

Caring is at the core of human existence. You care for your household, for those who are sick, for your neighbors but also for your neighborhood and for nature. Caring is part of everyday life.¹ When we tie our children's shoelaces or take them to school, or run errands for the neighbor who has trouble walking, we are caring. When a friend helps us remodel or clean up our kitchen, or when a neighbor looks after our plants while we're on vacation, we are cared for. Care is also working with our neighbors in the community garden, working a shift at the soccer club bar, or volunteering. We are nowhere without all this caring. Without it, there's no life.²

Caring, paid and unpaid, is about meeting basic human needs like the need for connection and the need for reciprocity. Scientists including the American psychologist John Cacioppo have shown that in order to feel good, we need to both give and receive care³. We need a rich reciprocal connection with others to satisfy a deep-seated need to belong. It is part of our humanity. Human beings are much more than individuals; they are inextricably linked to others in nu-

1 We adopt a broad definition of the term 'care' that is more political than the narrow way it is commonly used. By doing so, we built upon the work of authors like Joan Tronto. As Tronto for example writes in her book *Democracy: Markets, Equality and Justice*: 'Care is everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes (notonly) our bodies, ourselves (but also) our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web'. (page 19) Tronto (2013).

2 This point is nicely illustrated by the German writer Mareice Kaiser in her book *Das Unwohlsein der modernen Mutter* (2020).

3 Cacioppo used neuroscientific research to show that people not only have a need to receive but also to give care. In his book *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, he writes that receiving care alone is not adequate enough to get a feeling of human dignity and does not improve the wellbeing of people who suffer from loneliness.

merous communities. The earth also needs care; we cannot just endlessly use it up. Recognizing our connectedness to each other and to the living world where we are part of means embracing community and caring.

We therefore call for putting care centre stage in our society. This is featured already in the rising wave of new economic thinking. In this way of thinking that is led by female economists across the world, people are cooperative, caring and social beings, not primarily competitive, calculating and individualistic. Community, connectedness, caring and reciprocity all take central places.

Not individual but collective problems

Given the crucial role of caring, one would think that we would give it a lot of space in the economy and in society. Unfortunately, that's not the case at all. We are stressed, overburdened and increasingly depressed. The pressure of work has increased while certainties are falling away. Flexible contracts are increasingly the norm and the number of working poor is rising. Many people, mostly women, can barely manage to combine care with paid work anymore. As mothers, we run from obligation to obligation, never fully present anywhere. We are chronically tired and often feel guilty: towards our colleagues, our children — we even feel guilty for not taking good care of ourselves. More and more men are also experiencing this feeling of being overburdened, albeit to a lesser extent.

At the same time, loneliness is growing while more people are living on their own, without community. Whereas most of us have a need to care for someone or to contribute to something, to be part of a group. These problems are routinely presented as individual problems yet they are collective problems that we need to solve collectively. Burnout, for example, is often seen as a personal failure rather than a social problem. While mental health services are working overtime, mental health problems are a huge burden on our society.

Time for a cultural shift and new political leadership

There is little room for caring for others or caring for ourselves. In our modern capitalist society, investments are generally only made for profit. Care work, unless it can be made profitable, is something that should be minimised from a capitalist point of view. Even child care is often something you purchase as a service, and has become part of the international financial system. Houses are turned into commodities to such an extent that we are now facing a housing crisis of unprecedented proportions. Market dynamics permeate the capillaries of our private lives: instead of offering an empty house to a friend to use for a vacation, we are enticed to put it on Airbnb. Care, child care, our homes: these crucial components of our caring lives should not be transactional but relational.

It is market logic that triumphs while the caring person often loses out.⁴ The current system provides little guidance on how to approach human beings as community beings. Our success at work largely determines our self-image. In recent decades, our society has become saturated by the political ideology of neoliberalism, in which the free market offers the best solution for everything, and where the main focus is on individualism, performance and competition. This radical ideology has also penetrated our heads. How can we turn the tide?

We need new political leaders who put caring for people and the planet at the centre, and a government that gives us the space to be caring people once again. Reducing market logic requires activist politics, but we also need a cultural change, a change in ourselves, because connectedness, the sense of community, reciprocity, cooperation,

⁴ The anthropologist and psychologist Alan Fiske showed in the early 1990s in his book *Structures of Social Life* that there are four ways in which people relate to each other: by sharing together, by conforming to authority, by applying strict equality, or through a market transaction. Although human beings' natural preference is often for sharing or equality – within the family or neighbourhood, for example – it is the market transaction in particular that has become increasingly dominant in human relationships and interactions.

and the realisation that we are interdependent comes from our perspective on what we value.⁵

Recognize the caring basis of our economy

Care is the foundation of our society and therefore of the economy.⁶ If we see the economy as a social system to provide for each other's needs and desires, we realise that it consists of much more than the free market alone. Besides the market, there is the state, but also the household and the community (also called commons). Care work is a type of work that is all about the relational, about taking time, about being flexible.⁷ Many of our caring tasks take place in two specific sectors of the economy: the household and the commons. We call this domain the care economy.

The care that takes place in the care economy as informal labour forms the basis of our (family) life and of our economy. Informal care, cooking, cleaning, shopping, taking care of children: the majority of such care tasks are still performed by women. Feminist economists also call these informal care tasks “reproductive” labor: that which is necessary to keep the family and the community running. Business, which strives for productivity and efficiency, cannot exist without this constant caring but this form of labour, mostly performed by

5 In the words of Joan Tronto: ‘Despite the voluminous discussions about the nature of democratic theory, politics, and life, nothing will get better until societies figure out how to put responsibilities for caring at the center of their democratic political agendas’ (preface p. ix). (*Ibid*)

6 The authors of *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*, published in 2021, have a similar message. As they write “Care does not merely involve the work that people do when they look after the physical and emotional needs of others – critical and urgent as this dimension of caring remains. ‘Care’ is also a social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of life. (...) Care is our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself.”

7 As the feminist author Leanne Segal, one of the authors of *The Care Manifesto* puts it in an interview with a Dutch Journalist: “Caring requires time and flexibility, and that is exactly the opposite of what the market wants. The market wants to make the way people provide care faster and more and more efficient. *Wat de zorg nodig heeft: tijd en flexibiliteit. En de markt gaat dat niet regelen – De Correspondent*)

women⁸, is invisible within our current economic models. It does not count toward gross domestic product (GDP). The key role of caring for the functioning of our economy is thus structurally invisible, to economists and to society.

Towards a caring society and regenerative economy

Since the 1970s already, there have been efforts to make care work visible and recognized.⁹ But when we put caring at the centre, as we do here, it also has implications for the design of our society and economy as a whole. In this view, all economic interaction from the household to the marketplace is embedded in a society of cooperating citizens, which in turn form part of the living world. Recognizing and embracing this would mean a cultural change centred on solidarity, community, ecology, reciprocity, cooperation and interdependence.

Imagine the market logic being pushed back, creating more room for the caring human being. Caring for our children, friends, neighbours or the garden becomes cool and individual achievement drops down a bit on our list of personal priorities. Relational economic principles of exchange and connecting individual interests with those of the community form the basis. There is a focus on the local economy, the neighbourhood and the district and a focus on social and ecological value creation rather than pure profit maximisation. We are committed to a localization and democratisation of the economy. We focus on alternatives to capitalist production. This takes many forms, from a greater role for the public sector to cooperatives, mutualism, and circular models of production.

In recent years, the range of insights on how we can shape the econ-

8 SCP, Emancipatiemonitor: <https://digitaal.scp.nl/emancipatiemonitor2020/wie-zorgter-voor-de-kinderen>

9 Much of this work has been done by feminist thinkers like for example Marilyn Waring, who wrote the provocative book *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth* in 1992.

omy and society differently has grown enormously. Women, in particular, are at the forefront of this intellectual revolution, shaking up the standard linear thinking within economics. They are sketching the outlines of an economy that places the well-being of people and planet at the centre, where GDP growth is a means and not an end in itself, and where there is room for value that cannot be expressed financially. Examples of these new economic schools of thought are the ideas of a doughnut economy, a wellbeing economy and a de-growth economy. They emphasise the need for a shift to an economy and a society in which caring people are given the space and resources to flourish. All of these currents stand for a shift to an economy in which we consider both our human necessities and the maximum carrying capacity of our earth.

They see human beings as cooperative, caring and social, not merely competitive, calculating and individualistic. Community, connectedness, concern for the planet and reciprocity are central here. They emphasise the need for a regenerative economy: an economy that is not extractive, but rather adds value to the broader ecosystem it belongs to.¹⁰ In doing so, these new economic narratives offer prospects for an inclusive, sustainable future for all.

Frontrunners

In a society that offers too few ways to appreciate people as community beings, citizens are taking matters into their own hands. Cultural change is already underway, certainly among the hundreds of thousands of active citizens united in community initiatives and

¹⁰ As the Heinrich-Boll Stiftung has written: “The challenge we now face is no longer just to create sustainable cities but truly regenerative cities: To assure that they do not just become resource-efficient and low-carbon-emitting, but that they positively enhance rather than undermine the ecosystem services they receive from beyond their boundaries.” It entails developing comprehensive political, financial, and technical strategies to create a restorative relationship between cities and the ecosystems from which they draw resources for their sustenance. <https://www.boell.de/de/navigation/urban-development-urban-future-regenerative-city-11735.html>

neighbourhood networks. That is why it is useful to take a closer look at them. These civic initiatives respond to our intrinsic need for community and place caring and sustainability at their core. By strengthening community life and neighbourhood ties, they form the foundation of local economic life. In this way they play a crucial role in the transition from an extractive to a regenerative economy.

An important part of these civic initiatives puts into practice an organisational model for caring, democratic communities that we call “commons”. In a commons, a community collectively cares for a shared resource or amenity without much interference from the market or state. In commons, citizens have control over the management of the resources or facilities, such as energy, food and shelter, but also healthcare, internet and knowledge. Elinor Ostrom won the 2009 Nobel Prize in economics with her research on the commons where, among other things, she demonstrated the resilience of this organisational model. The commons make principles such as reciprocity, sharing and caring more visible. A cooperative is the legal form that most closely aligns with commons.¹¹ Concrete examples include food cooperatives, urban vegetable gardens, informal care initiatives, and also neighbourhood cooperatives, internet platform cooperatives and creative commons productions and technologies.

At the neighbourhood cooperative “The Eester” in the Eastern Docklands of Amsterdam, neighbourhood residents actively cooperate in the fields of care, mobility, housing and sustainability. This cooperative originated with the local residents themselves. Shared ownership is central, so that the value produced together is preserved for the participants and the environment.

¹¹ A cooperative is an association of members who run a business together, with a common goal for all members. There is shared ownership and shared governance, so that the value that is produced together stays within the community and is preserved for the wellbeing of the participants and the natural environment.

“Caring is in everything we do here, whether it’s about sustainability, helping neighbours or children’s activities. It’s all about meeting and connecting. For me, caring is also about taking responsibility for the people you live with and the environment you live in.”

– Initiator and local resident Meta de Vries

At the De Nieuwe Meent (dNM) housing cooperative, a group of Amsterdam residents have joined forces to set up a housing community that is as inclusive and sustainable as possible. With the clear slogan “Homes are for living in, not for making a profit from”, they are nearing their goal through a long process of fundraising, leaseholder arrangements, and negotiations with the municipality. dNM is shifting the perspective from the home as an investment to a place to live and a safe place where caring is a given. The cooperative members also want to add value to the neighbourhood.

“I really chose to live with friends of colour, with knowledge of inclusion, diversity and activism, because we think we can create much more of a safe space in the household, which will be something new for all of us and hopefully really a calming factor in our living together. I think caring is a given within our housing cooperative.”

– Harsono Sokromo, member of the dNM housing cooperative

“In the collective space De Grubbehoeve in South-East, neighbourhood residents are stimulating entrepreneurship in a collective way through the project ‘Make your own Work’. The goal is to start a cooperative for beginning entrepreneurs in the Bijlmer, where residents can learn from each other and develop entrepreneurship skills without immediately having responsibility for

their own businesses. Participation is free in ‘Make your own Work’, asking for ‘reciprocity of commitment to each other and to provide continuity for the initiative’ instead of money.

People fall by the wayside, but that does not make them worthless. Everyone has talents. (...) The difficult thing is that this society makes very high demands.”

– Initiator and local resident Elisabeth Werter

We want these examples to give a concrete idea of what the caring economy looks like, and what it means for the people who shape it. Here, caring for people and the environment merges with reciprocity and the intrinsic need for connection. Here, people live and work according to a culture that is based not on individual achievement and competition but on interdependence and cooperation. If we want resilient neighborhoods with strong social cohesion, then this is what we as a society must aim for.

Government, take up your role

What more can we do to share and support caring? Ultimately, the transition to a caring economy for people and planet is about a value shift. It’s not just about how we produce, but also about how we live, how we work, and what we value. Individual achievement or collective well-being? Competition or cooperation? Specialisation or integration? Control or trust?

This shift must be reflected in institutions and policies. An active government is needed in order to support care work and distribute it more fairly. A government that ensures equal access to basic services such as housing, childcare and education. A government that does not marginalize care work but recognizes that care is the basis, and

ensures that both women and men have time for it.¹²

As early as the 1970s, the feminist movement in Germany and the Netherlands, among others, fought for a care income: support for caring through an unconditional allowance. This has many similarities to the ideas about universal basic income, but with a specific care focus. Shortening the work week is another way to free up space for caring, something else that feminists have been pushing for since the 1970s.

But the government must also commit to a greater role for the caring solidarity sector and regenerative economy. This means, besides (re) regulation of the market, there should be investment in the caring solidary sector and support for the local sustainable and collective movement. Local governments play an important role in this transition to a caring society, by directly supporting the democratising movement of neighbourhood networks and citizen collectives. For example, by accepting citizen collectives and cooperatives as partners and structurally entering into collaborations through Public-Collective collaborations.¹³ It is a choice: you can only use money once. What do we invest in as a society? In what kind of economy and therefore in what kind of society are we investing?

12 Simply giving women more time to care through for example prolonging maternal leave, could merely reinforce the gender gap. The 3 R's of feminist economics prescribe: Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute (See Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute Unpaid Care Work: How to Close the Gender Gap, Diane Elson 2017)

13 For more information about PCP's, see for example Democratic and collective ownership of public goods and services. Exploring public-community collaborations, Sept 2021, Transnational Institute and Building Public-Commons Partnerships, Building New Circuits of Collective Ownership, Russel & Millburn, Oct 2021

In Public-Collective Partnerships (PCPs) a collective of citizens, sometimes as a cooperative, works together on an equal footing with public institutions such as a municipality in the management of local facilities or in goods and services provision. Co-creation is central and a model for building strong communities and resilient neighborhoods and citizens at the city or regional level. One example is energy management in Wolfhagen, Germany, where a citizen cooperative co-owns the municipally owned energy company and participates in decision-making about its strategic orientation. Cooperative cleaning services in the cities of Valparaiso and Recoleta in Chile also rely on such cooperation. Chilean cities support the creation of cooperatives, in part by awarding tender contracts for the cleaning of public spaces to new cooperatives.

A cooperative incubator from within a municipality could play an important role and give a structural boost to the cooperative and broader commons sector by providing advice, mentoring programmes, financial support, a network and a link to the city's procurement. Just as investments are now being made in commercial start-ups, the city could also invest in the caring and cooperative economy. Cities like Barcelona and NYC are leading the way in this regard.

Put caring at the heart of the new economy

The call for a different, more inclusive and sustainable economy where the community and the neighbourhood take central stage is getting louder. You can see steps being taken in the right direction everywhere now. The municipality of Amsterdam for example is the first municipality to embrace the “doughnut thinking” of the Oxford economist Kate Raworth.

Let's put caring at the heart of our economy. Let's do justice to the human need for reciprocity, connection and community and recognize care as the foundation of our humanity. Let's embrace caring as the antithesis to the neoliberalism of personal responsibility, individual merit and competition. Let's put caring at the centre by actually investing in caring communities that are the foundation of the local economy. Not half-heartedly, but with the conviction that a transformation to a caring economy is the only way forward.

