Neighborhood and Urban Research

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Redoing Caring Practices through Urban Neighborhood Materiality

Abstract: In this article we analyze the role played by materiality in the reproduction of caring practices in urban neighborhoods. Our theoretical aim is to show the capacity of social practice theory to combine and reintegrate the perspectives of sociology, anthropology, and geography through the concept of neighborhood caring, which refers to the behavioral, symbolic, and spatial dimension of people's attitudes toward their neighbors as well as to the place they live in. Based on qualitative research in six urban housing estates in three cities, we want to examine four modes through which materialities are entangled in the invisible work of the everyday collective accomplishments of neighborhood well-being, that is: (1) integrating individual performances into collective endeavors of caring practices; (2) creating conditions for the orchestration (or disorganization) of practices of caring undertaken by a variety of entities (i.e., private and public, institutional and non-institutional); (3) being an element of social practice involved in the collective processes of negotiating and reflecting; and (4) delivering an emotional component facilitating or hampering day-to-day relations and interactions as preconditions of practices of neighborly care.

Keywords: caring, social practice, urban neighborhood, housing estate, materiality

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, socio-economic lockdown, and internal as well as external isolation have disrupted daily routines. Previous practices have been abandoned and replaced with others which need to be learned. The pandemic has revealed the mental fragility of populations and the importance of being able to deal with unforeseen events and their consequences. Illness, an uncertain work situation or lack of work, and the lonely feeling of anxiety and responsibility for oneself and dependent family members have been new experiences for many hitherto stable individuals and groups (Pierce et al. 2020). Studies on the individual and collective determinants of the pandemic have begun to emphasize the importance of social solidarity and integration (Matthewman and Huppatz 2020). These have now been given even greater importance by the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine and its political and economic consequences in Europe.

In the conceptual network of analyses on care, for well over a decade there has been an emphasis on an ideologically legitimized opposition between care as a private affair, occurring in homes and families, and care "as endemic to (potentially) all social relations

that matter" (Lawson 2007: 3). The first understanding resulted from the neoliberal vision of a society based on an individualistic ontology of social relations, assigning individuals— and sometimes the family—sole responsibility for themselves and their relatives. The second approach, developed in feminist thought, defined care as an element of a broader system and all social relations as contextual, partial, attentive, responsive, and responsible (Lawson 2007: 3). The battle with the coronavirus has undoubtedly contributed to a return to public discourse on fundamental social values, highlighting the significance of care for other people and for the entire ecosystem in conditions of crisis. As shown by the media, as well as by the first academic studies (Belén Cano-Hila and Argemí-Baldich 2020), in all societies affected by the pandemic people have organized themselves and helped each other on a grassroots basis, for instance, with shopping, delivering meals and medication, or maintaining daily contact with people living alone (for example "call a senior" type schemes). Ordinary people have always instinctively organized and integrated in the face of various threats and crises, irrespective of the current calls for solidarity and care (Jupp 2012). This has been seen particularly in Poland since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, as it has not been the central government or national agencies that have made an enormous effort to welcome and care for around three million refugees but local authorities, NGOs, and especially ordinary people.

The questions we ask in this article concern, firstly, the things people do every day in their immediate environment to care for themselves and the place they live in. Secondly, we consider the role played in this process by materiality, including both the objects that people use and the organization of space, which with other factors constitute daily practices. This text may be interpreted in the context of the pandemic, but we began the research on which it is based several years previously, and we hope our conclusions will be useful after the pandemic is over, as well as in regard to the long-term climate crisis.

The framework of the analysis is the model of practicing care in the neighborhood embedded in social practice theory, but with particular attention to the material aspect of practices. This family of theories assumes, firstly, that without a material component social life would be unthinkable; secondly, that things have diverse relationships with other components (meanings, emotions, capacities), creating wholes reproduced in everyday acts of behaviors, that is, social practices (Gherardi 2017; Morley 2017; Shove 2017; Orlikowski 2007; Scott, Orlikowski 2009; Schatzki 2010; Reckwitz 2002a).

The article has five main parts. In the first, we discuss the findings from theoretical works and empirical research conducted using the so-called praxeological approach, which forms the conceptual framework for our analysis. In the discussion, we lay out our conclusions concerning the materiality of social practices as an insufficiently researched issue in the context of the practice of care and resilience in local communities. The second part presents the methodology we used. In the third, referring to the results of our empirical research, we introduce various examples of practice of care in urban neighborhoods, focusing on its material aspect. In the fourth, we discuss the mechanisms through which materialities are involved in everyday accomplishments of neighborly care. In the conclusions, we indicate the transformative potential of practices of care in the current conditions of social uncertainty.

The Material Component of Social Practices

The theoretical approach forming the framework for this article is social practice theory (Schatzki 1996; Schatzki 2001; Schatzki et al. 2001; Reckwitz 2002b; Schatzki 2002; Rouse 2006; Shove et al. 2012; Hui et al. 2017).

The central conceptual category, as well as the place in which social practice theory situates the moment of "the social," is practice, meaning what people usually say and do in various situations and contexts. Andreas Reckwitz defines practices as a "routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz 2002b: 249). For Theodore Schatzki, meanwhile, practices are "embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understandings" (Schatzki 2001: 11). Both authors emphasize that practices constitute a whole that cannot be reduced to the elements mentioned in the definitions, as the key thing is the way in which these elements form the whole. Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) emphasize that the course of a practice depends on the accessibility and ongoing integration of at least three types of elements: materiality (things, consumer goods, infrastructure), competences (understanding and capacity to act in a given situation), and meanings (embodied understanding of the social meaning of a given practice). Practice is therefore understood as a dynamic "arrangement" of material and non-material elements that may be filled by many individual acts of behavior—performative ones—reproducing the pattern. For instance, eating practices can be reproduced in individual acts of consumption, scientific practices in individual acts of research, market practices in individual acts of exchange, and so forth.

As in related fields and approaches in the so-called post-humanities, such as ANT (Latour 2005) and Assemblage Theory (Merriman 2019), social practice theory also strongly emphasizes materiality as an immanent characteristic of practices. Wanda Orlikowski—faithful to the premises of Karen Barad's (2003) post-humanistic performativism—suggests abandoning the understanding of social and material elements as distinct "essences" (2007: 1438). In her view, this requires "replacing the idea of materiality as 'pre-formed substances' with that of 'performed relations,' in order to characterize the recursive intertwining of the social and material as these emerge in ongoing, situated practice" (ibid). Together with Susan Scott (2009), Orlikowski introduces the category of "sociomateriality" (Scott and Orlikowski 2009; Cecez-Kecmanovic 2014; Jones 2014). Developing this term, Matthew Jones extracts five basic notions that together create the meaning of sociomateriality: (1) *materiality* as central to the understanding of contemporary organizations and, in a wider sense, social phenomena; (2) *inseparability*, which stresses an ontological claim about the inextricable entanglement of the social and the material; (3) *relationality*, as an anti-essentialist rejection of the notion that entities have inherent properties, viewing these rather as relational; (4) *performativity*, which refers to a view of the relations and boundaries between the social and material as being enacted in practice rather than given; and (5) a focus on *practices*, rather than discourses or cognition (Jones 2014: 897). Materiality is therefore "integral to organizing, positing that the social and the material are *con-

stitutively entangled [italics in the original] in everyday life" (Orlikowski 2007: 1437). To recap: the idea of the socio-material nature of practices emphasizes that objects, programs, technologies or other material objects "do not stand alone with certain inherent properties, but […] their material characteristics and capabilities are relevant only in relation to specific situated practices" (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011: 1249; Scott and Orlikowski 2009). However, as Gherardi and Rodeschini add, "A position of constitutive entanglement privileges neither humans nor technologies, neither knowing nor doing; nor does it link them in a form of mutual interdependence" (2016: 269). It is rather the dynamics of practice itself that is responsible for how things, technologies, ideas, meanings, actors, and other material and non-material elements of practice are constantly connected and reconnected to sustain practice as a collective accomplishment.

Consequently, in analyzing the sociomateriality of a neighborhood we adopt the dynamic and relational premise that things are defined, constituted, and positioned by the role they play in realizing specific practices (Feldman and Worline 2016: 304; Shove 2017: 157). Thus, firstly, we assume that all the objects located in a neighborhood space— a bench outside a block of apartments, a parked car, or a notice on a door—acquire their characteristics only within practices and in relations with other elements of practices (meanings, competences, emotions); secondly, that the same objects may fulfil various roles within various, parallel practices; and thirdly, that they can change their status with the changing relations within a given practice or within a bundle of practices forming the greater whole.

Practices of Neighborly Caring and Their Material Aspects

We regard neighborly care as one of the ways of building and sustaining a local community of practices (Farnsworth et al. 2016). The concept employed in our article is significantly different from the classic views of care as looking after a family member in the domestic space. Much research on care has focused on people who are considered "vulnerable," in particular elderly or disabled people. Our study follows an approach in which care is considered as "important to and exchanged between everyone—friends, family, workmates—not just those groups normally identified with state welfare provision" (Bowlby 2012: 2102). Looking at the issue from that perspective, the concept of care addresses "species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Fisher and Tronto 1990: 40; Tronto 1993: 103). The scope of this understanding of care encompasses caring not only for people but also for the entire human living environment and all its elements, including the material objects whose quality contributes to a person's well-being. In this view of care, a neighborhood is a space in which acts of care take place (a space of care), but also a space that is the object of care (a space to be cared for). This means that care for people can be displayed not only directly, towards them, but also by caring for a place which they frequent. As Kathleen Mee (2009: 850) writes, by caring for the housing-estate space, people also care for their fellow residents.

Our position follows the evolution of thinking about care (as a moral reflex) taking place not only in research on ethics but also in sociology and gender studies. In literature on the ethics of care, we can observe a trend in which the concept of care is viewed outside its sentimental and privatized (limited to relations within a family) understanding. This is done, firstly, by breaking the link between care and physical or emotional proximity and, secondly, by giving this category rational characteristics, that is, objectivized and lacking "emotional" elements. Feminist studies question the "gender essentialism" that attributes to women particular dispositions associated with looking after others (Noddings 1982; Williams 2018: 3). Researchers from a political science and institutional background, meanwhile, propose expanding the interest in care beyond the private sphere to also examine how care practices function in the public, institutional space (Tronto 2010: 159). There have been signs that in reference to these types of practices the traditional distinction between the private and public sphere no longer makes sense (Urban 2015: 219). Consequently, the emphasis falls on understanding care as "…a culturally constructed directive, generalized concern or a sense of responsibility towards matters that transcend the private sphere, towards neighbors, other people within one's environment, and the affairs and values of city/community and society" (Fine 2005: 248; Rummery and Fine 2012). Furthermore, proponents of the new understanding of care favor replacing the asymmetrical "care giving/care receiving" relationship with attitudes of care attentiveness and responsibility for care embedded in the public space. This, however, demands expansion of the context of the analysis to encompass a complex system of relations and effects connected to practices of care realized in the public space (Tronto 2010).

From a praxeological perspective, care is something more than just taking an interest in others' well-being. It also entails actively practicing this interest. Following David Conradson, we assume that it is "the proactive interest of one person in the well-being of another and the articulation of that interest (or affective stance) in practical ways. Care may thus be present in everyday encounters between individuals who are attentive to each other's situation, who perhaps provide practical assistance or who simply make the time to listen to what the other has to say" (2003: 508). The most interesting thing for us is how materiality becomes part of this active interest in the well-being of others—and specifically, in the context of our research, closer and more distant neighbors. We also share the view of representatives of the post-humanistic stream of research on integration or social solidarity that analyses of these phenomena should focus not so much on human subjectivity as on the complex relationship between the human and material factors in which these phenomena are manifested (Kallio 2020: 267; Gherardi and Rodeschini 2016).

In their understanding of care, Gherardi and Rodeschini introduce a distinction between care and caring. "While 'care' as a noun leads to the exploration of values and concerns about moral order and the understanding of good and bad, 'caring' as a verb leads to the exploration of the practices whereby care is performed and its value is asserted or contested in the context of practising" (2016: 268). This statement leads to perceiving "caring" as "a situated activity, and a collective competence," where different actors "'do' care in situated practices, working together with artefacts and other technologies" (ibid.). Eventually, Gherardi and Rodeschini define care as "an emergent process, a competence

that is realized by a heterogeneous collective, composed of more or less able-bodied humans, tools, technologies, rules, and other 'non-humans' or 'more than humans' […] linked within sociomaterial relationships" (ibid.).

Situating the analysis in the praxeological paradigm, we understand practices of neighborly caring to mean systems of doing and saying and the meanings, motivations, and justifications that accompany them, oriented toward reduction of inequalities, inclusion in the network of neighborly relations, improvement in the well-being of people living on the housing estate, and raising the quality of life in the local environment.

In the next sections, we introduce the methodology of our empirical research and examine the two roles played by materiality in reproducing practices of neighborly care: infrastructural objects as objects of everyday care and sites of encounters as resources for opening the horizon of encounters and relations to enable practices of care for others.

The States in the Study—Description of the Sample and Methodology

Our analysis is based on data collected in 2016–2018 within the research project Differences and Boundaries in the Process of Creating Neighbourhood Communities in Large Cities. A Socio-spatial Study on six housing estates, located in three Polish cities. To better understand the practices as performed, situated, and relational we aimed for differentiation between the sites. First, we selected the cities, taking into account the diversity of their economic profiles, size, and location in parts of Poland with different historical backgrounds (including in terms of the culture resulting from the partitions of the nineteenth century). The populations of the cities we selected range from approximately 130,000 (Tychy) to almost a million (Krakow). Their functions in the country and regions are different: the city of Tychy is part of the Silesian conurbation, which was mostly built after the Second World War and has a labor market still oriented toward industry; Krakow is one of the most important academic, business, and tourist centers in Poland; and Lublin, a metropolis on the regional scale, is an academic and tourist center in the eastern part of Poland. In the second stage, the housing estates were selected after a reconnaissance and interviews with local experts. We considered the profile of the housing estates, their location in the wider urban structure, and their history (built in the twentieth or twenty-first century), which, in Poland's case, has an impact on local infrastructure (see Table 1). In our study, the housing estate is understood as a formal—but not necessarily administrative—unit in the city. It is recognized as an "estate," that is, its name is known and used by the city's inhabitants. Even if the original estate structure has changed over time—for instance new blocks have been built, new administrative structure has been introduced—the boundaries of the estate are still defined by the historically established road system. When selecting the sites of our field research, we were looking for estates that were both different (e.g., type and number of buildings, demographic profile) and somehow typical of the city. This is why, for instance, the new estate chosen in Krakow is a relatively small, gated community (the land ownership structure is fragmented in the inner city), while the one in Lublin is a comparatively large complex of several gated communities developed on the edge of the city.

Table 1

Comparison of selected characteristics of the researched estates

City	Krakow		Lublin		Tychy	
Estate	"Old"—K	"New"—P	"Old"—M	"New"—W	"Old"—A	"New"—B
Building date	1960s–70s	Since 2010—new blocks still under construction	1950s–60s	Since 2012—new blocks still under construction	1951–1956	Since 1999—new blocks still under construction
Location—distance to the city centre/ to the most important square (Tychy)	4 km	c. 7 km	c. 4 km	c. 9 km	c. 1.5 km	c. 0.5 km
Approx. number of units (blocks)	60	5	58	45	33	9
Type of buildings, features of estate	Mix of high-rise (up to nine floors) and low-rise (four floors) blocks, modernist estate structure including basic infrastructure, kindergarten, schools, shops, two parks; two walkways, one as the walking area. Most of the housing administered by two large housing associations. Important role of local Catholic church as the owner of the infrastructure (Catholic school, cultural and sport. complex, including a gym, two fields, theatre auditorium etc.).	Six-floor buildings in a gated area, few green spaces, small play areas inside. All amenities and basic infrastructure (shops, post office, public and private school, kindergartens) outside the gates, as part of an older neighbouring estate. Also a church in the immediate vicinity of the gated community (since 2012).	Nine high-rise blocks, 49 low-rise (up to four floors), 50% of the area is a green space (squares, trees etc.). Schools, kindergarten, cultural centre, shops. Estate administered by an old (one of the oldest in Poland) housing association. Campus university located in the proximity of the estate.	Mix of four-floor modern blocks designed and constructed by several developers; gated houses and communities administered by separate housing entities. Very poor social infrastructure (during the field research a school and kindergarten were under construction). A Catholic parish has been set up (but the respondents only knew there was a local parish priest; church under construction).	Blocks of three to five floors in socialist realism style. Structure including basic infrastructure, kindergarten (public and private), schools, libraries (for children and adults), health clinic, shops, church, central square, walkway. Most of the housing administered by the municipal management of residential buildings (with separate housing communities).	Blocks of two to six floors (mainly four floors). Structure including basic small shops (e.g. grocery, bakery) and services (e.g. hairdresser), centrally located large and attractive playground; the district primary school is "across the road" in a neighbouring estate; buildings administered by the municipal management of residential buildings or social housing associations.
Approx. number of inhabitants	10,000	2,000	6,000	5,000	4,000	2,000
Socio-demographic characteristics of inhabitants	Diversified structure, composed of two main groups: 1) permanent residents consisting of senior citizens and families with children, 2) tenants (students, young working people etc.).	Mainly people aged 30 to 50, middle-class couples or families with children and teenagers. Few older people and the tenants. The old surrounding estate represents a social and demographic mix.	Diversified structure, composed of two main groups: 1. permanent residents consisting of senior citizens and the new "gentrifiers," 2. tenants (students, young working people etc.)	Mainly people aged 30 to 50, middle-class couples or families with children and teenagers. Few older people and tenants.	Mixed population in terms of age, social and economic status; from individuals and families benefiting from social assistance to "gentrifiers" representing the new middle class.	Mainly people aged 30 to 50, many middle-class families with children.

Source: Smagacz-Poziemska, Bierwiaczonek 2022.

In each estate, the study began with an exploratory section and estate ethnography (photographic documentation, enquiries, observation). We carried out individual interviews on an ongoing basis in order to differentiate interviewee profiles in terms of age, gender, economic status, time spent living on the estate, and family situation (see Table 2).

Table 2

Interviewed inhabitants of the researched estates

City		Krakow		Lublin		Tychy		Total
Estate		"Old"	"New"	"Old"	"New"	"Old"	"New"	
Gender	Women	22	10	18	14	21	18	93
	Men	15	5	9	11	13	13	66
Age	18–35	7	5	8	15	4	4	43
	36–50	8	8	7	6	15	23	67
	51–65	10	2	3	4	7	1	27
	+65	9	0	9	0	8	3	29
Total		37	15	27	25	34	31	**159**

Source: project archive.

The interviews were transcribed, followed by the first phase of coding, to identify all the activities done by the research subjects on the estate. This procedure was performed on 20 interviews, resulting in identification of the most visible practices organizing estate life in the empirical materials, such as practices of car parking, parental involvement, and care. Following Schatzki's theoretical model of social practice, we developed a coding scheme consisting of both the performative part of a practice and its organizational dimension: how and why people do what they do (a comprehensive account of how the empirical material was collected, coded and analyzed can be found in our article: Smagacz-Poziemska, Bukowski, Martini (2021)). To analyze the material aspects of doing care in a neighborhood, however, we decided to apply the model proposed by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012). The latter is simpler than our original model based on Schatzki's theory. Although it does not grasp all the performative aspects of a practice, we found it "handier" as a tool, making it possible to simplify the rather complex and dynamic set of components involved in a practice.

Following Shove, Pantzar and Watson (2012), we assume that the course of practices depends on the accessibility and ongoing integration of at least three types of elements: materiality (things, consumer goods, infrastructure), competences (understanding and capacity to act in a given situation), and meanings (embodied understanding of the social meaning of a given practice). Distribution of these three elements varies both in the society as a whole and in specific groups (Blue et al. 2014). It is the way in which these three elements are connected, however, that forms a practice. Shove et al. (2012: 14–15) notice that "practices emerge, persist, shift and disappear when connections between elements of these three types are made, sustained or broken." We also adopt the dynamic as well as relational premise that things are defined, constituted, and positioned by the role they play in realizing specific practices (Shove 2017: 157). This premise has important theoretical and analytical implications. It indicates that objects acquire their characteristics only in practices and relations with other elements of practices (meanings, competences), that the

same objects can perform various roles within diverse simultaneous practices, and that they can change their status along with the changing relations within a given practice or within a bundle of practices, creating a larger whole.

While analyzing empirical data, however, we needed more detailed information to reconstruct the modes and ways in which materiality is involved in neighborly caring practices. To achieve this goal, we decided to follow Davide Nicolini's strategy of "Zooming in" (Nicolini 2012). In order to follow certain objects (Bueger 2014), we chose various questions from Nicolini's list in regard to tools, artefacts, and their mediation work:

"What artefacts are used in the practice? How are the artefacts used in the practice? What visible and invisible work do they perform? In which way do they contribute to giving sense to the practice itself? What connections do they establish with other practices? What sort of things do they carry into and make present in the scenes of action? Which type of practical concerns or sense do artefacts convey to the actual practicing?" (ibid.: 220).

Following the intuitions of Elisabeth Shove (2017), we will examine the general roles that materiality plays in reproducing neighborly care practices.

Materiality and Its Role in Practicing Neighborly Care

Elisabeth Shove (2017), inspired by Theodore Schatzki's concept of the material arrangements amid which practices transpire, develops her own approach, introducing a distinction that takes into account the role that materials play in the enactment of any one practice. She distinguishes resources, artefacts, and infrastructures as three roles that materialities fulfil in relation to practice. Things with their infrastructural relation to practice (such as power, data, or water) "constitute an essential backdrop to contemporary life" (ibid.: 158) and are almost invisible in daily life unless any failure or disaster happens. Another role of things in regard to practices is the devised-oriented one (artefacts). Shove stresses, however, that "things which are mobilised in practice are not merely 'used.' Rather, such things are implicated in defining the practice itself" (ibid.: 159). The last role that things fulfil in relation to practice is that of being resources. As Shove (2017: 156) notes, in this role things "are used up or radically transformed in the course of practice and that figure as 'resources.'" "This way of thinking about things is distinctively practice-centric," she adds.

Based loosely on this division and using its main premise about the relationship between things and practices as a signpost, we want to introduce to our empirical part two aspects which we think are important in investigating the role materiality plays in the practice of neighborly care. The first is connected with objects with a "dual role," in Shove's distinction: belonging essentially to the settlement infrastructure, they also serve as objects-in-use. These are buildings, stairwells, trees, greenery, open spaces, and many other elements that play the role of "background" for practices and are simultaneously the subjects of cleaning, cultivating, renovating, repairing, and (re)constructing as artefacts. The second aspect we want to shed light on is the way socio-spatial arrangements influence the affective components of day-to-day practices. Furthermore, we want to reveal the wider background of this relationship, indicating the social, economic, and class embeddedness of materiality.

The infrastructure/objects in a care relationship

The first, in the most general terms, is the role of "background" reality. For neighborly care, this background is the housing estate infrastructure, which becomes the "object" of care. We are particularly interested in such elements of the estate infrastructure as buildings and their fittings, stairwells, greenery, open spaces, and trees on the estate, as well as similar objects of care and renovation, and also objects of repair, (re)construction, and adaptation in the form of special paths, driveways, ramps, and other facilities, along with improvements for the disabled, the elderly, and all other users of the common space.

An example of a "community through care for infrastructure" is the case of the old M housing estate in Lublin, where a number of residents look after stray cats. On the estate, the group has placed several shelters which it regularly cleans and where it leaves food for the cats. Similar initiatives involve care for birds, and also planting and caring for the greenery around the buildings.

M: There is a group of cat lovers that has come to an arrangement […] I think the housing cooperative put the shelters [for cats] up, and they just look after them. They take care of it themselves, divide up the jobs, and look after the shelters. They're free-roaming cats. […] The people who do it are very discreet. One time we tried to talk to them […]; they categorically refused, because they didn't want to make a fuss about it. […] I once saw a lady come here with food, clean everything up, and tidy up around the whole thing. It's all arranged sensibly, well thought out, it works […] actually these mini-feeders—for example, a pellet, you can buy it now; it hangs on a tree in winter. For example, you can see feeders put out on balconies, people feed the birds. LU_M_M_12

Cooperation networks of residents and institutions form around elements of the estate infrastructure. The statements of representatives of the cooperatives show that not only do they not oppose residents' initiatives regarding planting things in the space around the buildings, but they even finance these schemes, as well as continuing to care for them and organizing professional services (trimming, conservation). The estate infrastructure therefore becomes a keystone of the practices of caring for their communal space employed by residents and the institutions formally responsible for the estate's upkeep. Moreover, institutions support residents in their initiatives by providing fertilizers or soil as well as defending them from opponents of "spontaneous" care for the infrastructure, who also appear:

Researcher: But, for example, you allow somebody to occupy a piece of the lawn and make a garden there, right?
Interviewee: I mean, you know, in fact we say if someone has the neighbors' consent and so on, let them do it. But if someone [an activist] comes along and says, "Who gave you the right to give permission?" and so on…
Researcher: An activist, a local one, I take it?
Interviewee: Right! But we don't give it in writing, sir, no, no.
Researcher: I see.
Interviewee: We try to pretend not to see those things, though. But on the other hand, it's nice, because there's a plant in front of the entrance to the block and so on. I don't have any complaints, for example, we have Maria, who made herself a little garden, she took good care of it just to make sure it was looked after. Because that's the most important thing. Although for the greenery there's a deduction [in the budget] and often if we need fertilizer or something, we fund it, or we buy her tree bark or fertilizer or soil to put down and so on. […] The administration department keeps on eye on it.

Behind the appearance of banks of flowers lies a year-long rhythm of shrewd collaboration: collecting seeds in autumn, exchanging them, preparing seedlings, watering,

ensuring that the neighbor is in a sufficiently good physical state to be able to come down and help with the weeding. Stairwells, green areas, and playgrounds may also be such places. They permit physical contacts to be formed and sustained, which in turn is a condition for other types of more personal and intimate contacts that become the basis for providing care and creating local geographies of care (Conradson 2003). It is not only nature on the estate that is the subject of interest and care, but also the material infrastructure, which needs to be monitored, repaired, or refurbished on a daily basis. This is noted by people whose years of administrative experience and inner passion for social activism lead them to place particular emphasis on the use of material objects:

Interviewee: You know what, I admit that some neighbors from other buildings say […] that for years I've been looking after this block, that I'm in constant contact with the cooperative services. And, in fact, they see me checking the work that takes place, with the laborers, they see me because I spend so much time doing that, […] that they know I react and respond, and don't just ignore it, say it's OK. And perhaps unconsciously, but to a large extent, when it comes to this kind of disruptions, disputes, it might also be part of it a little, that they see someone being active, someone who has been looking after the block for years and knows all the installations like the back of his hand […] especially as sometimes they ask me not just about this block, but also to advise and have a look, to give them something. KRK_KR_M_09

Care for material elements is accompanied by building a sense of shared responsibility for the place of residence. The following quotation shows how the technical and material aspects of living somewhere are incorporated into the discussion of shared responsibility for the communal space.

But there was a group of people…as I call them… kind of entitled…and they just demanded what was theirs. And my answer was always: "It works two ways. I know you care about it and you have the right to, but you tell me what duties do you have in the housing community?" Because these people came…to the housing estate from various places, and they didn't know how to—I should say, some still don't!—live in a housing community which is THEIRS. They just say the whole time "THEY." And I answer them: "Who are they?" When you answer that question—who "they" are—I'll tell you that you and he are also part of this "they." And that's how it looks. TY_B_M_22

In the interviews, we find numerous examples of informal and institutional care for the estate infrastructure, including its diverse components: material and natural, animate and inanimate. These show how cooperation networks for maintaining and caring for the infrastructure are formed among various actors and awareness of shared responsibility for the place develops.

Socio-spatial arrangements of neighborhood care: bodily performances, materiality, and emotions

In our research, we discovered a distinct link between ways of organizing space and the quality of life on the estate as well as the quality of inter-neighbor relations, which create a potential favoring or hindering the formation of practices of neighborly care. The organization of space is connected to the period when the estate was built, and this in turn is linked to the urban planning guidelines in operation at the time, which affect the type and means of construction and the quality of the service infrastructure on the estate (see Table 1). Apart from the infrastructure and material organization, there is another important aspect in the creation of local practices: the sentiments attached to specific objects, events,

and people. Emotions influence the temporal and spatial organization of local practice, for instance, motivating or discouraging people from using the common space (when they know their neighbors are there) or causing people to avoid their neighbors or join with them in enacting local practices (such as watching children at the playground, weeding the flowerbed, walking a dog, etc.). Choosing estates with various stories, we would like to explore how emotions "work" in "doing care" at different sites.

The old A housing estate in Tychy was supposed to be a prime example of modern, socialist housing construction. Comfortable apartments with windows on both sides, sociopetal communal spaces, and a full network of services available on site formed a kind of "city within a city" favoring internal integration despite a varied social makeup. Years later, these urban planning characteristics have proved to be an important asset, stimulating local gentrification. Common spaces surrounded by buildings are conducive to neighborly relations based on a kind of exchange of favors between recent arrivals and older ones—often single men—who have lived on the estate from the beginning. An example of one such neighborly support network for caring for children playing outside the apartment buildings is described by a young resident of A housing estate:

Interviewee: Well, you know […] he'll come down [the neighbor]. For example, he'll stay…look after my children, since I have a nine- and a six-year-old and I'm still afraid to leave them in the yard, so he'll stay and say, "Ola, go and finish the soup, I'll look after them for you." Great. […] Not for a long time, because I try not to take advantage, but when there's an emergency situation. […] I think that [it happens in other entrances], because I see here, in the yard, for example, that two mothers are sitting there but there are more children. Everyone has their eye on the others…But here I ask this neighbor specifically, not him, or he offers himself. So I know that [my son] is being looked after. And I know that if they run out on their own there's always some other mother there and they'll watch them. TY_A_M_17_A and B

Owing to the design of the estate as a spatial-functional whole complete with numerous commercial/service, educational, cultural and administrative institutions, comprising many semi-open spaces and yards, relations between the estate's residents overlap: in formal and informal contacts, various functional contexts (education, services, administrations), and numerous spatial systems (neighborhood/estate). This in turn translates into a frequency and quality of relations that is important for social resilience, providing a good foundation for building other components of local resilience: attachment to place and local identity.

Another example is a new estate in Tychy. The community-care role is manifested in an underground garage in a block on one of the new estates we studied, which during football championships is transformed into a meeting space for residents. They remove their cars, somebody brings down a projector, everybody brings chairs, and they exuberantly set about organizing the cleaning and rearranging of the place. Three circumstances should be mentioned to shed light on the wider context of this event: the building of communal spaces facilitating the formation of relationships, a generational community (mostly young families with small children), and the type of ownership (housing loans offered to persons with average income).

W Estate in Lublin was built in a different urban planning regime. It is an example of a typical new housing development from the 2000s, built on dedicated plots according to free-market rules, with private infrastructure (playgrounds, parking spaces), communal spaces limited to the minimum specified by law, and a weak infrastructure of services and institutions. The whole estate is de facto made up of many gated mini-estates, which form

communities of apartment owners. W Estate is mostly inhabited by young representatives of the middle class, who have taken out large mortgages to buy their own apartments. Relations between communities often involve conflicts over access to shared resources (parking spaces), as well as tensions resulting from jealously guarded privileges (estate infrastructure):

And it's really annoying that people would like to shut off their own things but use everything open to all. Wherever they can go, right? Because there was a group of people here who wanted to fence off the playground so children from other [communities and estates] wouldn't use it. Because we pay for its upkeep—we all have sand in all the playgrounds, which needs changing, which costs money, but on the other hand we said, "We're going crazy, we don't want to fence ourselves off." From the outset we said we didn't want to fence ourselves off and wouldn't…probably wouldn't fence ourselves. Unless they somehow forced us to, I don't know, in some way, but… [laughs]. LU_W_I_08

The examples above reveal how regimes of spatial planning affect the quality of neighborhood relations, thereby shaping the opportunities and limitations of local communities to counteract the effects of unfavorable phenomena and events. These examples show the mutual involvement of material and emotional (semantic) elements. The material infrastructure (communal benches, greenery, playgrounds or the lack thereof) and architectural arrangement (open, prosocial or closed, antisocial) not only affect the lack or presence of social tensions but also emphasize or weaken social distances by encouraging or discouraging the formation of neighborly relations. The elements of the estate infrastructure and architectural arrangement can also influence people's generalized, emotional relationship to the estate space, which can block the affective elements of practices of care that are essential for their construction and reproduction.

Discussion

In the empirical section of this article, we showed various examples of the entanglement of a housing estate's materiality in everyday practices of caring for the wellbeing of the neighborhood community. On this basis and in regard to the questions Nicolini raised in relation to tools and artefacts and their mediation work, we reconstruct the (in)visible work that materialities perform in neighborhood practices seen as a collective accomplishment. We find four aspects of this work: integration, intermediation, reflexivity, and affectivity.

The first aspect shows how tools and artefacts contribute to the integration of individual practices into collective practices. Caring for stray cats is an example of infrastructure involvement in performances of neighborhood caring. This case represents the most integrated form of caring as a collective action. Co-orchestration of the activities is invisible to an outside witness. The "cat infrastructure" adapted to the customs of "non-human actants" is discreetly incorporated into the space and architectural elements of the estate, without disrupting its operation or causing potential reactions from other residents. The cats' carers establish a division of duties to provide the cats with constant care. In summary, analysis of the practices of caring for cats reveals how specific elements of these practices, such as the human actors (carers), the semantic-emotional structure (care for the weaker), non-human actants (cats and their habits), and material factors (feeding places, walkways to

balconies), are orchestrated to take into account feline dispositions (timidity), the identity of the carers (which persons take part), feeding times, and sites on the estate (discreet places).

A second aspect of the materiality in action is its role in coordinating the efforts invested by individuals and institutions. This is the case with caring for greenery on the estate, including tiny gardens. Negotiation of the objectives of two types of practices toward the same element of the estate infrastructure comes with an accepted division of responsibilities. The spaces next to the apartment blocks become a part of coordinated practices of collective caring performed by the inhabitants and formal institutions. It is worth stressing here that the "backyard" nature of greenery proves to be a characteristic that facilitates coordination of practices. For residents, it is often an extension of their private space, encouraging their personal and complete engagement and enabling the estate administration to limit itself to auxiliary and supporting roles. Material components therefore become a factor helping to integrate practices of caring for the estate green spaces as a collective accomplishment.

Thirdly, materiality—including infrastructural communal parts—is subject to negotiation, and consequently also the reflexivization of practices of neighborly care, including reconciling this component with other elements of these practices. Some residents in the community want to absolve themselves of personal responsibility for common spaces by excluding these spaces from the scope of everyday caring practices. For others, care for shared spaces (the condition of infrastructure) is a significant part of their teleo-affective structure, as Schatzki (2002) would call it, or, according to the model introduced by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson, the meanings assigned to these practices. While some claim that care for common spaces is the duty of residents, others argue that it should be a task for service-providers who are paid to do the work. Disagreement over the meaning of the term *shared or common space* and the associated practical-ethical connotations (such as who has and does not have the moral obligation to care for it) precludes closure of an important element of social practice (meanings) and its connections to other element (e.g., material), thus preventing practices of caring for common spaces from being activated as a collective accomplishment.

Fourth and finally, materiality—or, more broadly, spatiality—owing to its various involvement in wider orders (social, class, economic), influences the affective relationship with shared spaces and the estate as such. In the second subchapter of the empirical section, we quoted extracts from interviews made in estates built as part of various urban-planning regimes, with extreme examples being the modernistic estates of the 1960s and 1970s and gated communities from the early twenty-first century. Our research provides empirical evidence not only of the relevance of connections between competences, materials, and meaning, but also the subtlety of the forms of connections. The research conducted within other theoretical paradigms, for example, using the concepts of belonging or neighborhood attachment in quantitative studies (including Bonaiuto et al. 2003; Francis et al. 2012) clearly show the link between the quality of a shared space and how it is organized and the sense of belonging. Our research confirms this picture, as well as adding new elements and contexts. In the case of a gated neighborhood, the ownership structure of the estate space—which has been exploited by the developer to create the maximum saleable floor area—has led to a lack of shared spaces. Physical obstructions (fences, gates, prohibition signs, etc.), both those originally built in the new estates and those "added" to the structure

of the old estates, and the relationships between buildings, streets, and pavements, support the (re)production of a socio-spatial, monocultural class system. These fences, obstacles, barriers, and prohibition signs, which are a symbolic reflection of the individualization of ownership relations, create a space that emotionally discourages meetings, the forming of relations, and the building of bonds, and consequently makes it difficult to implement care for neighbors as a communal venture. This is unlike modernist estates and also new (not gated) ones where both the arrangement of the buildings and what is found between them symbolically opens the space and "invites" people to form relations. Fences and gates emphasize social distances, differences, and aversions. Meanwhile, a shared space filled with appropriate artefacts (benches, sandpits, green spaces) offers the material tools essential in forming relations, while also expressing a symbolic shortening of social and class distances. A lack of common spaces or an infrastructure blocking contacts reinforces an emotional atmosphere that discourages joint initiatives.

Settlements' social profiles (i.e., class-homogenous or class-differentiated), in combination with the types of housing-estate arrangements (old, popular-type ones or new, development-type ones), translate into everyday neighborly practices and therefore practices of care.

As we can see from these two examples above, all everyday actions confirming socio-spatial distances or contesting them by public caring are "consequential in producing the structural contours of social life" (Feldman, Orlikowski 2011: 1241). This makes a neighborhood a good terrain for observation of the constant process of (re)producing these wider contexts of social order that facilitate or hinder neighborhood care practices.

Conclusions

By focusing on neighborhood care practices, we show, firstly, the potential of a praxeological approach in sociological research on the mechanisms of local integration and disintegration. Secondly, we aim to shed light on the subtle, unobvious, or hidden aspects of care enacted out of a home and its material and spatial entanglements.

Material elements constitute an integral element of all practices, including practices of neighborly caring, which protect a community from the destructive impact of many external and internal factors.

Analysis of everyday practices in urban housing estates shows four ways in which materiality is entangled in generating and reproducing practices of neighborly caring, namely: (1) integrating different performances into neighborly caring as collective accomplishment; (2) mediating among a variety of actants involved in practicing neighborly care; (3) acting as a facilitator for processes of negotiating and reflecting on day-to-day practices; and (4) thanks to its affective and emotional attributes, influencing day-to-day relations and interactions as preconditions of practices of neighborly caring. These aspects of the work that materialities perform in neighborhood practices seen as a collective accomplishment can be referred to the more general roles materiality may play in practicing local community. The first role is to generate a sense of belonging to a place through caring for its infrastructure. A housing estate's infrastructure constitutes a natural potential for building social proximity

through a constant, everyday presence for interactions and occurrences, and also for producing individual and collective emotions and everyday lifestyles as an element of new local community forms. The second function refers to how places in the housing-estate space may be used for forming relationships and constructing practices of caring. The availability and density of these places, in connection with the urban layout and institutional saturation, either encourages and enables or constitutes a natural barrier to the formation of neighborly relations, and on their basis, the initiation of practices of care. At the same time, the arrangement of a space favors social relations or, on the contrary, weakens the readiness for such relations. Third and finally, materiality acts as an essential building block for direct neighborly interactions and relations. Modification of these components and their connection in new bundles of behaviors and expressions makes it possible to transform anonymous and non-binding relations into those full of care and engagement in regard to immediate and more distant neighbors. In this way, residents of the housing estates that make use of the available materiality—including their bodies, objects, greenery, and animals—generate and reproduce practices of care for their neighbors, thereby strengthening relations and building systems of mutual support. The social competences developed in this way become another potential available to a community in dealing with unfavorable phenomena, crises, or risks.

Examining care from the perspective of materiality, however, also reveals nuances in the image of "neighborhood" that are not noticeable in studies of attitudes: caring in the neighborhood is not a "spectacular" practice, but rather arduous work. The difficulty with perceiving it results from the fact that the immediate objectives are not obvious or their social perception is trivialized and particularistic. Feeding free-roaming cats or planting flowers next to the entrance to a block of apartments could easily be dismissed as someone's whim, and keeping an eye on the neighbors' children who are playing outside may be seen as simply killing time. On the other hand, Gherardi and Rodeschini could be followed in seeing these deeds—which are minor but noteworthy—as binding, compositional practices that reinforce the collective pursuit of the community's wellbeing. Materiality and its numerous variants and aspects constitute an intrinsic attribute of the lives of individuals and communities, both in the context of threats of various size and intensity and in terms of the resources and potentials that, when exploited and processed appropriately, could counterbalance these threats and even help to inure individuals and communities to such crises.

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