

Who Cares? Thinking with and through Care for Sustainable Marine and Land Planning on Islands

Islands as Lighthouses for Sustainability (ISLAS) 2026

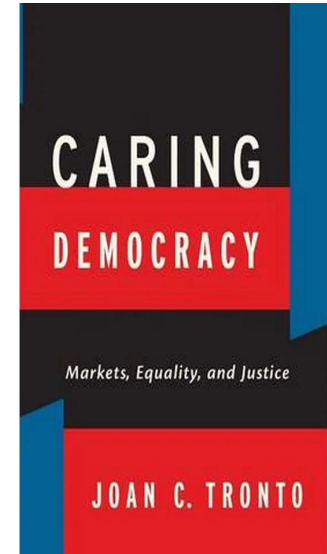
Sissal Dahl, s.d.t.dahl@rug.nl



| ISLANDS
ERASMUS MUNDUS RESEARCH MASTER

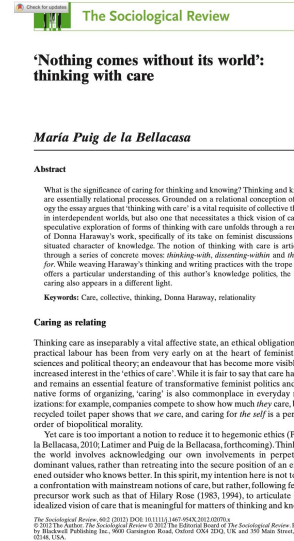
On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web (Fisher & Tronto, [1990](#), p. 40)

- **Caring about — attentiveness.** Noticing needs, vulnerabilities, dependencies, and neglect.
- **Caring for — responsibility.** Taking responsibility and asking who should respond.
- **Care-giving — competence.** Doing care well, with adequate time, skill, resources, and infrastructure.
- **Care-receiving — responsiveness.** Asking whether care meets actual needs and how it is experienced.
- **Caring with — solidarity, plurality, trust, justice.** Organising care collectively, democratically, and fairly.



Thinking with and through care

- **Thinking with care:** it gives us vocabulary and sensitivity for noticing relations, needs, dependencies, responsibilities. What and whose needs become visible? What relations sustain life here? What kinds of labour, support, maintenance, and responsibility are involved?
- **Thinking through care:** it influences how we understand contemporary problems and pressures, sustainability challenges, and possible solutions. How does a planning issue look different when care is central? Who benefits, who carries the burden, and who is excluded?



Care as material, embodied, spatial, formal and informal

- **Embodied and material:** care depends on bodies, time, energy, skills, buildings, roads, ferries, homes, technologies, tools, and physical environments etc.
- **Formal and informal:** care happens through welfare services, planning systems, healthcare, schools, family, neighbours, volunteers, and community networks etc.
- **Spatially and culturally embedded:** care is shaped by availability, distance, proximity, mobility, housing, land-sea relations, local norms, histories, traditions, language etc.



Care in planning for sustainability

Explicitly recognised in for example *SDG 3. Good Health and Wellbeing*, and in *SDG 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies* (SDG 5. Gender Equality).

In its broad meaning care cuts across many SDGs such as, education, decent work, reduced inequalities, sustainable communities, climate adaptation, life below water, and life on land.

It is necessary to stay critical to *who* is expected to care, who is actually being cared for and under what conditions?

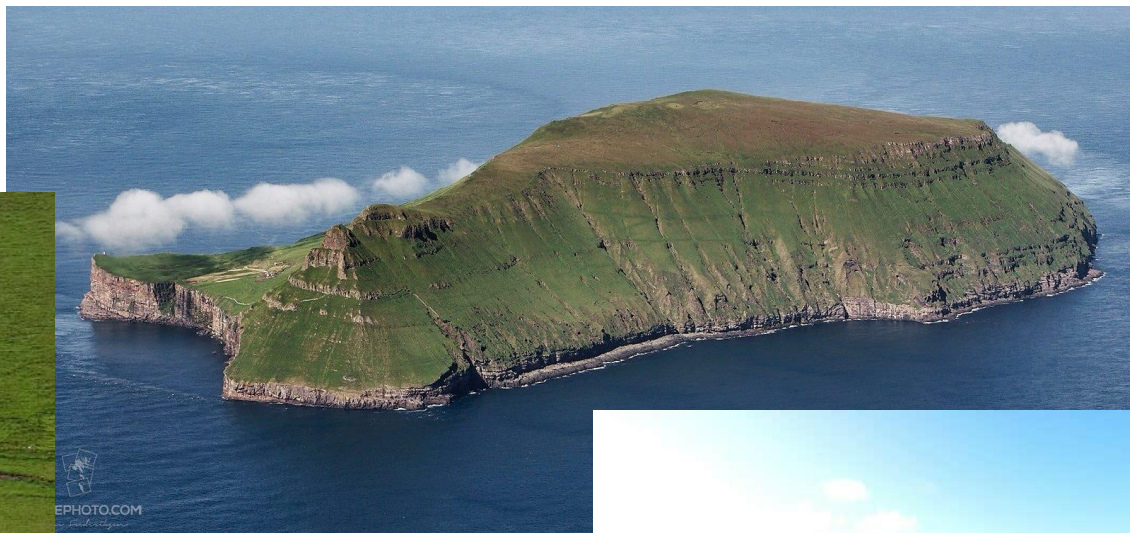
The crisis of care

The care crisis refers to the growing pressures on how care is provided and sustained, driven by demographic change, welfare retrenchment, economic reforms, labour shortages, and rising living costs etc. It impacts both formal systems (hospitals, schools, eldercare) and informal care (families, neighbours, communities) (Bhattacharya, 2018; Daskalaki et al. 2021; Fraser, 2017; Hall, 2019)

The “logics” of care

- Care follows relational time, not only clock time. It is not always predictable or schedulable.
- Care resists dominant economic logics because it cannot easily be stored, optimised, outsourced, or made profitable.
- Care is organised through uneven geographies, for example the separation of home and work, migration, demographic shifts, service centralisation etc.





Making care visible in planning

- **Infrastructures of care:**

The physical infrastructures that enable care: roads, transportation, digital connectivity, housing

The social infrastructures of care: community gatherings, social networks

Care as an infrastructure: the social relations and labour that enable life to continue

- **Care as a resource:** makes us think through governance of availability, accessibility, distribution, but also as something that can be extracted and depleted, brings into question whether care is a private or public good.

Planning with care

- **Maintenance and repair:** Instead of only creating new initiatives developments to asking what needs to be kept going, supported, restored, or fixed and who is involved in this
- **Responsibility and redistribution:** Who cares, who pays, who decides, who benefits, and who is burdened?
- **Participation and democratic deliberation:** who is asked and involved in planning and decision making, is it representative and who is missing?

Planning for interdependencies

Care reveals interdependencies and shows how people, places, infrastructures, institutions, land, sea, and more-than-human life depend on one another.

Care also create relations through repeated acts of support and attention, and generate trust, reciprocity, and solidarity.

Planning can help shape and support these relations, but it can also weaken them through overburdening, service loss, or environmental degradation etc.



Human and more-than-human interdependence

Care is not one-directional: Humans care for environments through e.g. protection, restoration, and conservation, but environments also care for humans

People and more-than-human life are interdependent: life is sustained through relations with the sea, fish, weather, soil, water, animals, coastlines, plants, and ecosystems.

For example, creating a marine protected area can support care for marine biodiversity, but depending on how it is planned, it might also disrupt local fishing practices, access to the sea, cultural knowledge, and community relations.

Looking through care can reveal tensions, conflicts and the political dimension of sustainable planning



Who or what is being cared for, and who or what is neglected?

Whose care is recognised as legitimate, and whose is contested?

Who decides, who benefits, and who carries the cost?

Islands through the lens of care?

On the one hand island conditions can (re)inforce pressures and challenges for care:

- Distance, mobility, access
- Limited services
- Demographic shifts
- Seasonality and pressures from tourism
- Heightened informal responsibilities
- Lack of formal information and communication
- Climate change
- Social norms and pressures

Islands through the lens of care?

On the other hand, island conditions also highlight the possibilities of care:

- Social proximity and encounters
- Strong and extensive social relations
- Informality
- Cultures and networks of mutual aid
- Democratic participation
- Rhythms that are (sometimes) more aligned with care
- Local knowledge

Thinking with the Faroe Islands, Lesvos, and the Wadden Islands through informal care relations in the making of everyday life

What does inquiring into care tell us about possibilities and limitations in making and sustaining viable and meaningful island lives - when, how and for whom?



Serious games

A serious game is a game designed for more than entertainment, it uses the structure and engagement of games to explore real-world issues, create understanding, or support learning. These games still use gamification and game elements, which include things like choices, rules, goals, and feedback to create an engaging experience, but these are used to explore real-world issues rather than just to entertain (Ampatzidou et al., 2018; Christiaanse, 2025).

For example for research, participatory planning and democratic decision making, and for public dissemination

Making everyday island life

Island board: start → end = one day

Roles: each player has responsibilities (e.g., parent, elder)

Care resources: start with limited care resources (visible to all)

Time: passes by rounds or real-time (e.g., 30 mins)

Dice: randomness of moving through the day

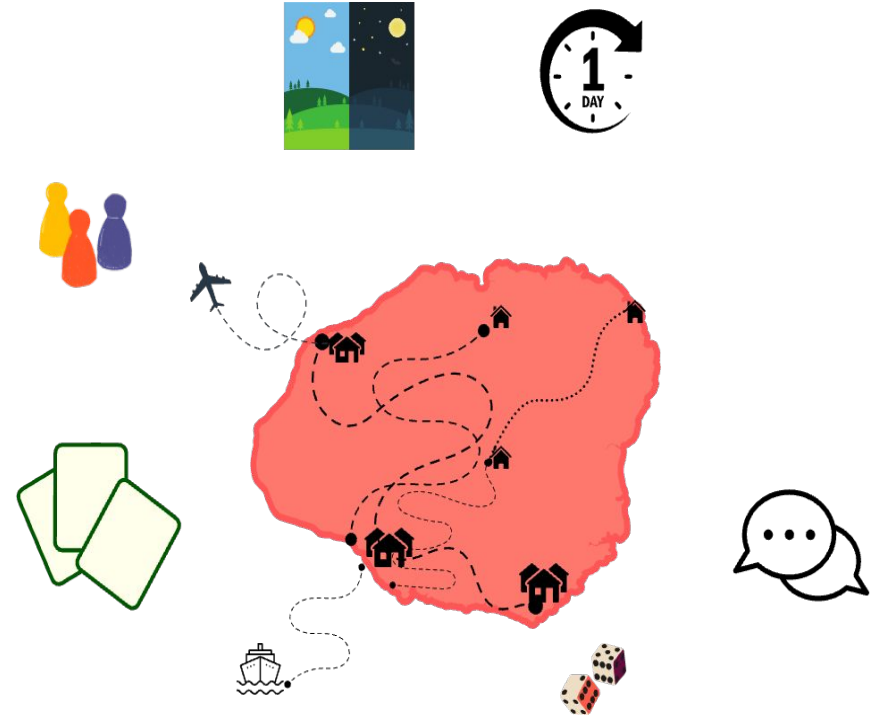
Care resource stops + points: optional stops to collect resources

Situation stops: mandatory challenges needing resources

Solve: use your own, borrow, or wait to get resources

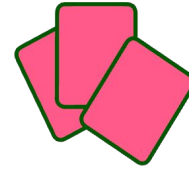
Discuss: group decides if resources fit situations

Goal: win only if everyone makes it through the day (collaboration)

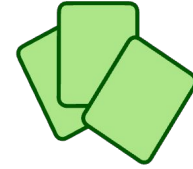


Roles and responsibilities:

For example man 30s, two kids; elderly woman, grandmother, husband needs daily care

**Care (care broadly understood):**

Material (Money, car, medicine); Relational (grandparents, neighbourhoodfacebook group); Institutional (hospital, parental leave); Temporal (flexible working hours, holiday hours); emotional (patience, motivation) spatial (public bus, increased ferry times). It could also be something cultural, environmental, technological etc.

**Everyday (island) situations:**

Delayed ferry times; child too sick to go to school; an elderly relative needs groceries but your work hours got extended etc.

