BOOK REVIEWS

HOUSING IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD: A BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

of

INTRODUCTION TO HOUSING, 3rd Edition, Edited by Katrin B. Anacker, Andrew T. Carswell, and Sarah D. Kirby, Routledge, New York, 2025.

In recent decades, the housing environment in the US has changed substantially creating a need for a second, and now a third edition of *Introduction to Housing* by Katrin Anacker, Andrew Carswell, and Sarah Kirby. The first edition of *Introduction* was published in 2005 after the housing boom of the 1990s that led to rising housing prices. The second edition was published in 2018 after the US had recovered from the housing bust of the late 2010s following the housing boom. With America having recuperated from the COVID-19 pandemic, this third iteration "discusses [the] past, current and future challenges of the housing market" (p. 7).

Of the 23 chapters in this volume (prepared for the Housing Education and Research Association), 19 are either completely new or substantially different from previous editions. This 464 page book is divided into five sections: "Introduction," "Housing Tenure versus Homelessness," "Housing Policy," "Special Topics in Housing," and "Housing in a Global Context."

Drew begins the Introductory Section by discussing three emerging issues in the US housing market (Chapter 1). First, the finance industry of the 1980s and 1990s developed mortgage products for lower income households (e.g., sub-prime home loans), but these products later fueled increased foreclosure rates. Second, the affordability crisis for rental households has worsened and government resources have fallen far short in meeting needs. Finally, residential construction has been slow to recover from the 2011 recession with the most important cause being regulations, especially those related to multi-family construction.

Beamish, Goss, and Lee (Chapter 2) provide a useful conceptual framework for understanding the factors influencing housing choices. According to this framework, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics influence "psychographics (lifestyle, housing values, cultural orientation, generational differences), which influence housing norms (tenure, space, structure, housing quality, neighborhood quality, and expenditures), which in turn affect the choice of a particular house" (p. 49). The authors should have acknowledged the already extensive literature using this type of

path analysis model to evaluate the determinants of residential satisfaction, mobility and quality of life (see for example Marans, Stimson, & Webster, 2024).

By 2050, the US will no longer be a predominantly White country; "people of color" will be in the majority, according to Anacker, Chapter 3. Given that the homeownership rate of Blacks and Hispanics is under 50 percent, and that the growth rate for "people of color" exceeds the White growth rate, the US may, in the not too distant future. no longer be a nation of homeowners, but rather a nation of renters. This shift is problematic given the higher cost-burden among renters, and because homeownership is a key strategy for building wealth over time. Anacker's use of the term "people of color" (Blacks, Hispanics, Asians) is problematic because of wide variations between ethnic groups and within them. For example, "people of color" are not all similarly disadvantaged in the housing market. The Asian homeownership rate is closer to the White rate (61 percent versus 74 percent) than the rate for Blacks and Hispanics (45 percent and 49 percent respectively); and the Asian median income is actually 34 percent higher than for Whites ($122,600 versus $81,100). Furthermore, Caribbean or Africa born Blacks have experienced faster improvements in housing indicators including homeownership than native born Blacks (Tesfal, 2015).

Garcia's overview of fair housing lending as a key immigrant-related housing issue (Chapter 4) spotlights Paseo Boricula in the Humboldt community in Chicago, as a successful example of Hispanic enclave stabilization and preservation. The Paseo Baricula metal flags mark the gateway for a corridor of Puerto Rican businesses, restaurants, affordable housing developments, non-profit organizations, and cultural institutions. "Within a year of the completion [of the] flag gateway, the stretch of Division Street had quickly transformed. Sixteen new businesses opened in the first year with a total of more than 90 businesses and organizations by the year 2000..." (Applied Real Estate Analysis Inc, n.d.). Garcia should have provided a more sophisticated and up-to-date evaluation of this project to supplement the one illustrated map included in her chapter. She also should have discussed important issues raised by the case study such as: do such improvements spur housing price rises and make housing unaffordable? and, do these efforts represent a form of "Disneyfication?"

Section 2 begins with Yerena's discussion of the many risks of homeownership including possible unexpected increases in insurance, taxes, and maintenance costs as well as declines in equity in the home due to factors beyond the owner's control such as increased mortgage rates and economic recessions (Chapter 5). The author takes the reader through several "difficult-to-understand" aspects of housing finance: the credit-worthiness score, the minimum downpayment, different interest rate mortgage types, single-family versus cooperative and condominium ownership, and various refinancing options. "Only by fully understanding the process and implications of becoming a homeowner will any of us make the best decisions for ourselves and our circumstances" (p. 90).

Understanding the homebuilding industry is a prerequisite for addressing the housing affordability crisis. Koebel, Sanderford, and McCoy (Chapter 6) help us to do this by highlighting six key aspects of the industry: that the labor required in housing construction is provided through smaller, specialized contractors; that housing production is highly capital intensive; that housing markets are extremely volatile; that public policy (especially zoning and building regulations) sets the rules that affect how construction occurs; and that the housing industry is structured around different market segments based on tenure (owner versus renter), housing type (single family, attached duplexes and town houses, and multi-family housing), and funding (private versus government subsidized); and that factory-built and modular housing constitutes a small, but growing share of new housing construction. Unfortunately, the prospects for growing the share of factory-built and modular housing, thereby improving housing affordability, is not discussed.

Between the 1970s and early 2000s, America's highly regulated housing finance system dominated by local banks and deposits was replaced by a largely deregulated system dominated by securitization (i.e. the process of packaging individual loans into a pool and selling them to investors) and risky loans (Nelson, Chapter 7). The glut of low-quality subprime mortgages played a major role in causing the Great Recession of 2005-2007. Currently, a variety of federal programs aim to expand credit to lower income people but "there is little agreement among policymakers and industry leaders about how to balance the desire to expand credit to more households with the need for financial stability" (p. 129).

The need for affordable housing has increased recently in part because of the demolition of older, deteriorating, rental housing stock and because of gentrification, i.e. upwardly mobile middle-class families moving into inner-city areas (Yust, Chapter 8). Currently there are more than a dozen federal programs addressing low-income rental housing needs, the two most important of which are the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC). However, there is weak political support for increased funding for these programs at the national and state levels, while local implementation is stymied by NIMBYism (Not in My Backyard).

Michelini and Cantell (Chapter 9, "Homelessness") provide a useful overview of the Housing First (HF) model that prioritizes providing housing for the homeless without prerequisites such as being alcohol – or drug-free. Once HF homeless are housed, clients receive counseling, and treatment and support services. In theory "participants must adhere to program rules and procedures to remain in the housing unit" (p. 159). But it is unclear, based on the chapter, whether participants are actually being dismissed for relying on drugs or alcohol. The main criticism of the HF model is that it ignores the root causes of homelessness, like drug addiction and mental illness. The good news is that homeless prevention programs – such as the ones being implemented by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, show some evidence of success (Chapman et al., 2024). Such programs rely

on early interventions such as family counseling to reduce the risk of recurring homelessness.

Katherine Howell (Chapter 10) opens Section Three on housing policy by highlighting the varying and contradictory approaches to community development since the 1970s. Passage of the Community Development Block Grant Act of 1974 gave state and local governments greater flexibility in using federal housing funds, but targeted community development block grants achieved limited success in promoting neighborhood upgrading. During the 1990s, policymakers and urban scholars focused on "the toxicity of poor neighborhoods for those who live in them" (p. 174). based on the neighborhood effects literature. Policy makers promoted poverty dispersal through housing vouchers (e.g., the Moving to Opportunity [MTO] demonstration) and the revitalization of public housing through mixed-income developments (e.g., HOPE VI), but the existing research provides limited evidence of success and new dilemmas. For example, HOPE VI has generally led to improved housing and neighborhood conditions, but many original residents have been displaced.

On the other hand, McClure (Chapter 11) provides a useful overview of the federal government's housing strategies, including direct project-based housing (public housing, reduced-rate loans to developers, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit [LIHTC]); direct, tenant based subsidies (e.g., the Housing Choice Voucher Program, HCVP); and direct, place-based subsidies (the Community Development Block Grants, CDBG). According to McClure, "the dual strategy of supporting both a tenant based voucher program and a project-based production program will remain the preferred approach for federal assistance in providing affordable housing and that current housing conditions favor an expanded use of voucher programs and a reduced use of production programs" (p. 201). However, McClure's assertion that the focus of HCVP will change and that "PHAs (public housing authorities) will be expected to guide HCV households away from high-poverty, racially and ethnically concentrated neighborhoods and toward high-opportunity, economically, racially, and ethnically integrated neighborhoods" (p. 202). is out-of-date given the Trump Administration's aggressive efforts to scuttle HUD's Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing mandate (AFFH) developed during the Biden Administration, which would have, among other things, sought "integrated living patterns" (p. 193; see also Gramlich, n.d.).

The Great Financial Recession (GFR) and the COVID-19 pandemic recession highlighted the *risks* of homeownership for lower-income householders (Wong and Gonzalez, Chapter 12). During the GFR, the government established a few foreclosure programs, but "they [were] insufficient, delayed and lacking in boldness" (p. 216). In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic plunged the US economy into the greatest recession since World War II. However in sharp contrast to the GFR, foreclosures during the pandemic were rare because of policies such as foreclosure moratoria that involved legal stoppage of debt payments. To remedy the vulnerability of low-income householders, especially ethnic minorities, Wong and

Gonzales recommend that "public investments... focus on low-income populations disproportionately affected by economic downturns" (p. 220). But should the federal government help low-income households move toward homeownership even if this means supporting subprime mortgage loans, a now-discredited strategy?

Twiss and Martin's discussion of military housing (a subject heretofore largely overlooked in housing studies) begins Section 4. They show the strengths and weaknesses of military housing privatization (Chapter 13). Housing shortages during and immediately following WWII led to federal support that enabled builders like William Levitt to develop and test technologies and processes for mass-produced single-family homes, later used for suburban mass housing projects such as Levittown. A backlog of maintenance and quality-of-life issues toward the end of the 20th century caused the Department of Defense to begin privatizing military housing by making loans and land available to private builders and, as a result, by the end of 2022 nearly all on-base military family housing in the US had been privatized. However, privatization-related concerns had emerged by the 2020s. Some housing providers "were making large profits while taking minimal risks...when they were providing substandard housing" (p. 241). Whether similar problems will emerge in civilian housing as HUD privatizes public housing under the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) is not discussed in the chapter or elsewhere in the book.

The aging of America creates opportunities and challenges for policymakers, practitioners and researchers responding to the housing needs of seniors. Most elderly want to age in place and Pfeiffer and Saadaoui (Chapter 14) discuss diverse strategies for enabling seniors to do just that. Accessory apartments are secondary living quarters in a single house property that can take many forms including adapted garages. An increasing number of localities are liberalizing regulations, but restrictions on conversions (e.g., that the tenant be part of the same household renting out the property) are limiting secondary unit production. Reverse mortgages enable the elderly to take advantage of their housing wealth by converting the equity in the home into cash that can be used for health care or other purposes. In recent years, reverse mortgages have been under increased scrutiny because they may put the senior or their heirs at risk of losing their home because they are unable to maintain it or because they are unable to pay property taxes or insurance on it (Silver-Greenberg, 2014).

Chapters 15 and 16, focusing on the physical characteristics of the home itself, are a departure from the main focus of the book, that is, broad housing trends and housing policy. The detailed narrative could have been better located in a guidebook for homeowners. In Chapter 15, Parrott and Atlies focus on the impact of the home environment and health. They argue that the home is affected by both macro-environments (the climate, the landscape, the building site, technological advances and legal requirements) and micro-environments (the building structure, construction materials and furnishings). Residents affect the home-health system

with decisions that they make about the design, construction, management and maintenance of the home as well as by their attitudes and behavior. In Chapter 16, Parrott, Lee, and Laquatra argue that "sustainable housing is achieved when the design, development and construction, occupation, and maintenance of the housing is at a level of efficiency that the impact on the environment – current to future – is little to none" (p. 304). Topics covered include the need for greater energy efficiency in lighting, heating, and cooling and the importance of using green building practices.

Disaster events including wildfires, flooding, earthquakes, and hurricanes cause thousands of deaths yearly in the US and impact the housing stock through damage and destruction. In the face of such threats, Hardison and Moody (Chapter 17), assert that communities need to become "structural resilient" by constructing levees where appropriate, and in general, adopting stricter building codes. In addition, communities need to develop stronger planning practices which "must be rooted in principles of equity and justice, listening to communities, and prioritizing solutions that honor community stories, voices and values" (p. 309). The authors' discussion of citizen involvement is insufficiently nuanced because it does not take into account implementation issues covered in the burgeoning community development literature. For example, in their effort to involve citizens, should disaster planners simply inform residents of proposals, involve them on committees or should they assign residents control of the planning process? (Arnstein, 1969).

Mottelson begins Section 5, with an international perspective focusing on Africa (Johan, Chapter 18). Since the end of the post-colonial period, most African countries have experienced rapid population growth and urbanization leading to widespread informal development, first with traditional, informal architecture using locally resourced materials such as mud, timber or stone. and more recently with informal settlements using a more modern type of vernacular architecture incorporating industrial materials (e.g., corrugated iron sheets) adapted to local conditions. The absence of formal housing has resulted in the majority of the sub-Saharan urban population living in "informal settlements characterized by contested legality of land occupation and construction that does not comply with building and planning regulations" (p. 335). A comprehensive solution is not feasible at present because of poverty and a lack of public resources. Consequently "unplanned informal settlements will likely continue to accommodate large numbers of low-income people... (p. 339).

Although the title of Chapter 19 is "Housing in Asia," Yanmei mostly focuses on East Asia where there are three models for providing affordable housing. Singapore is generally regarded as one of the world's most successful countries in providing public housing through the city-state's Housing Development Board (HDB). South Korea, which illustrates the private sector model, has a national housing finance system with commercial banks participating in it, similar to the US. Since 1999, the Japan Housing Loan Corporation (JHLC) has established a secondary mortgage market promoting homeownership.

Housing trends and policy debates in Australia (Gurrin and Shrestha Chapter 20) are broadly similar to those in the US. In both countries, post WWII national housing programs sought to increase the supply of single family ownership homes and currently 70 percent of Australians live in their own homes. Because of price inflation, younger people currently cannot afford a home and are turning to private rental housing. As a result, Australian housing has become increasingly unequal "defined by those with rising housing wealth and by those for whom access to homeownership is no longer possible" (p. 361). Increased attention has focused on how regulatory barriers (e.g., zoning) decrease affordable housing production, but some progress is occurring at the state level with the passage of legislation to overcome local opposition via "as of right development".

Krapp and Egner's Chapter 21 focusing on European housing is disappointing for the following reasons. First, the authors only discuss housing in the 27 countries in the European Union. Consequently, housing trends and policies in the UK, Norway, and several other countries are not discussed. Second, the primary focus of the chapter – a secondary analysis of the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions dataset (EU-SILC) – provides few new insights on tenure, overcrowding, or cost overburdened households. Most readers know that across Europe, with the exception of Germany and Austria, home ownership is the norm. Unsurprisingly, overcrowding is highest in the reduced-rent sector, reflecting the fact "that people in this type of tenure are still incentivized to share, even if the rents are lower than in the 'normal' rental segment" (p. 387). Third, the authors' discussion of EU housing policy instruments is far too short and sketchy to help the reader understand how intra-EU differences in housing policies might be based on the different welfare systems in Europe, (e.g. corporatist, social democratic, liberal, and Mediterranean or family-based welfare systems, see Stephens 2016). There is no discussion of the problems in the social housing sector. Citizens and policymakers in countries like Denmark are concerned that the segregation of immigrants in social housing is leading to American ghetto-like conditions like crime and a lack of cultural integration of immigrants into the larger society (Bryant, 2025).

Informal settlements (self-build housing) have been an intrinsic part of South American cities since the middle of the twentieth century with self-build housing currently comprising between 60 and 70 percent of the total (Donoso and Elsinga, Chapter 22). Many of the governments and the Inter-American Development Bank have recognized the value of these informal settlements and have supported their physical and social upgrading. However, turning to the formal sector, Social Interest Housing Programs implemented since the late 1980s illustrate the recent shift toward a market-based rather than government-based effort to promote homeownership. Under these programs, the eligible householder pays 30 percent of the cost of the mortgage through a special savings account and the government pays the remainder. The sales price is set by the government. Although "many policymakers have regarded such subsidy-base programs as a successful strategy..." (p. 400), builders

usually construct such new subsidized homes on cheap land on the metropolitan edge, thereby contributing to urban sprawl.

Alan Mallach's final chapter (Chapter 23) closes the book by noting how the global housing challenges of the 21st century vary between the Global South and the Global North. For the developing countries in the Global South, the fundamental challenge is the dangerously inadequate, unsafe and unhealthy conditions in slums and informal settlements. These countries lack the resources to address these challenges. On the other hand prosperous countries in the Global North have the resources to deal with the main housing issue – affordability. A well designed voucher program can address the affordability problem in metropolitan areas with an adequate supply of affordable housing, but in "hot" metropolitan markets, social housing would need to be expanded. Unfortunately, countries in the Global North, where much of the population is decently housed, lack the political will to tackle the affordability challenge. Housing advocates in both the Global South and the Global North, however, should not lose heart.

> The fact that the solutions, and a true right to housing, may be remote, however, does not mean that efforts to address these challenges and improve housing conditions is wasted effort. On the contrary, those efforts are needed more than ever (p. 420).

This 3rd edition of *Introduction to Housing* could be a useful supplementary text for introductory housing courses. The book is uniformly well written and non-ideological. The editors do a great job in cross-referencing the different chapters and the geographic and substantive coverage (e.g. military housing, disaster housing) is impressive.

The book does, however, have a few flaws. Chapter 11 provides a somewhat outdated assessment of America's housing mobility programs. Chapters 15 and 16, with their detailed guidelines for homeowners, really do not belong in this book and Chapter 21 on European housing is sketchy and uninformative. Hopefully, these flaws will be addressed in the next edition. It will be needed soon given the rapid social, economic, and political changes currently taking place in the housing environment.

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David P. Varady
University of Cincinnati

RETHINKING NEIGHBORHOODS, by William A.V. Clark, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2024

"Neighborhoods…are core elements of our lived lives" (p. 2).

I found myself in immediate agreement with this opening premise of William A.V. Clark's book: neighborhoods matter. This is something we all, perhaps, can recognize intuitively: whether we greet or pointedly ignore the neighbor next door, walk or fight traffic to school drop-offs, obtain a timely doctor's appointment nearby or halfway across the city, or choose to stay rather than leave when the building next door becomes a construction site – these are all daily manifestations of our neighborhood life. From this simple initial assertion, backed by his commanding knowledge of the field, Clark builds a powerfully grounded and comprehensively detailed case as to why places continue to matter.

The book is divided into three parts: the first explores neighborhoods and their role within the city; the second dives deeply into residential choice, selection, and the socio-economic dimensions of neighborhood life; and the third focuses on neighborhood outcomes – how place influences education, health, and overall well-being. Clark offers a detailed account of how people choose where to live and how those choices shape neighborhood composition, diversity, and class dynamics, touching on immigration flows and the decline of the middle class. These

discussions draw on major studies and debates around various neighborhood-related issues, including nuanced discussions of gentrification, segregation, and housing affordability, as well as the evolving forms of social capital and cohesion. The book includes classic studies as well as recent ones, and as such it is both anthological and up to date, approaching these themes from a social perspective which puts the emphasis on individual behavior and its cumulative effect on urban change.

Clark clearly knows his field and draws on a wealth of studies from a range of disciplines – including behavioral science, psychology, economics, and demography – to make his case. Throughout, he maintains a healthy skepticism and is not easily swayed by established narratives; claims need to be deeply substantiated to merit his endorsement. His arguments are backed up by reams of data, and the book features numerous studies with large datasets and a strong emphasis on quantitative research. Clark is also refreshingly candid in acknowledging when findings prove unconvincing, rather than settling for diluted conclusions.

This abundance of data points out that neighborhoods are significant sources of life satisfaction, connectedness, wellbeing, social cohesion, and health. Difficult or unsafe conditions, by contrast, can create or exacerbate chronic stress. Therefore, a consistent theme in the book is that places deserve investment; as Clark puts it, the focus should be on "bringing quality to the neighborhood, rather than gaining quality by moving from it" (p. 173). While many residents can and do leave disadvantaged areas, this often deepens decline for those who remain. Rather than taking an ideological stance in this long-standing debate, Clark draws on extensive data to examine both those who move and the neighborhoods left behind. He highlights how early-life environments have lasting effects on life outcomes and how place matters profoundly for children and families alike. Although significant causal links remain elusive, Clark acknowledges that research has revealed enough associative evidence between locality and health to warrant serious attention from policymakers.

Throughout the book, Clark challenges simplified explanations of urban dynamics, particularly those that minimize personal agency in household decisions about where to live. He aims to introduce data-based complexity to established stances around resilient inequality and concentrated poverty, questioning knee-jerk narratives of racism, and arguing instead that residential patterns emerge from complex processes shaped by resources, opportunities, and shared preferences. As he notes, people with sufficient means often "move to improve," seeking neighborhoods that align with common aspirations for safety, schools, and amenities. Clark suggests that residential preferences reflect not only "out-group hostility" but also positive motivations to live near those with similar socioeconomic circumstances. He emphasizes pull factors, such as the desire for better housing and environments, over push factors like avoidance of certain other groups. While acknowledging persistent inequalities, he highlights granular data that reveals a more dynamic and varied pattern of mobility than broad averages suggest.

However, the other side of the coin – the role of institutions and policy – would have merited from more systematic treatment. Neighborhoods are more than just the result of aggregated individual choices – they are also shaped in critical and lasting ways by institutional forces and policy decisions. Indeed, while the book acknowledges the historical impact of top-down planning, it often takes subtle issue with structural views, choosing, rather, to focus on the element of individual choice, thereby adding informed complexity to a contentious debate, but devoting less attention than perhaps warranted to the continuing structural and institutional factors that shape neighborhood life.

A demonstration of such forces can be found in neighbourhoods undergoing advanced regeneration processes, residents of which are often intensely buffeted by various external stakeholders, often far beyond their individual preferences. These regenerating neighborhoods also illustrate other themes discussed in the book such as the role of environmental effects. Sustained and pervasive neighborhood regeneration can be seen as a particular kind of environmental stress – the strain of living with persistent 'displaceability' and uncertainty, proximity to continuous construction and the unraveling of community ties – making contemporary regenerating neighborhoods a relevant contemporary case for further study. These changes and processes can affect neighborhoods residents in profound ways, and they deserve attention.

Additionally, Clark's discussion of social aspects is comprehensive, yet a fuller exploration of physical form could have added another valuable dimension. The book does touch on the built environment, via topics such as access to green space, health impacts and gentrification, but a more systematic analysis, in the same rigorous manner that characterizes the rest of the work, would have further strengthened it. Neighborhoods are, after all, not only social but also spatial entities, and physically can differ quite dramatically from each other. It would have been intriguing to see how design, layout, topography, and location shape neighborhood life.

Reading this book as a planner, I found it broadened my sense of what neighborhood studies can encompass. Urban planning tends to emphasize physical and spatial aspects, but Clark's work reveals and expands upon social and economic dynamics that shape neighborhood life just as powerfully. For planners, this perspective offers instructive insight into how people make residential choices. For researchers in population studies, sociology, or urban studies, the book maps out key debates and foundational research of the past few decades. Anyone interested in the relationship between individuals and neighborhoods will find it a rich and data-driven resource. And perhaps readers of all stripes will be reminded that the age-old maxim still rings true: place matters.

Shira Lichtenbaum
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

REFLEXIVE URBAN GOVERNANCE: CRITICALLY ENGAGING WITH URBAN POLICIES, Edited by Jurian Edelenbos & Beitske Boonstra. Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2025.

Reflexive Urban Governance advances a compelling proposition: that reflexive urban governance – the continuous, critical interrogation of the assumptions, norms, instruments, and consequences underpinning urban policy – can equip cities to confront today's complex, interdependent, and often intractable challenges, the so-called wicked problems. It is a modern, timely, and genuinely inspiring book. If I had to recommend a single title to a student, researcher, public manager, policy entrepreneur, civil-society leader, or elected official stepping into the urban arena, this would be it.

The book comprises eleven chapters. Chapter 1 by Edelenbos and Boonstra establishes the conceptual foundations, distinguishing between first- and second-order reflexivity and outlining five key triggers that recur throughout the book. Subsequent chapters operationalize these ideas across varied policy fields and contexts. Chapter 2 unpacks the rise and contradictions of the "Sharing Cities" label, contrasting civic and non-commercial sharing with platformized, commercial sharing, and examining how different municipal traditions, such as Vienna and Berlin, mediate these tensions. Chapter 3 explores Italy's "shared administration of common goods," originating in Bologna and diffusing nationwide through flexible collaboration pacts between municipalities and citizens; it is a rich account of institutionalized co-production anchored in horizontal subsidiarity. Chapter 4 traces how the "smart city" label traveled in and out of Rotterdam, showing how external recognition, internal micropolitics, and shifting coalitions converted "smart" at times into digital inclusion agendas – an exemplary study of serendipitous triggers and strategic reframings. Chapter 5 applies Reflexive Monitoring in Action to energy justice in Antwerp, following urban living-lab experiments that illuminate both the promise of iterative learning and the pitfalls of project-ization when institutional embedding is thin.

Chapter 6 moves beyond the state, focusing on critical-pedagogy schools, notably the Fe y Alegría network, as community anchors that cultivate resilience and reflexive capabilities in peripheral urban settings. Chapter 7 reconceptualizes urban agroecology as multispecies commons, using food forests in California and Parma to probe what a more-than-human reflexivity might entail for urban stewardship. Chapter 8 centers knowledge as an enabler of reflexive governance for nature-based solutions across Australian and European cities, detailing how sharing, integrating and weaving, and translating knowledge can institutionalize learning. Chapter 9 interrogates urban health governance and the risk of the "disappearing commons," with cases from Sydney revealing how "health" can be instrumentalized in growth coalitions unless equity-oriented reflexivity is sustained. Chapter 10 reframes urban network governance through boundary work and administrative capacities,

showing how different modes must be combined to keep governance adaptive and fair. Chapter 11 synthesizes the book's lessons, highlighting limits of reflexivity in people, places, and time, and concludes that reflexivity should become a continuous institutional culture rather than a temporary project.

Reflexive Urban Governance clearly positions itself within a broader tradition of urban policy scholarship focused on collaborative governance and the challenge of "wicked" problems. Urban governance scholars have long noted that complex, interdependent city challenges cannot be solved by any single agency or fixed plan; instead they demand collaborative, networked approaches involving multiple stakeholders. The book's emphasis on reflexivity – continuous critical questioning and learning – echoes key voices in adaptive urban management, who argue that mutual adjustment and adaptive capacity are pivotal for successful collaboration under conditions of uncertainty. By building on these themes, the volume situates itself in line with leading literature on tackling complex urban problems through adaptive, collaborative governance.

The book's virtues are manifold. It is original and up-to-date, capturing the late-modern pressures that cities face while providing a unifying vocabulary – first- and second-order reflexivity, triggers, and boundary work – usable by scholars and practitioners alike. Its repertoire of cases is both empirically rich and policy-relevant, spanning co-production in Italy, the travels of "smart" in the Netherlands, energy justice in Belgium, knowledge infrastructures for nature-based solutions in Australia and Europe, urban health in Australia, and civic capacity building in Latin America. Methodologically, it moves comfortably between conceptual refinement and grounded, field-sensitive analysis. Stylistically, the volume is clear without being simplistic: it names complexity, then shows how reflexive practices – monitoring, labs, pacts, and boundary objects – can render that complexity governable in fairer, more inclusive ways.

The principal limitation is the scope of geographical, socio-cultural, and political coverage. The volume's center of gravity lies in Western and OECD urbanism, with only limited attention to non-OECD and non-Western contexts. Apart from one Latin American case, Asia, the Middle East, and most of Africa are absent, leaving questions about the transferability of its frameworks to settings with weaker institutions or different political and cultural conditions. This mild Western bias does not undermine the book's contribution, but it highlights an important scope condition and points to the need for future cross-regional research.

Notwithstanding this caveat, this is an excellent and energizing book. It succeeds in theorizing late-modern urban governance challenges while offering concrete repertoires for action and learning. It will be highly valuable to graduate students and scholars in public policy, urban studies, planning, geography, sociology, and governance; to practitioners in local government and metropolitan agencies; to civil-society leaders and policy entrepreneurs seeking to design experiments that are institutionally consequential; and to elected officials, mayors and councilors who

need both language and tools to steer collaborative problem-solving under conditions of uncertainty. There are few readers who will not learn something substantive from this volume about how to navigate urban complexity more thoughtfully. I, for one, found it thoroughly engaging and instructive.

Itai Beeri
University of Haifa

DARK LABORATORY: ON COLUMBUS, THE CARIBBEAN, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS by Tao Leigh Goffe, Penguin Books, 2025.

The book challenges conventional narratives about the climate crisis and, in doing so, offers new pathways for confronting it. Already in the title, Goffe marks a new ground zero for the crisis – not the Industrial Revolution, as is commonly accepted, but the beginning of colonialism in the 15th century. Her central argument is that colonialism – as a pattern of inequality, environmental plunder, and the subjugation of peoples – was the driving force behind the climate crisis, and that the invasive processes that brought about globalization and capitalism still prevent us from adequately addressing it. In contrast, the ancient traditions of Caribbean indigenous peoples, with their deep and reciprocal connections to the land, animals, and plants, and their strategies for coping with the forces of nature, may offer paths toward change and healing.

Goffe's choice of the Caribbean as her 'laboratory' is not only historical, ecological, and literary – reflecting her research interests – but also genealogical, since she is of Black Asian (i.e., Afro-Asian) descent. She also takes into account social, environmental, and economic aspects, as in the model of sustainability, that stress the need to preserve the ability of Nature to perform processes in a stable manner over time. As such, a balance must be maintained between Nature's ability to continue to sustain its natural systems (ecosystems, life cycles, food chains, etc.) and to support life on Earth in the long run, as well as to meet the developmental needs of certain populations (human or otherwise) that depend on those processes; simply put, to secure a prosperous life today without depriving current and future generations of their rights to live at least as well as we did, if not better.

Her story begins with Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean in 1492, where she points out the introduction of sugarcane cultivation to the Caribbean as being the primary catalyst of the long-term climate change process. According to her theory, to take advantage of the Caribbean's humid, wet climate and mineral-rich soil, which offered the best conditions for the successful growth of sugarcane, a wave of violence was unleashed on the land and its indigenous peoples: slavery, disease, and death, accompanied by the exploitation of natural resources and the disruption of native biodiversity.

Goffe also presents another example, illustrating how humans have repeatedly and severely impacted natural systems in the Caribbean, referring to Humanity's effects on habitats, the food web, biodiversity, and ecosystems. She explains how the Europeans flooded the Caribbean with exported rats that disembarked from their ships. Then, to protect the sugarcane crops from being eaten by those rats, they imported mongooses from India. These 'invading' animals spread rapidly, dominating the Caribbean ecosystem, further damaging local, native biodiversity. Additionally, the 19th-century trade in guano – bat and seabird droppings used as fertilizers – from the Caribbean to Europe and North America is another example of such exploitative patterns.

Goffe resists telling the familiar tale of invasive species and unjust resource trade. Instead, she offers an opportunity for learning and a fresh start. For instance, she draws a lesson in collective survival from the mongooses that give birth on the same night and raise all their offspring communally. From Goffe's perspective, the use of guano reconnects us with natural, traditional cultivation methods, lost due to the industrial production of synthetic fertilizers, and even indigenous folk songs from across the globe can give us strength and hope in our fight against climate change.

Nevertheless, the climate crisis is a done deal. Its environmental and human consequences are clear, and the mitigating steps needed to adapt to it are well known. Yet most of us still fail to grasp the urgency, nor do we amend our destructive behaviors. Today, the Caribbean is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change. But long before the colonial era, the islands' inhabitants faced hurricanes and storms as a natural part of life. They avoided settling along the coasts, used trees as wind barriers, and cultivated resilient root crops for food.

Given its subject-matter, this book is not an easy read. Goffe's frequent leaps between places, times, and disciplines may make it cumbersome. Yet these jumps reflect the nonlinear, chaotic nature of the crisis we face – like the *butterfly effect*, which describes how small changes in the initial conditions of a dynamic, nonlinear system can result in large-scale, long-term impacts. They force us to look at the crisis differently. The questions she raises are: Can the West, which led us into this crisis, lead us out of it? Might future technologies draw from older traditions that the West once dismissed?

In recent decades, the ongoing and destructive impact of Humanity on the natural environment, on its living and non-living components, as well as its ecosystems and the climate, has led to calls for defining a new geological epoch – the "Anthropocene Age" ('the age of the humans'). Over the years, more popular alternative names have also been proposed, ones that better suit our current era and reflect the key forces shaping our 21st-century reality, such as the 'Capitalocene Age'. But now, with U.S. President Donald Trump reinstated in the White House with an agenda aimed at erasing everything 'green', it seems more fitting than ever to declare the 'Trumpocene Age' – an era with rhetoric normalizing climate-change skepticism and denial, while sanctifying economic growth. White House policy influences public opinion and

political discourse, raising serious concerns that anti-environmental policies may become normalized and permanent. Above all, we are once again redefining the relationship between Humanity and Nature, contrary to all the scientific evidence and the profound changes unfolding before our eyes. Climate change, environmental pollution, and the loss of biodiversity threaten the global order, our way of life, and life itself on Earth.

"We must connect the dots between the brutal system of chattel slavery and the degradation of the natural environment", writes Goffe, claiming that "as partisan politics slows any chance for climate repair through policy, climate scientists and climate philosophers can help us understand how environmental racism is a part of our current ecological crisis". *Dark Laboratory* offers a consciousness-altering historical and personal journey to the roots of the climate crisis, alongside an opportunity for redemption. But it remains uncertain whether Goffe's focus on social-environmental justice will ultimately result in poetic justice.

Adi Wolfson
Shamoon College of Engineering