

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.

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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.