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When cities broke into the global stage: 20 years since the publication of 'Cities and Climate Change'

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Abstract

This short symposium revisits the book *Cities and Climate Change* by Harriet Bulkeley and Michelle Betsill and its role in establishing cities as central actors in climate change governance. The contributors to this symposium reflect on the research themes and the book's legacy from their disciplinary perspectives. The first response explores the tensions between the elevation of cities as sites for climate action and the persistent lack of state action, arguing for meaningful public participation and a labour of making visible how city-based practices respond to climate change. The second response examines how the book has enabled generations of scholars to appreciate the complex constitution of city actors and how they interact/enact global climate governance yet remain frustratingly marginal in the discipline of International Relations. The third response explores how the book positioned the urban as a problem space, a manageable scale of intervention, and a political space with the capacity to enact innovation, triggering new questions about the potential and limits of the expanding responsibilities of cities. The fourth response argues that as cities become active in adaptation, they need to engage in an anticolonial politics of love and hospitality that sheds 'security' and makes the self vulnerable to 'others' for an effective response to climate change. The symposium concludes with a recap by Betsill and Bulkeley which underscores the variety of interdisciplinary debates that the book has generated, and its influence on current thinking on debates on climate change governance.

Keywords

Climate change governance, multi-level governance, urban climate action, international climate regime, climate justice, climate urbanism

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Introduction: the legacy of cities and climate change (3C)

Vanesa Castán Broto and Simon Marvin

In 2023, it was 20 years since the publication of Michelle Betsill and Harriet Bulkeley's 'Cities and Climate Change' (3C), a book that marked a change of thought on the role of cities in governing climate change.[1] This book spearheaded a wave of academic debates and policy thought that put cities at the forefront of climate policy. The book is recognized for having made three significant contributions to environmental governance and urban geographies. First, it situated the work of cities in space, demonstrating the variety of governance arrangements that enable climate action in different urban contexts. The book constituted a critical starting point for debates on multi-level governance and policy fragmentation that are still vibrant today. Second, the book opened a range of institutional-focused approaches to understanding the role of cities in environmental governance. The book stimulated debates about the results and implications of climate action at the urban level and the extent to which these constitute transformative change. Third, the book extended the conventional understanding of the role of cities in the global arena. The book raised novel questions about how global cities influence climate actions in cities and how cities and urban networks have become global actors in international climate politics. In doing so, 'Cities and Climate Change' fostered a new generation of thinking on the role of cities in climate policy. In this symposium, we would like to constructively reflect on how the legacy of this book is still relevant in geographical studies on global environmental governance, local environmental policy, and critical urban geography.

The critical point of departure in 3C concerns a conception of the state as a unitary actor – the conception of a fixed territorial entity operating at the national scale whose interests are uniform. This assumption informed a cascading model of subnational governance whereby the nation-state interests are unproblematically translated down the governmental hierarchy and applied at the local scale. This perspective was already under critical reassessment at the time of 3c's publication – particularly with the growing censure of the hollowing of the state, the critiques of scale and territory, and the re-assessment of policy implementation and the emergence of governance – that together essentially regarded the concept of the unitary state as a 'fiction.' Yet that model remained prevalent in policy and practice and was recycled and reproduced in environmental governance and action. Concepts of unitary state action were being re-mobilized in the new ideas about climate action that appeared to be overlooking the 1990s enthusiasm for local government action that had come to dominate sustainability agendas, most notably Agenda 21. This shift generated critical new questions: Why is the local government emerging as a key actor? Where is the local government in climate change governance? And what about all the other actors who also bear responsibility for climate mitigation? What about private actors and civil society? This became consolidated in a question that would come to inform academic debates in the coming decades – where is climate governance located?

The book responded to these questions with critical concern about the enthusiasm for local government as a place of environmental governance because of the displacement of responsibility to local governments already stretched in their capacity and resources. 3C responded by carefully exploring empirical cases as a means to find a potential answer to the problem of, on the one hand, recognizing the sub-national scale of action while, on the other, also allocating responsibilities somewhat – a fundamental dilemma for which the book finds and answers in the notion of multi-level governance. The concept of multi-level governance, the book finds, plays a crucial role in climate governance. The book had influence by bringing together detailed empirical evidence of how climate governance was carried out. The Cities for Climate Protection Programme, which inspired and oriented the empirical analysis of the book, was one of the first transnational municipal

networks to take the international stage. It was established by the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) created by the International Union of Local Authorities (today's UCLG) and the UN Environmental Programme in the wake of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992. The Cities for Climate Protection Programme constituted an early demonstration of the value of network approaches in climate action. Focused on emissions mitigation, the focus of the programme was on 650 cities in the US, UK and Australia. Perhaps one of its main achievements was constructing climate change as an issue to be addressed at the local level. The Programme became a model for future policy development work, reflected in the recent highlight of networks as effective means for mitigation at the global level. The book was the first analysis of this pioneering programme demonstrating the role that cities already had in international climate governance at the time. This became much more visible in the intervening decade, notably at the COP15 in Copenhagen, where the triumphal portrayal of local governments' leadership underscored the failure of nation-state-based international negotiations.

The contributors to this symposium reflect on the research themes and the book's legacy from their disciplinary perspectives focusing on the following themes. Anna Davies explores the tensions between the elevation of cities as sites for climate action and the persistent lack of state action, arguing that the lack of public participation in city-based initiatives has been a critical factor. David Gordon examines how C3 has enabled generations of scholars to appreciate the complexity of city actors and how they enact global climate governance yet remain frustratingly marginal in the discipline of International Relations. Pauline McGuirk and Robyn Dowling, explore how C3 positioned the urban as a problem space, a manageable scale of intervention, and a political space with the capacity to enact innovation is triggering new questions around the potential and limits of the expanding responsibilities of cities. Ankit Kumar argues that as cities become active in adaptation they need to engage in an anticolonial politics of love and hospitality that sheds 'security' and makes the self-vulnerable to 'others' for an effective response to climate change. In the last contribution, Michele Betsil and Harriet Bulkeley reflect on their own journey since C3 was published. Together these contributions demonstrate the enormous capacity of C3 to generate interdisciplinary debates that changed both academic and policy thought around the locations of climate change governance.

Staying with the trouble: The persistent challenge of public participation in cities and climate change

Anna Davies

Since the publication of *Cities and Climate Change*, urban environments have become increasingly marked out in academic and public discourse as major sites for innovation, action and socio-environmental transition; frequently characterized as living laboratories where experimental interventions seeking positive social, economic and environmental change can be tested. Whether this is articulated through initiatives with prefixes such as smart-, 15 min-, circular-, edible- or net zero-cities, the challenges of climate change commonly play a central role in justifying action (Watts, 2017). Certainly, the elevated profiles of cities through these initiatives have created new vocabularies and institutions for, and sites of, climate politics (Davies et al., 2021). However, while cities remain popular spaces for grassroots climate protests, radical city state action to back up the urgent rhetoric has been slow to emerge. Reasons for this are manifold (see Rivas et al., 2022), but I argue that a lack of embedded and enduring public participation remains a key factor. In this brief intervention I set out how *Cities and Climate Change* still provides inspiration and motivation for staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) of establishing and embedding infrastructures for meaningful public participation in city-based climate action, specifically focusing on an

intervention – Climate Smart – that sought to expand climate change adaptation capacity and capabilities of young people by increasing their visibility of climate change adaptation risks and confronting the complexities of responding to these risks. Haraway's concept of 'staying with the trouble' (2016) is apposite here as it calls for thinking deeply about how we live in, respond to and address complex challenges involving interconnections between people and place; to engage intimately with the 'trouble' we are in and not expect simple or easy solutions to building capabilities for climate change adaptation.

Considering public participation in sub-national government decision making has a long and well-established history in academia and planning practice prior to the emergence of climate change as a matter of policy concern in urban environments (Arnstein, 1969). The centrality of public engagement and action in progressing society towards more sustainable development at the local scale was also brought into sharp relief during the 1990s following the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and the adoption of Agenda 21 which recognized the essential role of publics in developing localized action plans on both normative and pragmatic grounds (Elelman and Feldman, 2018; Wild and Marshall, 1999). When *Cities and Climate Change* was published researchers were also beginning to call for more public participation in the shaping of policy responses to climate change, particularly in relation to climate change adaptation (see Few et al., 2007), although progress has been limited, particularly in relation to public participation in climate change adaptation planning (Hügel and Davies, 2020). Understanding why the challenge of engaging publics in shaping policy and practice in relation to climate change persists is crucial.

Examining the context in which *Cities and Climate Change* emerged finds some familiar features: International conflicts with the Iraq war were ongoing in 2003 and we are still experiencing the wider ramifications of the conflict being played out in Ukraine; stark impacts from climate change were already being felt in 2003 – the hottest summer in Europe for 500 years – while the summer of 2023 was the hottest globally by some margin; and enduring vulnerabilities exacerbated by global pandemics plagued both periods (SARS in 2003; COVID-19 2020–21). At the same time urbanization trends continue, rising from 46 to 57% globally over the past 20 years and technological developments (particularly digital technologies) have continued apace. The spread of mobile digital data, wi-fi connectivity, and smart phone ownership have all dramatically reshaped how we access information and interact with others. Nonetheless, while traditional and social media coverage of climate change has increased significantly in the last two decades, the capacity to act on the consequences of climate change remains highly uneven (Lee et al., 2015). In this context of enduring issues *Cities and Climate Change* still brings visibility to the complex challenges of expanding public participation in climate action.

Visibility and complexity

Underpinning the foundational work of *Cities and Climate Change* are rich case studies from UK, USA and Australia and the transnational city climate change networks of which they were part. At the time of publication, the very act of adopting the city as a unit of analysis was novel. *Cities and Climate Change* used city case studies to tease out the multiscalar and multiactor relations in these spaces allowing for nuanced analysis of actions and interactions in places; and revealing how city-based practices reach beyond their boundaries into other locations and spheres of action. *Cities and Climate Change* helped to make visible processes and practices around decision making in the city. This work provided the baseline for future studies in more diverse contexts which culminated in the development of global city database examining 100 cities and their climate change actions (Castán Broto and Bulkeley, 2013). This has been influential in studies of city actions for climate change and has also inspired broader activities of making climate change more visible across a range of sectors and actors within urban areas. Activities building on the foundations provided by *Cities and Climate*

Change include the mapping of urban food sharing initiatives, nature based solutions and energy communities, which all seek to disrupt conventional understandings of practices within a city (see Almassy et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2017). Increasing visibility in this way is productive, although such counter mapping alone does not disrupt enduring patterns of power and inequalities within and between places. Further unpicking of the complex and dynamic relations within city-based assemblages is required.

Through its forensic analysis *Cities and Climate Change* revealed the complexity of city governance not as means to reduce that complexity or delineate discrete problems to be solved, rather to identify how that complexity creates socio-ecological tensions and potential ruptures which provide opportunities for doing things differently (Gillard et al., 2016). In particular, *Cities and Climate Change* sought to move beyond technical fixes and narrow managerial governance pre-occupations, elevating the inherently social and political processes that are suffused with uneven and unsettled agency. This move to acknowledging the multiple and intertwining spheres and tiers of relations as complex assemblages is seen both within and beyond research examining cities and climate change, from urban dwelling (McFarlane, 2011) and sharing cities (McLaren and Agyeman, 2015) to smart and sustainable cities (Cugurullo, 2021). In parallel, conceptual frameworks focusing on matters of expansion and inclusion in urban environments were emerging which centred urban intersectionality through climate change riskscapes (Davies et al., 2020) and calls for multispecies approaches (Gandy and Jasper, 2020) to ensure just transitions for people and the planet.

Expansive and inclusive approaches recognize the diversity of experiences and capabilities amongst urban inhabitants as part of calls for a just transition to decarbonized futures. Following McArdle (2021) and Amorim Maia et al. (2022) the goal of such intersectional work is to ensure that cities addressing climate change do not perpetuate existing inequalities and, beyond this, also provide for restorative climate justice. This cannot happen without engaging publics in ways that work for them and which recognize the multifacted and interlocking dimensions of climate change riskscapes that people inhabit. As noted by Davies et al. (2020: 197), 'when considering climate change, social justice principles cannot be appended after the fact'. Beyond this, exploring more-than-human rights to the city through a multispecies lens (Shingne, 2022), for example, resonates with calls in *Cities and Climate Change* to challenge power embedded in urban decision making processes that elevates certain groups over others. Certainly, following Houston et al. (2018), greater consideration of who speaks for (and with) the non-human in our cities is urgently needed and the principles of seeking more inclusive, ethical relationships hold true for all cities.

Capacities, capabilities and response-abilities

One concrete example of where the tentacles of *Cities and Climate Change* foundational work on public engagement, visibility and complexity provided a clear motivation is the Climate Smart initiative which focuses on building adaptive capacities for inclusive climate adaptation planning (Hugel and Davies, 2024). This collaborative project and the resulting learning platform and serious game focuses on the differential challenges that communities within Dublin face as a result of climate change; their diverse climate riskscapes (Davies and Hügel, 2021). This initiative began with discussions between researchers and young people in an inner-city area that is particularly vulnerable to coastal and river flooding, and which is also experiencing socio-economic deprivation and gentrification pressures, to better understand their knowledge, issues and concerns in relation to climate change and adaptation planning. These discussions underpin the resources that were subsequently developed for the climate smart platform, including videos and quizzes as well as a serious online game where you adopt the persona of Dublin Mayor and develop and implement your adaptation strategy. Embracing rather than shying away from complexity, game play is shaped by scientific knowledge (current flood predictions for Dublin in 2050 are used and randomized flood

events happen in each round of the game), democratic processes (a randomly generated electorate is created for each game, upset enough of the electorate and you are removed from office and the game ends early), resource constraints (players have €10 mill per year to spend on interventions and 5 years to adapt their city) and diverse advice provided by economic, social and environmental experts (Hügel and Davies, 2022). Cumulatively, the goal of the Climate Smart platform is to communicate the challenges and uncertainties that pervade interventions in complex adaptive systems such as climate change adaptation whilst also demonstrating that positive action can still be taken. It is just one intervention in an active space of climate innovation with new plans, declarations, targets, and networks emerging and evolving over time and space (Davies et al., 2021). These innovations unfold across schools and streets, appearing in museums and theatres while enacting new mechanisms for participation and engagement that are replete with creativity, and imagination (see Stripple et al., 2021).

So where's the trouble? Considerable gaps still remain between ambitions and actions. While urgent action is needed and public participation is seen as a key part of such action, supporting mechanisms such as the Climate Smart platform require time to build and ongoing resources to embed them as part of vital decision making infrastructures. While researchers, through co-design processes, can and do help initiate, design, test and evaluate the efficacy of such mechanisms, ultimately long-term city-level commitment to building and maintaining public participation infrastructures is required to build trust, capabilities and climate action. Certainly there is a danger that without such investment in the short-term city leaders of the future may argue that there is no time to 'waste' on public participation activities in the context of an emergency response to climate change adaptation. This would be catastrophic. Returning to the work of Haraway (2016: 34), we need to cultivate collective ways of knowing and doing by:

> Learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth [that] will prove more conducive to the kind of thinking that would provide the means to building more livable future … [to accept] more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together. Call that staying with the trouble. (Haraway, 2016: 9)

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Global politics through the looking glass: the lasting influence of 'Cities and Climate Change'

David Gordon

Net zero. Climate Just. Carbon neutral. A quick glance across the landscape of contemporary climate governance and one is confronted by the ambition and activity of local governments around the world. Cities making bold claims, setting aggressive targets, and implementing innovative policy actions; going 'further & faster' (GCoM, 2021), being recognized as 'climate champions'[2] and included as official partners in the UNFCCC Paris Agreement.[3] Cities have pushed, prodded, and pulled themselves into the global climate conversation over the past 30+ years and offer a potent(ial) counterpoint to the 'dangerous incrementalism' (Allan, 2019) of the inter-state process. Yet questions abound as to whether cities can live up to their ambitious claims. Amidst a flurry of scholarship aiming to address this query, we might also pause, take a breath, and look back before we look forward, drawing insight and inspiration from the now-classic *Cities and Climate Change* (C3) by Michele Betsill and Harriet Bulkeley. Interdisciplinary, insightful, and innovative, C3 is a foundational text but also a template for the kind of scholarship needed to understand and assess the engagement of cities in global climate governance. I want to use the space provided to offer a few brief comments on how C3 speaks to this crucial moment, with a focus on two themes: the emergent power dynamics shaping how cities 'do' climate governance and the tensions inherent in attempting to fuse urban and global interests through the novel governance spaces constituted by transnational municipal networks (TMNs).

Cities and Climate Change: A key juncture

Though the history of city engagement in world politics in general, and climate politics in particular, extends far deeper (Alger, 1990; Ewen and Hebbert, 2007) C3 was published at an auspicious moment. The first decade of concerted city engagement in global climate politics had just concluded and a second wave of activity was about to break across the reefs of international climate inaction. C3 thus captures and holds up for interrogation the engagement of cities in global climate politics at an opportune time: a nascent global movement about to explode in numbers, ambition, and activity.

C3 cracked open the door for scholars of world politics to take seriously the ways in which cities were operating outside of and beyond the confines of domestic politics. More narrowly it created an opening for scholars, for me personally in very profound ways, to think about 'how' climate change is governed globally in and through cities. C3 challenges the spatial rigidity of mainstream International Relations literature, with cities conceptualized as neither hermetically sealed nor hierarchically contained but rather as situated within complex political configurations that structure how climate change is defined, operationalized, and acted upon in/through urban space. The book shines a light onto the complex multi-dimensional politics that shape 'why' cities come to define and understand climate change in particular ways (or as a particular sort of problem amenable to particular sorts of responses), what kind of role cities see for themselves as climate governors, and how governance is carried out. Cities, as per C3, are part of the global firmament of organizations working to respond to the issue of climate change, and their positionality in that global context has enabled scholars to look at both local and global climate governance from a new point of view.

Why do cities govern climate change the ways that they do?

To understand why cities 'do' climate governance in particular ways (or at all for that matter) C3 implores us to consider not only local and domestic factors but also the embeddedness of cities in

a global context, and specifically the influence of TMNs. In so doing C3 helped direct attention to TMNs as institutional innovations through which local and global climate governance are inter-woven, not merely another actor on the stage seeking to exert influence, but emergent governance *spaces* populated by a diverse array of actors. The landscape of TMNs has changed and expanded in meaningful ways over the past 20+ years (Acuto and Leffel, 2021) and as a result we can now understand TMNs such as those studied in C3 as part of a broader domain of global urban (climate) governance (Acuto, 2020; Gordon, 2018). Nonetheless, the analytic framework deployed in C3, centred on the political struggles over how climate change is defined, discussed, and dealt with in and by cities, remains incredibly germane. As Betsill and Bulkeley aptly note, climate policy at the city-level is about the making (or not) of *difficult decisions* (p. 193), and cannot be resolved via recourse to better, more rational, or more readily available information. In so doing C3 pushes back on the tragedy of the commons orientation that has tended to dominate scholarship on global climate politics and focuses instead on the contested politics of winners and losers, and the processes of imposition and resistance, that shape the substance, orientation, and impact of climate policy initiatives regardless of the scale of intervention (Aklin and Mildenberger, 2020; Colgan et al., 2021).

Power and authority are thus central to understanding what happens within these new governance spaces, and here Betsill and Bulkeley's core concern with how global and local imperatives are being fused together remains a guiding light. While recent scholarship explores the conditions under which network secretariats (Lecavalier and Gordon, 2020), philanthropic entities (Fuentenebro and Acuto, 2022; Papin and Beauregard, 2023) and private sector interests (Davidson and Gleeson 2015; Gordon, 2020; Leal and Paterson 2023) are able to exert influence over the content and orientation of city climate policy, here I want to highlight the prescience of C3 in focusing attention on the power dynamics inherent in still-embryonic mechanisms of governance: methodologies of standardizing, measuring, accounting, and reporting urban GHG emissions.

C3 ultimately lands on the relative inability of TMNs at the time to shape city engagement or actions beyond that which they were already willing to do (p. 5) the intervening years allow us to re-examine practices such as these in a new light. That early orientation of TMNs towards (ac)countability, most readily observable within ICLEIs Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) 5-milestone framework, has become a widespread and taken-for-granted feature of contemporary city climate governance in the years since. This is most evident in the uptake of public disclosure practices by cities to third party platforms like CDP Cities and the Carbonn Climate Registry, and the emergence of a constellation of technical tools – software applications, training resources – and consultancies geared towards building the capacity of cities to regularize how they measure, monitor, and account for their climate emissions and activities (Gordon, 2016; Hughes et al. 2020).

Betsill & Bulkeley cast a critical eye on this phenomenon in its early form and their take – that directing scarce city resources to the task of measurement and reporting, nudging local actions and interventions towards those most amenable to quantification (p. 183) – remains a useful corrective to bear in mind. All the moreso in light of the acceleration of this trend across the broader domain of global urban climate governance (where a growth industry has formed emerged around techniques of modelling, measurement, and monitoring) underpinned by a combination of cities' desire to be perceived as 'investable' (read fiduciarily responsible) partners by global financial actors (Rashidi et al., 2019; Bigger and Millington, 2020) and the potentially homogenizing effects this has on city climate policies (Westman et al., 2023).

On whose behalf do cities govern?

C3 draws our attention towards the spatial tensions inherent in global climate governance and demand that we inquire into *whose* interests are reflected in global urban climate governance

(p. 191)? TMNs, as Betsill and Bulkeley observe, are *closed* arenas; governance spaces to which a select few have access and even fewer are able to upload, modularize, and mobilize specific understandings, policies, and priorities related to climate governance. The chasm between a dispersed politics of transnational city communication, coordination, and cooperation and a place-based politics of the urban is rendered in great detail across the chapters of C3 and TMNs to this day operate largely outside the reach of local interests, and city-network connections are forged through narrow, though variably more/less dense, interlinkages (particular city officials or politicians). If city climate governance is, as C3 convincingly suggests, an (at least partially) extra-urban phenomenon then how can we think about the political foundations on which transformative, ambitious city objectives rest?

This has important implications, of which I want to raise two. First, it demands that we carefully scrutinize the content and orientation of city climate governance. Though the discourse of climate justice and just transition has been incorporated into both city climate plans (Diezmartínez and Short Gianotti, 2022) and TMN programming, early analysis suggests that such a phenomenon remains more performative gesture than indication of a fundamental restructuring of city efforts (Angelo et al., 2020). The power differential between civil society and local interests on one hand, and the global financial, corporate, and private sector organizations that dominate the landscape of global urban climate governance on the other, must be rebalanced if transformative urban climate governance is to live up to its ambitious claims.

Second, it suggests the need to think carefully about the political foundations on which ambitious city agendas rest. Scholars have alerted us to the crucial importance of supportive political coalitions to the sustainability of transformative climate agendas (Bernstein and Hoffmann, 2018; Stokes, 2020) and, assertions of the 'pragmatism' and post-political orientation of cities aside cities are no different in this regard. Yet cities also experience a crushing need to secure an enormous amount of financial resources if they are to implement truly transformative agendas at the urban scale and as such face a strong imperative to take actions that satisfy the interests of multinational corporations and global financial actors to gain access to flows of private investment and climate finance (Sareen and Waagsaether, 2023). The latter suggests a dis-embedding of the city from local context; the former reminds us of the need for cities to remain tethered to the particulars of place and the needs of local populations. Together they suggest a complex politics of contestation unavoidable at the urban scale (Paterson et al., 2022). Here a Polanyian approach that explores the comparative efforts to re-embed city climate policy in specific social contexts could provide a useful addendum to the multi-level governance framework deployed in C3 (Thompson et al., 2020).

As I pored through 'Cities and Climate Change' for the first time in quite a while my mind wandered to the looking glass through which Alice steps in the eponymous novel by Lewis Carrol. Just as Alice steps through the looking glass into a world both similar and different to the one she calls home, 'Cities and Climate Change' opens the reader up to a world of cities engaged in, and with, the world; one by and large unseen by scholars of world politics at the moment of its publication in 2003. Whereas Alice is challenged by the unfamiliar logics she confronts, C3 serves as a cipher, one that has enabled generations of appreciative scholars to better conceptualize cities, the ways they interact in and through new infrastructures of global governance, and the diverse array of global climate governance they individually and collectively enact. The book helped kick off an explosion of scholarship on the global governance of not only climate change but global migration, public health, and human security among others (Aust, 2020; Durmus and Oomen, 2021; Gordon and Ljungkvist, 2022; Ljungkvist, 2021). Its cautious and empirically grounded skepticism underscores the need for continued critical interrogation of the myriad interests working to enable, shape, and constrain city climate governance into the future.

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Rethinking urban governance: the lessons of Cities and Climate Change

Pauline McGuirk and Robyn Dowling

Cities and Climate Change's contribution to scholarship goes well beyond shifting how we understand the multilevel governance of climate change and the role of cities therein. The influence of the book's central ideas have gone far beyond this to spur the wider field of urban governance studies, opening out conceptual pathways for unpacking the workings of urban governance, the configuration of the capacity to govern, the politics of governance, and the politics of centring the urban in the governance of complex societal challenges. Our commentary on the *Cities and Climate Change*'s influence and legacy is focused on three key points.

First, the book was, of course, foundational in recognizing cities – and municipalities in particular – as crucial political actors in climate governance, with independent agency. It unpacked climate governance as a complex multilevel process wherein traditional analytical divisions between the global, national and local scales lose their purchase and the multiscalar dynamics that constitute the relations of governance come to the fore. And this, in turn, revealed how relations of power in governance need to be understood with few assumptions about the operation of hierarchy or about how the authority to govern is established. A more subtle lens is needed. Bulkeley and Betsill deployed that subtlety in clearly demonstrating how city governance actions are not just responses to top-down imperatives or opportunities, that cascade hierarchically down levels of government, but they are constructed by and in 'relations of power and influence between sub-national and national state and non-state actors, and through multilevel, transnational networks' (p. 188). This stance opened out the way we understand cities' capacities as governance actors able to take effect beyond the discrete scale of the urban, and how we might understand the potential of cities in the multiscalar emergence of governance regimes more generally (whether about environment, society, economy, technology).

Cities and Climate Change's multi-scalar conception of cities as political actors also seeded a wider body of work that adopted relational understandings of urban governance that have refined our grasp on how cities' governance capabilities, and indeed their progressive political possibilities might be expanded or contained (Allen and Cochrane, 2010; Baud et al., 2021; Bartels, 2020; McCann and Ward, 2012; McGuirk and Dowling, 2021; Robinson, 2015). The book revealed city governance actors to be simultaneously embedded in *and* actively constitutive of multi-level regimes of governance but also increasingly enmeshed in topological relations of formal and informal networks of policy mobility, learning, capacity building etc. And so it provided a crucial stepping off point for developing more refined understandings of how multiscalar and topological dynamics matter, both for the potential to open up new urban politics and for where they may reach their limits (Davidson and Ward, 2022). Here we can look to a growing body of work on the proliferation of inter-urban networks around, for example, urban public space, housing crises, urban commons, public health, night-time economies, etc (e.g. Acuto and Leffel, 2021; Davidson et al., 2019). Equally, we could look to the flourishing of recent work on new muncipalism (Bianchi, 2023; Blanco et al., 2020; Russell, 2022; Thompson, 2021) that draws from the book's attention to the potential of municipal governments as multiscalar change agents, with the capacity to insert new progressive political agenda into social, economic and environmental governance regimes – from housing, to solidarity economies, to low carbon transition and climate justice – through various tactics that 'jump scale' or build capacity topologically. But the book did not resile from recognizing how these efforts encounter institutional limits and are undercut or derailed by scalar dynamics that narrow their opportunity structure (Pinto et al., 2023).

Our second point is to highlight the way *Cities and Climate Change*'s expanded conceptions of how the capacity to govern is produced as a 'dispersed form of rule.' And in fleshing out what this distributed conception of governance means analytically, the book also opened out recognition of the location of politics in urban governance, again widening our lens on the spectrum of political possibility.

Through the prism of urban carbon governance, *Cities and Climate Change*'s provided cogent examples of how the capacity to govern is realized through plural pathways, via diverse programs and projects loosely coordinated around a 'will to improve' (Li 2007), involving a multiplicity of actors and interventions working through multiple sites, elements, devices and mechanisms, objects and subjects. And all of this operating in an expanding set of domains, from transport and energy infrastructure, to the home, and citizen subjectivities. Beyond this, the book's empirical richness has encouraged attention to the actual political practices of governing as they occur across state and non-state, public and private domains and how these practices are cohered in place through irreducibly contextual means: forged through specific socio-material-political intersections in place (see McGuirk et al., 2016).

The legacy of the book's view on the politics of city governance has been equally expansive in effect. Bulkeley and Betsill insisted that climate governance is not a clearcut challenge but a political question of crafting problemisations such that governance issues come to matter in particular ways in particular places, as objects and subjects of governance are constituted in response to particular problematics: that is, they drew our attention to what we might now call material politics. They revealed how particular forms of problematization allowed for the extension of governance authority to intervene into new spaces and in new ways, leaving other trajectories, spaces and interests out of scope. Refusing the notion of policy problems as self-evident and of policy trajectories as common sense, the book's approach has provided urban governance studies more broadly with resources for critically understanding urban governance as always produced in a field of power and contested meaning (see, e.g., Teo, 2023).

In a generative vein, the book's distributed conception of governance also opened out our lens on the location of politics in urban governance. In our own work for example in the Australian context, we adopted Bulkely and Betsill's wide-spectrum lens on the material politics of urban energy governance (McGuirk et al., 2019) to explore how the particular problematisation of energy efficiency as a climate change issue endowed political capacity on commercial office buildings as key sites of governance intervention, whereby smart building energy management systems became authorized as key devices in energy governance. The book's wide lens on dispersed governance and its broad political spectrum furnished a means to grasp the broad ecology of interventions, actors and actions, sites, devices and moments through which the capacity to govern and the politics of governance is played out (Bissell, 2018). In our case, *Cities and Climate Change*'s emphasis on problematisation and its politics allowed us to see the political consequences of shaping governance regimes around building energy performance, consolidating this over more disruptive transformations of the energy production regime or challenging energy intensive social practices. More broadly, the book's expansive take on how and where politics can be located, offers a generative stance that has much to offer contemporary engagements with emergent, multifaceted governance 'problems' facing cities (and society more widely): from governance of AI and AI urbanism, to housing crises, to public health management.

This brings us to our final point which is to highlight *Cities and Climate Change*'s prescience in identifying the mobilization of cities (and indeed cities' self-nomination) as key players in governing a wider raft of complex challenges in and through the city. The book pointed to both the climate governance action of cities in the absence (or turgid pace) of national/international action and to how the urban was being drawn upon in multiscalar governance assemblages. Two decades later, the notion that 'cities can save the planet' (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2020) – that they can

deliver solutions to a range of complex social, environmental and economic challenges – is a common place (Acuto et al., 2018; Barnett, 2022; Lawton, 2020). Barnett (2022) recently referred to this as 'task responsibilisation' of urban actors and processes in governing societal futures. *Cities and Climate Change* opened the door to attending to the urbanization of complex problems/solution sets: from climate change, to (now) poverty, food security, AI-fuelled socio-technical transformations and more.

Indeed, in our own urban governance work, this has led us to our current research on urban governance innovation where we've been looking at how this task responsibilisation of the urban is driving the 'imperative to innovate' and the consequences for urban governance (McGuirk et al., 2022). The central themes of *Cities and Climate Change* – the multiscalar, the diversification of actors authorized to govern, the shifting politics of problematisation as cities and local governments are involved – are writ large in our emergent analyses. Our work thus far is revealing the widening dispositif of actors and mechanisms that constitute innovative urban governance initiatives (often self-consciously cast as such) and the broad spectrum of politics and political possibility (Sisson et al., 2023). And, perhaps not surprisingly, we find ourselves mirroring the very point that Bulkeley and Betsill return to in the book's conclusion. This is the on-going importance of the state as a governance actor. As we reflect on what the task responsibilisation of the urban for governing complex problems means for the urban state, we return to a prescient point made in the conclusion 'the role of the state is not governed by some determinate and finite notion of capacity but rather through negotiations in which actors and institutions mutually define their respective roles…shifts in the scale of state activity and authority should therefore be viewed as a reorganization of the social relations between actors, a reorganisation which may reinforce the power of the state' (p. 191). For us, then, *Cities and Climate Change* continues both to provoke and to provide us with conceptual resources; as it does, we argue, for urban governance studies more generally.

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Cities of love: Climate change, urban justice and an anticolonial politics

Ankit Kumar

Bulkeley and Betsill's (2003) arguments on a key role of cities in response to climate change stand the test of time. For the first time, this book presented evidence from different Western cities that the 'traditional analytical divisions between international and domestic politics, local, national and global scales, as well as state and non-state actors, no longer apply'. They argued that, contrary to normative understandings, climate change governance was not just a matter of global negotiations and national policies, but also local action, even though these local movements are deeply influenced by national, transnational, and global actors and actions (186).

Since the book came out 20 years ago, there has been increasing talk of climate justice, yet social justice within and beyond climate change discussions, locally and globally, has taken a beating. From the Kyoto Protocol to Paris and post-Paris discussions, 'the moral tenor of global climate governance has moved away from the principle of common but differentiated responsibility toward a perverse moral concept … "common but shifted responsibility"' (Okereke and Coventry, 2016: 847). Other key changes in the last 20 years overlap with climate change. We have a more entrenched neoliberalism manifesting in some places as austerity politics. This has stripped urban areas and local governments of resources and autonomy. There is a supposed 'global' development paradigm under the Sustainable Development Goals that calls for a bigger role for non-state actors, especially big business, and philanthropy. The transition from emission reduction targets for the global North under the Kyoto Protocol to targets for everyone under the Paris Agreement has been seen as evidence of a more 'global' development paradigm where roles and responsibilities are much more dissipated than before (Horner and Hulme, 2019). Finally, there is a global rise of populism and ethnonationalism. This populism is insidious in that it often supports particular forms of climate action while opposing social justice. This insidious nature also manifests in calls for social justice between nation-states and its denial within the nation-states. In light of these developments, I invite Bulkeley and Betsill (2003) to reflect on how the role of cities or urban areas more broadly might have progressed or regressed in the last 20 years. Here I offer some provocations for this.

In light of the developments briefly outlined above, (re)reading this book, I found myself inadvertently whispering *justice* every time the word climate change came up. And then asking myself, does that particular statement stand true? For example, 'climate protection has been adopted as a core activity of the environment division' in Denver (171). Would it also be true *now* that climate justice has been adopted as a core activity of the environment division? By doing this, I do not mean to question Bulkeley and Betsill's (2003) arguments. Rather, I want to, collectively, reread their arguments in the present-day climate context. I want to ask how cities might be embedding in/justice in their climate change work, alongside and despite the state. Here I pick 4 points:

First, Bulkeley and Betsill (2003) identify that 'climate change has been added to other rationales …. [like financial saving or better local environment] rather than providing a justification for policy action in and of itself' (173). How might this translate to a wider climate justice action? Perhaps a pertinent question is: which cities are actively involved in a social justice agenda and how are they using climate change as an additional justification for action? It might be worth remembering here that the advent of a politics of environmental justice was always rooted in racial justice.

Second, they identify the centrality of the 'availability of financial resources' in enabling local actions (175). Importantly, Bulkeley and Betsill (2003) note that local authorities that most effectively engaged with global climate networks did so due to 'the financial and political resources it offers than by access to technical and best practice information' (186). Finance is always a looming

question in climate change governance. Where is the finance coming from and for what purposes? As the power of local authorities diminishes in many parts of the world whether through a desire for centralization or through a politics of austerity, and corporations step in to fill the gap, where do concerns for justice stand?

Third, the 'powers of local government in the critical areas of land use planning, transport and energy management' (184) comes through as an important point. The question of energy, whether in the form of electricity and heating at home or for mobility, is central to climate justice. We can ask here, where do we see changes happening that centre justice? How and where are cities promoting more equitable consumption and using these as vehicles of climate justice actions? Subsidized public transport, for example, is an intervention one can think of.

Fourth, the Bulkeley and Betsill's (2003) remind us that it matters very much 'how the issue is defined and understood' and that local constituencies can relate climate action with 'other dividends, such as reducing local air pollution, improving the local economy, enhancing the liveability of urban spaces, and addressing social and economic inequities' (184). Perhaps, this is where we can most clearly ask if justice matters for cities taking climate action. Is justice one of the 'dividends' that come to matter? If it does, then is there a geography to this?

Bulkeley and Betsill's (2003) arguments for a key role of the urban or the local were based largely on what cities could do to mitigate global climate change or rather their own impacts on the Earth's climate. 20 years since, the question of climate change adaptation is progressively urgent. The links between climate justice and adaptation are important. Here, the argument is that 'socially just outcomes should be a priority if adaptation is to be fair, inclusive, and sustainable' and that 'adaptation rooted in equity and justice principles can have an "intrinsic" value (a goal in itself) and an "instrumental" value (in achieving wider goals)' (Singh et al., 2022: 656). It well established that 'vulnerable and historically disadvantaged communities—especially those in the Global South or less resourced cities and localities in the Global North—will disproportionately shoulder the costs of climate change as well as its negative implications for health, livelihoods, and economic security' (Olazabal et al., 2021: 828). In addition, the centrality of justice to the question of climate adaptation in is embedded in critiques that 'seek to interrogate environmental determinist narratives of risk, techno-managerial decision-making pathways, hegemonic state development policies, geopolitical contentions at multiple borderlands, and the active marginalization of the plurality of worldviews'. For these and other reasons, the question of climate justice and climate adaptation becomes more complicated than that of mitigation.

When it comes to greenhouse gases emissions, as Bulkeley and Betsill (2003) show, cities can contribute to global mitigation, (somewhat) independent of states. This is because the Earth's atmosphere is an open and shared space with flows of carbon emissions, and the warming they cause, circumventing political boundaries. Yet, the impacts of such warming are differential, and a 'global' climate change adaptation needs to be premised on sharing resources and spaces. This is hindered by political boundaries maintained by surveillance and carceral infrastructures. If cities are effective in 'lobbying national governments' and 'exercise a degree of influence' (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003: 2–3), how might this translate to climate change adaptation? My argument is that cities need to engage in an anticolonial politics of love and hospitality that sheds 'security' for an effective response to climate change. An effective response that brings climate change mitigation and adaptation together.

I take the example of the Sanctuary Cities movement (Kumar, 2023). This movement is often credited as an example of actions cities extend *within, but without*, states. Sanctuary cities offer support and 'safe space' to undocumented migrants, refugees, and those fleeing violence, by 'providing identification, housing, health and labour market [and]…. non-collaboration with deportation agencies'. Yet Roy (2019: 769) links the proponents of sanctuary jurisdictions and those of 'expansion of police power'. Sanctuary cities here are not premised on a resistance to the state;

rather, as Roy explains, they are expressions of resistance to particular parts of the state. For example, in the United states sanctuary cities were articulated as 'resistance to Trumpism' (Roy, 2019: 768). Sanctuary cities are premised on the 'liberalism' of local governments, including the local police. Yet, the police have a long history of brutality as 'state violence' (Roy, 2019: 768). This history of violence and carceral infrastructure targets mainly Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Dalit bodies, supported by the local state, is starkly at odds with movements for social justice that sanctuary cities purport.

What can then cities do to progress climate, justice and climate justice actions, besides and despite the state? Roy (2019) calls for a 'shift from sanctuary to abolition' (775). Building on this, I argue for a politics of love for the 'other,' one that rejects 'security' (Kumar, 2023). A politics beyond the state needs to engage with a politics of abolition. Where might we find these cities of love, these cities of climate justice?

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Response: When cities broke into the global stage: 20 years since the publication of 'Cities and Climate Change'

Michele Betsill and Harriet Bulkeley

We appreciate the opportunity to reflect on how the field of climate urbanism has evolved since the 2003 publication of our book, *Cities and Climate Change: Urban Sustainability to Global Environmental Governance*. When we were conducting our own research on cities and climate change in the late 1990s, there were relatively few scholars working in this area. This was partly because the problem of climate change was largely understood as a global collective action problem requiring the international cooperation of states, and partly because the long-standing divide between cities and nature meant that questions of the (more than local) environment were rarely considered as urban issues. Against a backdrop of increasing state recalcitrance on the need for meaningful action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, particularly in the US and Australia where we were working at the time, the green shoots of urban opportunities for action provided a source of hope and concepts of multilevel and transnational governance the means for connecting them to the global arena.

We were certainly not alone in finding cities a fertile ground for exploring the opportunities for climate action. During the 2000s, the field of climate urbanism grew significantly, expanding into a range of disciplines as reflected in the contributions to this symposium, including international relations (Gordon), human geography (Castán Broto and Marvin; Kumar), urban studies (McGuirk and Dowling), and public policy and administration (Davies). Relatedly, a host of concepts, approaches and methods were deployed to understand the climate/urban phenomenon, such that the field is now characterized by an eclectic mix of theoretical perspectives and varied conclusions about the weight and importance of urban climate action.

As the field has grown, we see a more critical engagement with the nature of urban climate politics and its limitations, and a shift from a concern only with the opportunities that cities might provide for responding to the climate challenge to more fundamental questions about what kinds of opportunities these are and for whom. Yet, there remains a tendency to speak about the nature of climate urbanism based on case studies of large cities and the global North, despite repeated calls to shift our analyses from these sites and deploy large-scale and quantitative methods.

The expansion of work on cities and climate change across different disciplines has enriched wider debates, such that, for example, the role of cities as actors on the global stage is now much more prominent within policy studies and public administration. The ways in which cities provide sites for climate politics and the subsequent reconfiguration of what constitutes climate politics has been significant in international relations. Likewise, the fields of urban studies and planning have now embraced the importance of understanding cities as both actors and sites of climate politics and of the manifold ways in which this is reconfiguring the very fabric and nature of the urban, what it means to inhabit the climate changing city, and indeed how the urban can be governed in the context of indeterminate climate futures. Over the past decade in particular, there has been a clear expansion of debates concerning how and with what implications efforts to reconfigure, inhabit and govern the city in relation to climate change matter in terms of (environmental) justice. Concerns have grown not only about who is benefiting from climate action, but also about how climate change may itself be a means used to perpetuate continuing forms of exclusion and injustice in the city.

20 years on, the field is broader, richer, more nuanced, and more political than we could have imagined looking at those first pioneering cities that made climate change their cause. As we move into a third decade of work in this area, and with no less than an IPCC Special Report dedicated to this topic on the horizon, we can also identify areas of emerging new scholarship and fertile ground for new endeavours. One relates to what appears to be a curious path-dependency of equating the

primary site of urban climate politics with the local state, whereas research on climate politics more broadly considers a much wider set of actors. We see much potential for casting the net much wider and going beyond engagement with the multiple civil society and private sector actors involved in local climate policy and with communities and social movements mobilizing around questions of climate politics and justice. Rapidly growing research on urban climate finance and the role of private actors in this domain contributes to a deeper interrogation of the political foundations of the city, as Gordon puts it, and what this means for the ways in which climate urbanism is (and is not) unfolding. Likewise, attending to other key private sector actors, including land holders, utilities, and sites of production and consumption, appears to be fertile ground for further exploring what McGuirk and Dowling view as a reorganization of urban social relations and renegotiation of the power of the local state.

A second area concerns issues of where and with whom responsibility for urban climate action lies. Kumar rightly highlights the necessity of considering whether and how climate in/justice is embedded in urban climate governance. For good normative and political reasons, climate justice debates often focus on those being put at risk or excluded from the benefits and processes of climate responses, and there has been a growing emphasis on including issues such as race and gender through an intersectional lens. As Davies suggests, this requires that we 'stay with the trouble' and tensions that arise with an increasing emphasis on a participatory politics that is both diverse and inclusive. An equally pressing justice concern relates to the actions of those who have the most responsibility and capacity to address climate change and their role in urban responses. For example, we can think of the now well-known figures concerning the relative contribution of global elites to emissions, or the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities which has orchestrated much of international climate politics as being of equal relevance to the urban context. Likewise, those with power, land, and resources, which in many urban areas particularly in the global South are not necessarily the local state, also bear a responsibility to foster climate resilience. Yet to date little scholarship has been directed to these questions.

Finally, important considerations about how we understand the nature of the urban and its boundaries lie at the intersection of questions about the multiplicity of sites and actors of urban climate politics and those concerning questions of justice and responsibility. The vast majority of climate urbanism research has worked with a largely bounded notion of the urban as a place, even while exploring its governance through multilevel and transnational perspectives. As we further interrogate cities' contributions to the climate problem and the kinds of possible solutions, the position of the urban within global flows (e.g. finance, goods, heat, or nature) is increasingly apparent. Questions of consumption inevitably tie particular urban sites and dynamics to supply chains and resource frontiers, while research on urban nature now positions cities in complex patterns of migratory species, upstream and downstream catchment management issues, and the ways in which cities are providing distinct new ecologies for often rare species. As this vibrant field continues to grow, we look forward to further thought-provoking work that asks these deeper questions about how climate change is reworking our understanding, imagination, and hopes for urban futures.

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

List of contributions

• Introduction: The Legacy of Cities and Climate Change (3C), Vanesa Castán Broto and Simon Marvin. • Staying with the trouble: The persistent challenge of public participation in cities and climate change. Anna R. Davies Geography, School of Natural Sciences, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. • Global Politics Through the Looking Glass: The Lasting Influence of 'Cities and Climate Change'. David Gordon, Department of Politics, University of California Santa Cruz. • Rethinking urban governance: the lessons of Cities and Climate Change Pauline McGuirk and Robyn Dowling, School of Geography and Sustainable Communities, University of Wollongong and School of Architecture, Design and Planning, University of Sydney. • Cities of Love: Climate change, urban justice and an anticolonial politics Ankit Kumar, Department of Geography, The University of Sheffield. • Response: When cities broke into the global stage: 20 years since the publication of 'Cities and Climate Change.' • Harriet Bulkeley, Durham University and Utrecht University & Michele Betsill, University of Copenhagen.

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Notes

1. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203219256/cities-climate-change-michelle-betsill-harriet-bulkeley.
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