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**Book review:**

Shadare, G.A. (2025) Book Review - City preparedness for the climate crisis – A multidisciplinary approach. *People, Place and Policy*, 19 (1). pp. 91-95. ISSN: 1753-8041

<https://doi.org/10.3351/ppp.2024.6874996238>

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## **Book review**

# **City Preparedness for the Climate Crisis – A Multidisciplinary Approach**

Edited by Francisco Javier Carrillo and Cathy Garner  
Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2021, 432 pages, £127.80 (Hb)  
ISBN 978 1 80088 365 9

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The study of urban climate vulnerability and adaptation has gained significant importance over the past two decades. This has sparked scholarly interest and discussions, especially as numerous cities grapple with escalating challenges arising from climate change. Mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change in urban areas require a comprehensive approach due to the complexities of the urban socio-ecological system. Cities, given their unique design and size, face distinct climate impacts. Therefore, it is crucial for adaptation plans to consider local attributes such as geographical location, risk levels, population size, social inequalities, political and economic structures, infrastructure vulnerability, and available resources. Cities play a pivotal role, and their decision to adopt specific plans can prevent extensive damage or lead to significant failures with widespread repercussions. Consequently, issues of adaptation to new realities and mitigation of existential climate risks, coupled with incorporating lessons of radical transformations that have been trialled and implemented across some cities, should improve or facilitate inter/intra-urban agency and ensure that cities are prepared for the uncertainties and risks emanating from climate crises.

The book '*City Preparedness for the Climate Crisis—A Multidisciplinary Approach*,' published by Edward Elgar Publishing Limited in 2021 and edited by Francisco Javier Carrillo and Cathy Garner, is a collection of 28 chapters grouped into seven parts. The book is part of a two-volume set created by the World Capital Institute (WCI) to promote a conceptual and practical approach to living in the Anthropocene. As an independent think-tank, WCI aims to advance the understanding and application of knowledge as the most potent force for positive development (Carrillo, 2015). Consequently, WCI advocated for a Knowledge-Based Discipline (KBD), defined as "the collective identification and enhancement of a value set, the dynamic balance of which promotes the sustainability and advancement of a given community" (Carrillo, 2014, p. 416), for interrogating and understanding contemporary challenges of the climate crisis in modern cities. When applied to urban development in knowledge-based cities, KBD aims to balance all forms of knowledge capital (tangible and intangible) in the evolution of

human activity for the present and the future (Carrillo, 2015). From this theoretical perspective, the primary measure of societal performance is not the increase in monetary wealth or GDP but the improvement in citizens' social and economic well-being and respect for our planetary ecosystems. Given the increasing urgency of addressing the climate crisis, there is more room for literature and studies that provide insights into the critical role cities can play for the benefit of citizens and the globe.

Borrowing mainly from the concept of values-based progress as an integrative framework, many of the chapters in the book also incorporate insights from the concept of knowledge cities, which WCI propounded. Defined as a 'permanent settlement of relatively higher rank in which the citizens undertake a deliberate, systematic attempt to identify and develop its capital system in a balanced, sustainable manner (Carrillo, 2004, 2006)', the framework can help cities to adapt better to emergencies and uncertainties in the post-industrial economic phase and serve as a useful heuristic and platform from which to manage rapid change.

The authors from different countries discuss various topics, including urban climate vulnerability, adaptation plans, and cutting-edge issues in city preparedness. The book also examines the impacts of climate change on cities and how indicators, metrics, and benchmarks can be used to create a knowledge-based framework for understanding and learning from city preparedness for the climate crisis. The book covers many innovative and thought-provoking topics and concepts related to urban development and climate change preparedness. The authors aim to address several important questions. I have considered a few of those questions below:

How can cities be best prepared to deal with the upcoming climate crisis challenges?

1. What strategies can cities implement to address climate crises? How can interdisciplinary studies help planners, policymakers, and leaders tackle adaptation, mitigation, and urban vulnerabilities in the coming decades?
2. What valuable lessons can cities learn from each other regarding climate preparedness and adaptation?
3. How can cities incorporate salutogenic principles (which espouse human health and well-being issues as a transformative approach to urban planning – see Chapter 7, pp. 93-105 of the book) into their urban planning to mitigate climate change's impacts and enhance their residents' health and well-being?
4. Finally, how can they promote and develop resilient learning ecosystems that create vibrant environments for collaboration, continuous learning, innovation, and adaptation?

The book uses indicators, metrics, and benchmarks to address these questions and create a rubric for understanding city preparedness. It outlines a structured approach to learning from different cities' experiences and improving resilience by covering topics on the profound innovations and knowledge market regimes for urban climate emergencies that can spur and challenge more effective collaborative climate change in urban areas. The 'sharing cosmopolis' perspective was highlighted as a framework for city prosperity without growth. Moreover, some topics exposed the potential dangers of urban troubles, highlighting urban dysfunctions, bunkerisation (a concept of reconfiguring spaces either as enclosed bunkers, fenced landscapes, eco-enclaves, fortified fragments, and artificial environments designed to provide protective and defensive responses to the ecological, military, and political threats of the Anthropocene by creating a 'new life support system on an enhanced scale' (Marvin, 2016, p. 237) - see Chapter 18, pp. 234-243), relocation, migrations, and climate change preparedness. The coverage of these issues was contrasted with the initiatives and ideas to prepare cities for the future by

exploring the issues of urban autonomous zones and mitigation of climate disasters. Other ideas, such as urban relational capital and creating new transaction regimes, seemed like cutting-edge ideas that could allow for 'neo-medievalism', a concept that permits the city to become a centre of self-governed subnational government. Moreover, the focus on urban autonomous zones, where cities can have a degree of self-governance and operate with some independence from the central government, seems like a good idea, especially when considering examples of places like Christiania (Copenhagen, Denmark), the Kowloon Walled City (Hong Kong – though no longer existing), and Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities, Chiapas (Mexico – an area governed by the Zapatista National Liberation Army and operating independently from the Mexican government).

However, the need for subsistence assurance will require a new object-oriented framework. The book closes with the re-imagination of the future city, which explores diverse issues like the political economies of the commons, the perspectives of youth on green local urban futures, and how cities can foster resilient co-learning ecosystems that can be crucial vehicles for regenerative urban development. Considering the intriguing idea of a "sharing cosmopolis" as a framework for city prosperity without growth can help advocates and planners advocate for a more collaborative and sustainable approach to urban living.

A critical aspect of the book is its in-depth discussions of various topics and issues that scholars and practitioners would find relevant. A good example is the concept of salutogenesis, which focuses on promoting health and well-being rather than just addressing disease. This concept, propounded initially by Antonovsky (1979), emphasises the importance of creating environments that support health and help people deal with challenges. In the context of climate change, salutogenesis can significantly contribute to cities' preparedness in multiple ways. For instance, it can involve building and maintaining climate-adaptive resilient infrastructures like flood defences and heat mitigation, as well as other measures to ensure that cities' infrastructures can support residents during emergencies. Other salutogenic strategies for promoting health-enhancing city environments include creating green spaces, addressing social determinants of health, building a sense of coherence, improving environmental quality to support residents' mental health, promoting healthy lifestyles, and fostering social connections.

Another concept was neo-medievalism (see Chapter 23, pp. 292-303), proposed by Hedley Bull (1977) in his groundbreaking book, *The Anarchical Society – A Study of Order in World Politics.* This political theory envisions a future where sovereign states are replaced by a modern, secular version of the political organisation that existed in Western Christendom during the Middle Ages. In other words, according to neo-medievalism, there could be a political order that allows overlapping authorities and multiple loyalties to coexist in increasingly globalised and internationalised cities, which have become the locus of highly significant urban activities. This could occur when there is extensive fragmentation of centralised nation-states. This concept helps us understand the contemporary political landscape by drawing parallels between the current international system and the political order of medieval Europe, where multiple overlapping authorities existed, and no single sovereign power existed. However, the challenge of operationalising the concept in modern cities lies in the complex and delicate management of conflicting allegiances. This would be practically impossible to coordinate in a future hyper-networked international system, where supranational entities like the EU, for instance, could increasingly dilute and even erode the absolute sovereignty of nation-states.

The complex governance structures emerging in this new political order might see the rise of non-state actors and regional organisations sharing governance responsibilities. The potential risks and promises of this future political or governance arrangement for cities are hard to imagine. However, given the global interconnected nature of modern political, economic, and social systems, there might be some hope. Notably, the book has ample case studies that readers will find helpful. For instance, the book discusses a case study comparing local adaptation plans in cities such as Rotterdam and New York, which have implemented innovative flood management systems. These cities serve as exemplary models of urban resilience, especially considering recent flooding and climate-related crises affecting cities worldwide. The book emphasises the urgent need for cities to enhance their resilience. For instance, the devastating floods in Central Europe, exacerbated by climate change, underscore the region's vulnerability. Similarly, increased rainfall and storm surges in densely populated cities like Mumbai and Jakarta have severely impacted marginalised communities. The main takeaway from the book is the call for planners, policymakers, and politicians to address the challenges of climate change and urban resilience through improved urban planning, investment in resilient infrastructure, and inclusive policies to protect vulnerable populations.

The book is a compelling and timely resource for scholars, students and practitioners because it delves into the urgent need for urban areas to adapt to the growing threats posed by climate change. The book stands out for its comprehensive and multidisciplinary perspective, combining insights from urban planning, environmental science, public policy, and social sciences. The authors effectively highlight the interconnectedness of various sectors and the importance of collaborative efforts in building resilient cities. The book illustrates successful strategies and innovative solutions implemented by cities worldwide through case studies and practical examples. It also addresses cities' challenges and barriers, offering actionable recommendations for policymakers, planners, and community leaders.

However, despite its multidisciplinary perspective and comprehensive treatment of all the issues confronting cities, the book could be complex and densely challenging for readers without a background in urban studies and environmental science. Furthermore, some chapters in the book may be too theoretical, particularly in their presentation and language, which may limit or restrict their practical applications for city planners, practitioners and policymakers. Nevertheless, these shortcomings were compensated for by the book's holistic treatment of some salient issues, highlighting the denial and lack of preparedness in many cities for climate preparedness, necessitating the urgent need for more proactive measures. Many case studies in the book offer pragmatic examples and comparisons of local adaptation plans and lessons, which should be valuable for professionals and practitioners.

Overall, this book is essential for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of urban resilience and the proactive steps needed to safeguard our cities against the climate crisis. It is informative and inspiring, significantly contributing to the discourse on sustainable urban development. It should be a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners interested in urban planning, climate resilience, and preparedness. However, it may require a dedicated and disciplined effort to fully grasp its extensive content.

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