Benjamin Richardson, ed.

Local Climate Change Law: Environmental Regulation in Cities and Other Localities.

International action to address climate change has been riddled with polarizing debates and limited success at securing a binding agreement which includes the world’s largest emitters. With the development of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, efforts to tackle climate change have focused mainly on large-scale international action.

Local Climate Change Law: Environmental Regulation in Cities and Other Localities, edited by Benjamin Richardson, offers an alternative perspective to the internationally focused climate change regime by highlighting the important work being done at the subnational level. In Chapter 1, the editor defines ‘local’ as, ‘the role of local governments, municipalities and city authorities in addressing climate change, through law, as well as policies, plans, voluntary codes and associated methods of governance’ (p. 4). This definition serves as the principal starting point for an analysis of local climate change regulation around the world. Through a comparative study of local mitigation and adaptation measures, the book focuses on the increasing role of public authorities in climate change regulation in cities, municipalities, and coalitions of states. In doing so, the contributing authors have created a volume of case studies that emphasize the importance of local climate change regulation to adaptation and energy efficiency measures, as well the benefits of collaborative partnerships between cities and municipalities.

Although this work is not the only one of its kind, Local Climate Change Law is unique in approaching the trends in local climate change regulation by analysing case studies which highlight the varied institutional context in which local governments attempt to tackle climate change. The book is split into three main parts: Part I lays out the framework for local climate change law, Part II analyses local climate action in North America, and Part III examines local climate change action globally. The breadth of case studies is impressive, with numerous studies focusing on the United States and Canada, while others focus on Australia, South Africa, China, and the European Union. The North America part is, however, disproportionately long, with 202 pages, compared with only 116 pages on the global studies in Part III. While the book’s organization is clear and easy to understand, the argument that local climate change action is increasing globally is weakened by the overwhelming number of North American examples. The overall message of the book would have been strengthened by selecting only the most important Northern American examples and including additional examples from outside that region. There is a
considerable amount of local climate change action occurring in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe that could have been highlighted.

The book contributes significantly to the existing climate change literature. Its insights are vitally important to the future of climate change regulation at the international, national, and local levels. Perhaps most importantly, the book draws out the increasing participation of local authorities in intergovernmental forums such as the United Nations and the World Bank, in particular as accredited observers or consultees. It also highlights an increased collaboration of mayors and cities around the world, including the 2007 World Mayors and Local Governments Climate Protection Agreement and the work of ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), to strengthen the role of local authorities’ ability to address climate change across the globe. However, as the book mentions, this phenomenon is not universal, and many localities lack sufficient jurisdiction or power to influence national and international climate change regulation. There is still much work to be done to increase the competency of local authorities. Despite this, the insights found in this book may serve to support policy learning at the local level, and perhaps serve as a stepping stone for increased participation of local governments and municipalities in international processes and collaborative ventures.

*Local Climate Change Law* highlights many global cities as innovators, implementers, and norm-setters of climate change policy. This is the most interesting of the work’s themes, and it weaves its way through many chapters. Chapter 5, by Melissa Powers, discusses the important role that cities can play in climate change mitigation due to their dense populations and powers to regulate activities within their jurisdiction. Historically, cities in the United States have had little independent authority, but they are increasingly becoming centers of economic and political power, making them meaningful actors in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The chapter highlights Portland and New York City for their land-use and transportation policies, building codes, and efficiency standards, as well as waste-reduction and food policies. Chapter 6, by Elizabeth Schwartz, and Chapter 7, by Meinhard Doelle and Kaija Belfry Munroe, discuss Vancouver and Halifax, respectively. Other cities including London, Alberta, Atlanta, Boston, Boulder, Brisbane, Cape Town, Copenhagen, and the Australian state of New South Wales are also cited for being centers of local climate change action and policy. The vast number of cities mentioned across various chapters makes clear the importance of cities in climate change regulation and policy development. The case studies found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, in particular, may serve as tools for cities looking to develop similar policies.