



Book Review

Shaping the Metropolis: Institutions and Urbanization in the United States and Canada
McGill-Queens University Press, 2019. 472 pp.

By Zack Taylor

Review by Anna Kopec
University of Toronto

‘Urban governance’ may imply that governance in urban metropolitan cities is confined to local governments and actors. Zack Taylor’s analysis, however, illustrates that the urban is not necessarily at the centre of urban governance at all. In fact, it is the upper levels of government that dictate governance in cities. Taylor illustrates the differences in the regulation of urbanization processes, and argues they are not random or accidental. In fact, such differences are the result

of deliberate actions and unintended consequences of upper levels of government that have structured government resources and capabilities. Different developmental paths have set diverging systems of multi-level urban governance.

Canada and the US are often compared, but Taylor’s in-depth case studies and historical analysis explains the different internal structures that have led to the forms of urban governance we see today. It isn’t only the thoughtful consideration of the Westminster and separated-powers models that make this book an important read, but also how carefully Taylor examines the role of these broader institutional relationships with thorough and historic case studies of Toronto, Vancouver, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Portland. The attention paid not only to institutional foundations, but also normative domains, case-specific narratives, and key actors, highlights the significance of provincial, state, and federal relationships.

This book is essential to anyone interested in urban governance in federal systems. ‘Urban’ does not only refer to the local but rather the different relationships and factors that restrict, enable, discourage, or embolden urban governance. The careful organization of the chapters, coupled with case studies, historical facts, and meticulous consideration of multiple factors, makes this book a vital addition to great comparative scholarship.

Let’s not deny the fact: federalism is complex. Taylor reminds us, however, that its complexity has foundations in history and is in fact part of the urban story. Thankfully we don’t need to unpack the convoluted histories, relationships, and institutions – Taylor’s already done it for us.