

# Reviews

***Water for All: Global Solutions for a Changing Climate***, by David Sedlak (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2023), 440 pp, cloth \$30, eBook \$30.

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Over the past twenty years, the availability of water and the risks posed by poor water quality, too little, or too much water, have increasingly caught the attention of social scientists and humanities scholars, highlighting how it is more than just a technical subject. Until the end of the twentieth century, water was primarily the domain of engineering. Unsatisfied with the uneven distribution of technology's benefits and the unintended problems caused by technical solutions, social scientists and humanities scholars began examining the water-society interface. Simultaneously, driven by challenges such as climate change and urbanization, engineering scholars have proposed advanced technical solutions to address the world's water issues. Trained as an environmental engineer with a PhD in water chemistry, David Sedlak is one of those exceptional authors who can write accessible books about society's relationship with water without compromising on technical aspects. *Water for All* promises to be a book that appeals to both technical and social science communities.

In his previous book, *Water 4.0*, Sedlak explored the past, present, and future challenges of urban water systems. Starting with the earliest urban water systems in ancient civilizations such as Rome, Sedlak set the stage for contemporary challenges posed by climate change, population growth, and aging water infrastructure. While *Water 4.0* provided an initial sketch of potential technical solutions to these challenges, *Water for All* focuses more on the interplay between society and technology. The focus on human behavior is clear from the start, with the first chapter stating, "Through water our humanity is revealed" (p. 1). How we conceive our water challenges, value aquatic ecosystems, and propose solutions reveals much about ourselves.

*Water for All* begins by elaborating on the six water crises that society currently faces: (1) water for the wealthy; (2) for the many; (3) for the unconnected; (4) for good health; (5) for food; and (6) for ecosystems. Sedlak clarifies that under the banner of "The Global Water Crisis," the underlying mechanisms for each crisis remain obscure. Suggesting that there is

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one global water crisis risks wrongly identifying and applying a universal solution when local challenges may vary greatly. For example, providing affluent people with enough water for their gardens is different than providing safe drinking water in areas with naturally high concentrations of arsenic in the groundwater. Sedlak also emphasizes that the “all” in the title includes our ecosystems. He sets these challenges against the backdrop of the Great Acceleration, a term commonly used to describe the rapid and widespread increase in human activity and its impact on Earth’s natural systems in the second half of the twentieth century.

The core of the book analyzes how different water technologies and water-using industries have functioned during the Great Acceleration. Sedlak shows how our existing economic and political systems favor short-term gains over long-term perspectives and how uncertainty in climate change projections is used to postpone action. This message is likely eye opening for technooptimists who see the world as a commodity and the economic system as the provider of its true value.

Although critical of orthodox economists, Sedlak stops short of ignoring financial and economic mechanisms altogether. He presents cities that have successfully used financial incentives and water pricing to reduce citizens’ water use, such as Seattle, which explicitly prioritizes conservation of water over the construction of new water infrastructure. At the same time, Sedlak acknowledges that simply weighing the costs and benefits of water technologies or interventions is not decisive for determining their desirability. Water-recycling technologies, for example, may be too expensive for a local farmer,

but the value that those capabilities add to public and environmental health may justify using public subsidies to increase general affordability.

In the last part of the book, “Planning for Change,” Sedlak discusses five ways forward. The first is closing the urban water loop, meaning that all water used could come either from rainfall or recycling, with no water leaving the system. This would still require a high level of technology, so it may work best in affluent, water-stressed cities, such as Singapore. The second proposal is net-zero-water buildings. Sedlak links this with people’s behavior and their relationship with water supply, suggesting a role for communities in realizing these water-saving efforts, such as in maintaining wastewater recycling and stormwater capture procedures. While this emphasis on local control of water is laudable, there is a tension between this idea and Sedlak’s observation that “the easiest conservation programs to implement tend to be those that reduce water consumption without making consumers feel as if they are compromising their quality of life” (p. 272). While true, a statement acknowledging that this may not be sustainable in the future, even with the best water-saving technologies, would have been welcome. Solutions three and four focus on local desalination technologies and creating room for water for the environment, respectively.

Readers seeking an explicitly normative stance may find the fifth way forward the most attractive. In this last chapter before the epilogue, aptly titled “The Right Thing to Do,” Sedlak proposes three normative pathways that have not featured prominently in other technically detailed books, as they do in *Water for All*. The first is the enforcement of environmental pollution rules, the second is the effective

implementation of the human right to water, and the third is nature's right to water. The latter idea is still considered unconventional by many in the Global North, but examples from the Global South show successful implementation of this right.

Societal change requires that people step outside their disciplinary and ideological comfort zones. This book is both a

convincing and inspirational step in that direction.

—NEELKE DOORN 

*Neelke Doorn is distinguished Antoni van Leeuwenhoek Professor of Ethics of Water Engineering at Delft University of Technology. Her work focuses on moral questions in water engineering and policy, and climate change more generally, for which she combines philosophical approaches with empirical investigations and modeling techniques.*

***The Golden Passport: Global Mobility for Millionaires***, by Kristin Surak (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2023), 336 pp., \$35 cloth, \$35 eBook.

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Variability in global mobility privileges is keyed to citizenship. For citizens of the Congo or Bangladesh or Honduras, there are few countries to which one can travel without first having to secure entry permission in the form of a visa. However, it is not just citizens of the poorest countries that face obstacles to mobility. Citizens—even rich ones—of more prosperous, non-OECD states such as Russia and China also need visas to travel to developed states, with all the ignominy and hassle that the visa process involves.

Enter: “citizenship by investment,” or CBI for short. In *The Golden Passport: Global Mobility for Millionaires*, sociologist Kristin Surak delivers a definitive account of the burgeoning practice by which states extend citizenship in return for cash. Investor citizenship has come a long way from its Wild West days in the 1980s and 1990s, a period that saw rogue agents selling passports out of suitcases and a patchwork of irregular programs through which one could purchase

citizenship. Today, investor citizenship programs have been normalized and professionalized. The rise of investor citizenship is an interesting story in itself, carefully recounted by Surak, and *The Golden Passport* has much to say about citizenship as an institution more generally.

As the book sets out in chapter 1, individuals are now able to secure citizenship in an array of mostly smaller states in return for variable combinations of donations and investments ranging from a hundred thousand dollars (in the case of countries such as Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Antigua) to unspecified millions (as with Austria and New Zealand). The number of individuals who gain additional citizenship(s) on a financial basis every year remains relatively small, at around fifty thousand a year (p. 17). Regardless, it can be a big deal for the countries that are doing the selling, the wealthy who are doing the buying, and the brokers who are smoothing the path between them.