The book “Géopolitique des Pôles.” subtitled “Vers une appropriation des espaces polaires?” (“Polar geopolitics. Towards an appropriation of polar spaces?”, author’s translation) written by Frédéric Lasserre, Anne Choquet and Camille Escudé-Joffres is a general public book describing geopolitical polar dynamics, responding notably to the “Arctic Scramble” narratives and similar discourses of a war on resources at the poles. The book states very clearly and from the beginning that the authors consider the risk of conflict to be over-exaggerated, and even unrealistic. Drawing on the academic background of the authors, the book presents a geographical, political and legal overview of both the Arctic and Antarctic regimes of governance in layman’s language.

The book has a very clear focus, a very clear goal: to demonstrate that there is no “cold rush” or “Polar scramble” in either the Arctic or Antarctica. Five chapters support this demonstration: first, an outlining of what makes polar regions attractive to stakeholders today, covering climate change, scientific interests, existing and potential resources as well as common (Southern) polar imaginaries. A second chapter on the political and legal reality of polar space appropriation covers in a very pedagogical manner the basics of the Law of the Sea, the Antarctica land claims and the processes relevant to Arctic maritime territorial claims. Follows a chapter focused on regional governance regimes, covering the Antarctic Treaty System from a practical approach, Arctic governance through the Arctic Council, environmental protection in Antarctica and environmental protection in the Arctic. Then comes a chapter on the regulation of key activities, which has a section reminding the legal and practical frameworks discussed previously applied to mining and fishing, and then a section on maritime traffic, a section on tourism. The last chapter focuses on the potential sources of tension in the Arctic, starting with a section on existing tensions in the Arctic, insisting on their low intensity, nonetheless, followed by a section on dispute solving mechanisms in Antarctica, and lastly a section covering Asian Polar interests. Lastly, a final chapter wraps up the original question with the optimistic conclusion that the climatic and environmental challenges burdening the Polar regions call for cooperation rather than for conflict.

The authors present an optimist view of the state of Arctic cooperation today. Because of the clear focus it is easy to follow, and every subsection relates clearly to the main point made. However, that comes to the price of sometimes being repetitive, including in the chapter structure itself with some frequent overlap. Besides, it mainly presents State-focused issues

that are also relevant to non-Arctic stakeholders, glossing over or simplifying certain issues, which can be seen in the overly optimistic portrait of Indigenous inclusion in the Arctic governance regime that is presented, for example. However, keeping in mind that the book is not an encyclopedic endeavour but intended for the general French-speaking audiences, this is a coherent editorial choice and prevents it from becoming too information-heavy.

Moreover, the text is very pedagogic and shows the benefits brought by the interdisciplinary background of the authors: every legal mechanism mentioned is carefully detailed in an accessible language, completed later by an overview of the practices. Another consistent theme is the worry about climate change and its consequences, which is weaved through the entire book beyond the original subsection dedicated to it. It also contains a relative abundance of maps and tables which ease comprehension.

The vast majority of the book is focused on governance mechanisms, both legal and customary, and thanks to the clear focus the topic is explored in depth, especially on the Arctic side, which is much more developed. Despite covering both Polar ends, the book underlines on several occasions the fundamental difference between the two that is the Arctic organic, permanent population of 4 million people. However, the “Arctic” itself is never explicitly defined: due to the attention given to maritime claims since we are mostly talking about the political Arctic, one would expect the authors to follow the political definition of the Arctic Council. However, one notices some surprising omissions, such as the absence of mention of Iceland in the section dedicated to tourism for example – while it is mentioned in fishing related sections, or the absence of any map giving one or several definitions of the geographical Arctic. This seems to indicate a somewhat confusing understanding of the Arctic: some clarification would have been welcome.

As it is not a scientific publication but a mainstream audience work, there is no reference in the text, but there are two bibliographies at the end. The first one, the list of references for the text itself is a bit short, and the large share of French speaking references is surprising, but it is recent and up to date. The second one, a bit longer, is a selected bibliographies of work from the authors, which presents no overlap with the first one while providing other sources relevant to the topic as well.

To conclude, this book gets its point across in a simple but effective manner, through very

clear even though somewhat repetitive demonstrations. As a text directed towards French mainstream audiences, it definitely achieves its goal by providing pedagogical explanations on a wide array of topics that often arise in the general media. It is a valuable introduction to polar geopolitics, that could potentially be used as a starting point for higher education students as well.