



## Practices, programs and projects of urban carbon governance: Perspectives from the Australian city



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 24 June 2013

Received in revised form 3 December 2013

#### Keywords:

Urban carbon governance

Gramsci

Governmentality

Hegemonies in-the-making

Australia

### ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the governance of transitions to lower carbon cities. Drawing on both governmentality and neo-Gramscian perspectives, we chart and explore the diverse objects, subjects, means and ends evoked as governmental programs, or hegemonic projects in-the-making, are shaped to orchestrate urban carbon governance. We ask about the diversity of what is being sought through the governance of carbon in the city, how this is rendered and how carbon is being made to matter in the city. We do so through analysis of an audit of carbon governance initiatives in Australian cities, and a characterisation of these initiatives as four distinctive governmental programs. To make sense of the diverse ecology of initiatives revealed, we adopt a typological approach to suggest four distinctive governmental programs—Behaviour change; Demonstration; Transition; and Advocacy. We suggest that Australia's emergent landscape of urban carbon governance both reproduces existing governance orderings and contains openings—via fragile emergent hegemonic projects—that might produce more transformative orderings: not least because of the demands and politics the low carbon subjects being invoked might be empowered to pursue but also because of the potential reconfiguration of the 'integral state' as new governmental programs are imagined and enacted.

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### 1. Introduction

This paper addresses the practices, programs and projects through which the urban governance of carbon is being accomplished. Our aim is to further understandings of how transitions to lower carbon cities are being governed through examining the case of Australia. We focus on carbon governance as the explicit efforts directed towards decarbonising the city – usually driven from a concern to mitigate climate change, but also bound up with imperatives to diversify energy supply and integrate renewables into the energy system. Australia offers an intriguing context for this task. On the one hand, the political governance of climate, and of carbon in particular, has become mired in political contest and compromise (Howarth and Foxall, 2010). Yet on the other hand myriad actions organised by diverse actors, and operating across diverse spaces and scales, are shaping new modalities for carbon governance (Moloney et al., 2010; Jones, 2012). In terms of spatiality, Australia is no exception to the widely held observation that the city is being shaped as a crucial governable

space for carbon (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2007; Hodson and Marvin, 2010). Our own audit of carbon governance initiatives in Australia's capital cities, conducted under the Australian Research Council-funded Australia's Cities and Carbon Reduction project (see Section 3), revealed an ecology of nearly 900 initiatives involving state and non-state actors, working alone and in hybrid partnerships, acting across different domains, and through different modes.

Making sense of this ecology of initiatives being enacted in and through the urban, our analysis adopts a typological approach to the governmental programs being shaped, which we categorise as Behaviour change; Demonstration; Transition; and Advocacy. As we elaborate below, they suggest differentiable rationalities or 'wills to improve' (Li, 2007)—or, in Gramscian terms, emergent hegemonic projects—reflected in the orchestration of varied arrangements of actors and mechanisms, subjects and objects of governance, and forms of knowledge. Our typology provides a framework within which we aim to chart empirical and theoretical concerns about the emergent logics and practices that are orchestrating urban carbon governance. We are led in the first instance to pose the broad but rather straightforward questions: What kinds of things are being sought through the governance of carbon in the city and how are

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these rendered? How, then, does carbon come to matter in the city? And we build on these to speculate on two wider questions. First, how might the emergent practices and rationalities of carbon governance be implicated in reproducing existing governance orderings—is it being packaged into familiar forms and structures, practices and relationships and contributing to the maintenance of particular social formations? Second, and no less important, how might emergent logics and practices be capable of contributing to shaping new (potentially transformative) orderings of governance (see Perkins, 2011)? As such we are concerned with the question of hegemonies-in-the-making.

In exploring these questions our analysis draws together neo-Gramscian-informed insights with a governmentality analysis. The neo-Gramscian<sup>1</sup> approach focuses on the processes and dynamic configurations involved in constituting and reproducing hegemonic governance forms, relations and purposes, while governmentality analysis aims to identify the logics and assemblage of practices (problematisations, mechanisms, subjectivisations) and entities through which governance towards particular ends is mobilised. Notwithstanding ontological differences between neo-Gramscian and Foucauldian perspectives we, like others (Jessop, 2007; Li, 2007; Ekers and Loftus, 2008; Okereke et al., 2009; Bulkeley and Schroeder, 2012), find this a productive theoretical ground for probing questions about the sedimented and shifting practices, processes, entities and relations through which urban carbon governance is being made (and remade).

However, we avoid a tendency in both Gramscian and Foucauldian analyses to interrogate single hegemonic projects or governmental programs and to over-prescribe claims to the dominance of neoliberal rationality and ordering within them (see Walters, 2012). Rather we are interested in understanding the multiplicity through which urban carbon governance is being fashioned and orderings of carbon governance are being formulated. Resisting the homogenising effect of presuming emergent programs of urban carbon governance to be pervasively or exclusively neoliberal, these combined approaches can in fact be beneficial for recognising the variety of logics, techniques, objects and subjects being drawn together in emergent governmental programs or hegemonic projects. Applied to our audit of carbon governance initiatives, a neo-Gramscian/governmentality framework helps to tease out the varieties of ways of governing carbon at work and, in a wider sense, contribute to the identification of different interests, rationalities and orderings in the making.

We begin by developing the argument for a neo-Gramscian and governmentality approach, bringing these perspectives together to think about urban carbon governance as a suite of inter-related governmental programs or hegemonic projects in-the-making. We then use this approach to analyse the programs we identify as emerging in Australia's urban carbon governance, drawing out aspects of their rationality and practice, and the alignments of objects and subjects they mobilise. We conclude with critical reflections on the diverse political work they attempt and with speculations on their capacities both to sediment existing governing orderings and to contribute towards the formation of transformative governance possibilities that may be both entangled with and exceed neoliberal governance forms.

## 2. Hegemonic projects in-the-making: governmental programs and urban carbon governance

As global environmental governance has been fashioned through attempts to create marketised governance regimes, social

science analyses have, understandably, focused heavily on the production of carbon as a commodity and its subsequent neoliberalised governance through carbon economies and enrolment in circuits of accumulation (Böhm and Dabhi, 2009; Bailey et al., 2011; Newell et al., 2012). Important as the political work done by this mode of carbon governance is, we wish to argue that carbon does more and different political work through diverse means, including work that speaks to the maintenance and reproduction of wider structures and systems and, potentially, their transformation. Such an argument requires caution against overvaluing neoliberal forms, modes and purposes of governance, thus producing reductive analysis in which the co-presence of other ways of governing and transformations in the objects, subjects, means and ends of government cannot easily be discerned (Walters, 2012).

The emergence of the city as a governmental space for carbon, then poses intriguing questions around the multiplicity of what is sought through the governance of carbon, of how carbon is made to matter in the city and of what might it do in different contexts. Rice's (2010) analysis provides a productive point from which to consider these concerns. Focussing on Seattle, Rice explores how climate and carbon are harnessed to do political work in the city. She argues that the local state reproduces its governmental authority and exercises its political power by drawing on climate as a central focus for urban policy. It makes climate governable *through carbon*, primarily applying techniques of inventory and accounting that monitor and control carbon emissions from urban activities and link them to particular territories that match the territorial logic of the state, reinscribing state institutions' boundaries and governing capacity. For Rice, these steps of climatisation, carbonisation and territorialisation enable the mobilisation of state authority and political power through governing carbon, by creating and enrolling responsibilized carbon-relevant citizens as governable environmental subjects.

Here we extend Rice's (2010) insightful analysis in two directions. First, we argue that carbon is understood and made relevant to the workings of urban government—or in Rice's term, that urban government is carbonized—in a variety of ways that exceed the territorialised accounting mechanisms that are the focus of her account. This demands receptivity to the multiplicity of carbon governance. That is, it requires recognition of the multiple ways in which carbon is related to the city and rendered governable, beyond notions of carbon economies and related accounting metrics.<sup>2</sup> Second, and relatedly, we argue that understanding urban governance of (and through) carbon requires us, explicitly, to view 'the state' and its powers of rule as distributed (Ekers and Loftus, 2008; Okereke et al., 2009), accepting the wide array of entities through which the urban governance of carbon is achieved. In governing carbon, states (attempt to) orchestrate relations with non-state actors in the private sector and civil society to achieve governmental objectives through an array of political practices of shared governance that extend beyond relations of coercion and contract (see Li, 2007; Perkins, 2009). Such orchestration necessitates contending with the lack of unity of purpose, the diverse logics and wills and the incompatibilities across the actors and entities involved in governing. So we are left with a dynamic view of states as heterogeneous and constructed, and as porous, processual and relational in character (McGuirk and O'Neill, 2012). But beyond this, viewing states' powers of rule as distributed also means taking a wider view of governing authority. It means accepting that legitimate governing authority may be generated 'outside' states through processes of

<sup>1</sup> Drawing on Morton (1999) and Levy and Newell (2002) we use the term 'neo-Gramscian' to refer to thinking in a Gramscian way rather than drawing on Gramsci in any doctrinaire sense. A neo-Gramscian approach draws on Gramscian notions in ways that are significant to present problems and that can be combined with other intellectual frameworks.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed Rice's analysis is sympathetic to this. She acknowledges that "state power is expressed in diverse ways through many sites of governance. . . [so] a more nuanced look at state practice, particularly as it occurs through the most routine and everyday activities of local governments, might shed light on the state–nature relationship being expressed through new subnational climate change programs" (2010:930).

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