Making Climate Change Governable: Carbon Accounting

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Governing transitions

• Leviathan is the classic account of governing
  – Hobbes project a ’state of nature’. Before the state, before society. No authority. To kill was a right in the fight for survival
  – ’war against all’, hence a ’social contract’. Individuals give up rights for protection
  – Sovereign and legitimate authority becomes established
• Governing/Governance is derived from Hobbes
  – Capacity to get things done with/without legal competence

• But how do something become governable?
  – From *who governs* to *how emissions are governed*. 
Non est potestas Super Terram quae Comparetur ei Iob. 41. 24.
Accounting for Carbon

• Smart energy monitors in the household
  – Small device, real-time feedback, all UK-households by 2020
• Online carbon calculators
  – Immediate estimation of your footprint, Thailand travel etc.
• Certification standards in the carbon market
  – Gold Standard, VER+ etc. Measurement criteria.
• Carbon Disclosure Guidelines
  – Reporting manual companies (2000 firms have signed up), disclosure of historical and future carbon emissions
• Remote sensing satellites,
  – Forest carbon content
• Climate labels
  – Tesco labelling, carbon content of goods
Carbon Accounting

Flows of Carbon

• Forest and soils
• Industry installations
• Goods
• Households
• Persons

Governing artefacts

• Sinks
• Units (tCO$_2$e, CER, EUA)
• Labels
• Disclosure reports
• Budgets
• Footprints
Carbon Accounting

• These seemingly disparate phenomena are ‘calculative technologies’

  – Insistance on the counting of carbon (quantification, demarcation and aggregation)
  – Devices that enable stocks and flows of carbon to be turned into objects of governance.
  – Those objects (sinks, credits, labels) make political intervention possible
Governing energy transitions

Carbon accounting as empirical development

- A major achievement over the last 20 years
- The measurement of carbon in individuals, firms, towns, forests, goods, sectors, practices
- Invention of objects of governance

Carbon accounting as a perspective on governing

- From ‘who’ to ‘how’
  - Public/private, mandatory/voluntary, sticks/carrots
- Governing a sphere depends on its representation
- From ‘grand designs’ to mundane mechanisms (e.g. auditing that makes it possible to govern).