

Climate Benchmarking: The Emergent and Contingent Politics of Climate Norm Creation

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New Thinking For Energy





Background/approach

- Questions:
 - Motivations, expectations and methods: explored in the form of EU 20-20-20 benchmarks within context of UNFCCC
 - Compliance: explored in Germany and the UK. Presented as similar and as ‘good’ in benchmarking tables but here reveal the different and contingent politics of complying
- Benchmarks as normative, constructed: objectives chosen, courses of action deemed appropriate and what is left out has ‘...implications for policy prescriptions and responses at national levels (Broome and Seabrooke 2012: 8)
- Benchmarks and benchmarkers as varied – reveal meaning
- Climate governance as emergent, fluid (Stevenson 2011) and also as vulnerable to further qualification

Climate Benchmarking Motivations I

- Scientific knowledge (neutral) points toward anthropogenic climate change and growing political acceptance
- Consequences of climate change extreme and will effect all (albeit not equally) – action beyond politics (party, national)
 - Keep warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels
- Benchmarking one method of mitigation and establishing new climate norms
- EU 20-20-20 (EEA)
 - GHG emissions reductions for EU 20% by 2020 (binding)
 - *Renewables* EU level 20% of energy consumed (binding)
 - Improve *energy* efficiency by 20% by 2020

Climate Benchmark Motivations II

- Different Benchmarks:
 - Climate mitigation new: '*emergent norm*': intentions to change
- *What norms qualify motivations and in what ways?*
 - That there should be 'international', quantifiable targets and that these will drive policy and behaviour changes
 - Influence of neoliberal economic ideas, use of market mechanisms reflecting existing power relations in 1980s/1990s
 - Targets are technical and (for some) apolitical/good

I: Economic growth is 'sustainable'

- Ecological/radical ideas about limits to growth compromised away to get international agreement (Bernstein 2001) - EU as reformist (contestation from 'status quo')
- How reflected in benchmarks (methods):
 - Differentially benchmarked recognises need for countries to 'catch up' economically (post 2004)
 - Energy efficiency of all targets implies less economic growth – but benchmarks less committed/measured
 - What is left out? Fossil fuel subsidies, core sectors...
- Economic growth objective as NORM

II: Climate governance as separate

- Benchmarkers: DG Climate separated from DG Environment, separate from DG Energy: *Interactions* become key here
- How reflected in benchmarks:
 - Environment (*excluded*):
 - Binding GHG emissions but not other environmental measures - in practice climate programmes that are environmentally damaging can be claimed as successful on *climate metrics*
 - Also allows for low carbon nuclear
 - Energy (*included*):
 - Mainstreaming back into other policy areas
 - Climate benchmarks will drive change in other governance areas
 - Energy transition

Comparative Compliance

- Germany (reformer):
 - Qualitative analysis suggests Germany well ahead of UK: phase II (nuclear); long-term commitments; political/public will; considers distributional effects - SCALE
 - More reformist than most countries but still makes concessions for economic growth – energy security/systems driver for change
- UK (weak reformer-status quo):
 - Qualitative analysis suggests far behind Germany: weak phase I; further down hierarchies of goals; fewer choices made; capacity
 - Economic growth and energy security as greater drivers for policy change – nuclear and renewables
 - Stay diversified (security) means betting on all technologies – delays decisions on other parts of energy systems

Conclusions

- Ways in which climate governance **interacts** with other areas has implications for continued emergence of climate norms
 - **Hierarchies** and compromises: between climate and other governance areas; within governance areas; energy systems
 - What is **not** seen: scale and impacts of change (distribution)
 - Negative side-effects of meeting climate targets can be used to argue against future targets
- Emergent climate norms as political:
 - Assumptions built in are not transparent/obfuscated: impacts
 - Open to further contestation – less ‘taken for granted’
 - Complying/changing has deep socio-political implications

- Greater knowledge of assumptions built into benchmarks as well as the scale and politics of changes might assist those wishing to keep climate on agendas by equipping them with visibility of political 'realities' facing countries complying