

The Politics of Accountability in Networked Urban Climate Governance

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Abstract

Cities are increasingly seen as essential components of the *global* response to climate change: setting targets, taking action, and rendering themselves accountable to global audiences for their efforts. Why cities are making themselves globally accountable in the absence of compulsion or obligation, and what it means for cities to operate simultaneously as global and locally accountable actors, constitute important puzzles for scholars of global climate politics. In this article I set out the basic parameters of this phenomenon, and offer a conceptual framework with which to parse the politics of accountability in networked urban climate governance. I apply this framework to identify three distinct forms of accountability present in the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group: an external politics of recognition; a network politics of ordering, and; an internal politics of translation. The article explores each for their distinct political processes, orientation, and power dynamics, and offers some propositions with respect to how they interact, and what it means both locally and globally when cities make themselves globally accountable.

Accountability is increasingly prominent in the domain of networked urban climate governance. Cities actively seek to be held accountable, illustrated most clearly in the claim that they produce upwards of 80 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions (World Bank 2010). At the same time, cities are adopting norms, discourses, and practices of global accountability, as evident in the uptake of standardized measurement tools and adherence to principles of public reporting and transparent disclosure of local emissions, actions, and effects (CDP 2014). Accountability, in both cases, is employed to underpin the claim that “no one can do more to produce good outcomes for the world than we, the mayors of great cities, can” (Bloomberg 2011).

At first glance this is a promising trend as it suggests cities are moving towards a more rigorous form of climate governance. Yet, as Kramarz and Park

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suggest in this issue, there is a need for caution as global environmental governance, broadly conceived, has witnessed much growth in the number of accountability systems but little progress in achieving environmental outcomes (see also Najam and Halle 2010). Promises of accountability, after all, mean little, and attention must be paid to the political processes that shape and give them substance and effect. What, in other words, are the “good outcomes” that cities purport to produce, and can they be expected to achieve them? In this article I assess three aspects of this overarching question. First, why do cities and city-networks want to *be accountable* as global climate governors? Cities, after all, are seeking out accountability where it is neither imposed nor formally required, and this raises the question as to what accountability *does* in the domain of networked urban climate governance, and why cities want to do it. Second, to whom and for what do cities seek to be accountable? Novel systems of accountability that are directed towards external audiences (other cities, funding agencies, capital markets) imply answers that may be in tension with traditional forms and practices of local democratic accountability. Lastly, is accountability in networked urban climate governance capable of producing effective environmental outcomes, or is it a further illustration of the disjuncture between gesture and effect? Cities may be awash in accountability, but whether this serves to produce desired outcomes remains unclear.

The red thread running through each of the questions set out above is the need to be sensitive to a nascent “politics of accountability” taking place around novel systems of urban accountability (Chan and Pattberg 2008). Excavating and understanding the form and function of these politics offers value to scholars of accountability in global environmental governance as well as those of urban climate governance. Bringing cities into the accountability discussion offers a means of expanding the domain of initiatives under examination, and assessing how city-networks fit into broader processes of global climate governance (Gupta 2010; Mason 2008; Hsu et al. 2015; Jordan et al. 2015). At the same time, bringing an accountability orientation to the study of cities and global climate governance offers a means of responding to calls for conceptual innovation needed to better understand both the politics of city-networks (Andonova et al. 2009; Bulkeley and Betsill 2013; Bulkeley and Kern 2009; Okereke et al. 2009) and their transformative potential (Gordon and Acuto 2015).

Accountability in Networked Urban Climate Governance

Cities are increasingly acknowledged as participants in global processes of climate, environmental, and sustainability governance (Scruggs 2015; World Bank 2010). From the humble entreaties first voiced in the early 1990s, cities have come to see themselves as generating collectively meaningful global governance. This escalation in ambition—what Bulkeley (2010) labels the “second wave” of urban climate governance—has generated a concomitant increase in scholarly

attention. Cities are included in both the broader firmament of “experimental governance” and as part of a transnational climate regime complex (Bulkeley et al. 2014 Hoffmann 2011; Abbott 2012). Yet there remains a pressing need to better understand how city-networks function internally, whether they are capable of closing the gap between rhetorical commitment and meaningful impact, and how they might be able to do so in the absence of formal coercive authority (Jordan et al. 2015). Scholarship has begun to address questions of power, authority, and coordination but none have yet focused on the question of accountability (Acuto 2013a, b; Bouteligier 2012; Gordon forthcoming 2016; Hakelberg 2014; Johnson et al. 2015; Lee 2013).

Accountability, however, has undoubtedly entered the lexicon and practice of urban climate governance. Cities, as noted above, seek to be *globally* accountable, and are doing so through practices of measurement, reporting, and disclosure. The novelty of this phenomenon rests in its global orientation. Long entrenched in domestic accountability systems, both local (to citizens) and multi-level (to upper levels of government), cities are coming to engage in accountability relations that operate outside the bounds of formal or institutionalized obligation.

To develop a descriptive picture of this phenomenon over both space and time, I gathered data from various disclosure platforms, including the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) Cities Programme and the carbonn Climate Registry (cCR), public reports, statements, and speeches issued by a variety of urban climate governance networks including the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40) International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) Metropolis, and US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement (USMCPA) along with other urban climate governance stakeholders such as the World Bank. This data was supplemented with a comprehensive review of secondary sources (media reports, third-party evaluations) and primary research conducted between 2011 and 2014 in New York City, Sao Paulo, London, and Johannesburg as part of a project investigating on convergence in urban climate governance.

In this article I focus largely on the C40, which is recognized as an archetypal global city-network engaged in climate governance and has been at the forefront of the move towards accountability in networked urban climate governance (Acuto 2013a; Bulkeley and Schroeder 2012). While the C40 differs in important ways—it has a limited and selective membership of 83 global cities—it has characteristics that render it akin to other city-networks engaged in climate governance: voluntary participation, a lack of formal hierarchical authority relations, and limited ability to enforce compliance with nominal commitments (Bulkeley and Kern 2009).¹ As a result, the analysis developed offers insights

1. The C40 is also at the forefront of the Compact of Mayors meta-network that links it together with ICLEI and the UCLG around a common enterprise of quantification, reporting, and disclosure. See Compact of Mayors 2014.

that may be applicable across the broader domain of transnational and autonomous city-networks.²

Since 2005, the C40 has consistently put forth the claim that cities are collectively responsible for producing 70–80 percent of total global GHG emissions (Arup 2011, 2014). The C40 leverages this figure as a means of authorizing demands for “engagement, empowerment, and resourcing” (Volans 2010) from national governments and international organizations alike, and undergirding the proposition that it has the capacity to be “the world’s leading, and most indispensable, climate change organization” (Bloomberg 2011). Such demands have been linked explicitly to the adoption of a novel set of relations *between* C40 cities. Membership requires that cities disclose their emissions and governance actions as a means of enhancing network coordination (C40 2011), and as a “commitment to action—a commitment that must be matched by an equal willingness to be judged by our progress, and be 100 percent accountable” (Bloomberg 2010). To do so is to “publicly identify all the initiatives that we’re undertaking...set clear, quantifiable benchmarks for implementing them [and] regularly and openly assess our experience with them” (Bloomberg 2010).

Such ideas have indeed been adopted across the C40. Over 80 percent of network cities engage in the combined practices of measurement, accounting, and public disclosure of citywide GHG emissions, a number that has increased dramatically (Figure 1) since it was first piloted in 2008 (CDP 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). At the same time, nearly all (94 percent) have demonstrated a willingness to systematically identify, account for, and disclose local governance practices and interventions (Arup 2014) providing the C40 with a means of affirming the oft-stated assertion that “cities act while nations talk” (Volans 2010).

There are indications that this trend extends beyond the C40 as well. The CDP Cities program (which offers a disclosure platform to both C40 and non-C40 cities) has seen considerable growth in the number of cities publicly reporting local emissions and governance data. The number of non-C40 cities participating in the program has increased substantially and at a faster rate than C40 city participation (Figure 2). Since 2011 there has been a 240 percent increase in non-C40 city participation, with 146 cities disclosing emissions in the most recent report (CDP 2014). Operating in parallel, the carbonn Climate Registry (cCR) serves as the repository for the ICLEI city-network and aims to “enhance [the] transparency, accountability and credibility of climate action of local and subnational governments” (cCR n.d.). Between 2011 and 2014 the cCR saw a tenfold increase (Figure 2) in the number of reporting cities, with 524 cities currently reporting their emissions and governance actions as of 2015.

Cities, then, are increasingly linking their “meaningful steps to reduce emissions” to the proposition that “the only way to measure progress is through a trans-

2. The argument presented here does not, however, extend to city-networks such as the EU Covenant of Mayors in which the state pursues accountability through the provision of financial incentives and enforcement mechanisms.

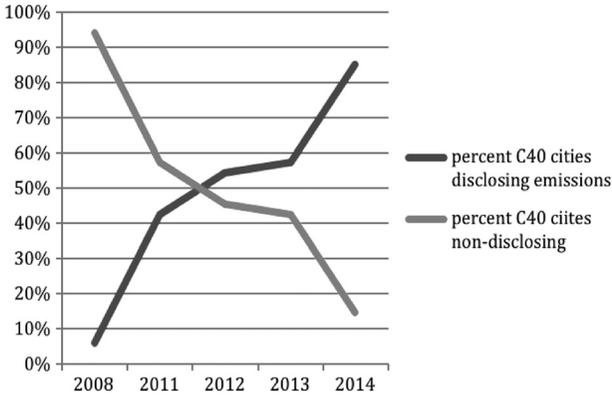


Figure 1
Emissions Disclosure by C40 Member Cities: 2008 to 2014³

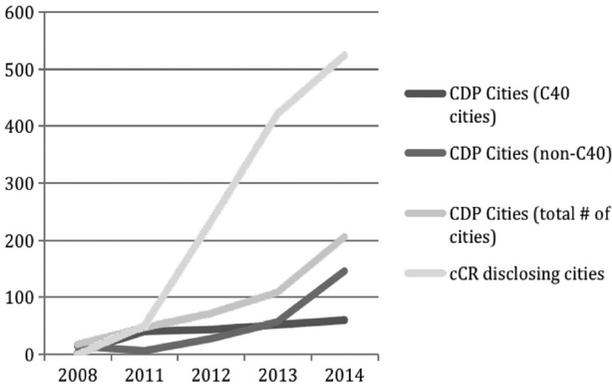


Figure 2
Disclosure to CDP Cities, carbon Climate Registry (cCR): 2011 to 2014⁴

parent and consistent system that provides accountability” (ICLEI-USA 2015). There remains, however, a need for critical investigation to better understand what accountability “does” in networked urban climate governance, to whom cities are “being” accountable as global climate governors, and for what they are accountable.

Conceptualizing Global Urban Accountability

In the best of scenarios, answering such questions entails a task neither simple nor straightforward (Finnemore 2013). It becomes more difficult in transnational governance where “distinctions between principals and agents are

3. Data drawn from CDP 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014

4. Data drawn from cCR 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014; CDP 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014

ambiguous, shifting, and interdependent” (Ebrahim and Weisband 2007, 7). If transnational networks are “diffuse, complex and weakly institutionalized collaborative systems [that] are neither directly accountable to an electoral base nor do they exhibit clear principal agent relationships” (Benner et al. 2004, 198), then city-networks further magnify this challenge given they “straddle the boundaries between state/non-state [and] public/private authority” (Bulkeley and Schroeder 2011, 10). Yet, as Bulkeley and Schroeder argue, this constitutes not only an analytic challenge but also an opportunity, since cities can “provide an important window through which to examine” contemporary processes of global governance (Bulkeley and Schroeder 2011, 10). How, then, to conceptualize accountability as it pertains to cities engaged in the global governance of climate change? Two basic elements need to be considered.

On one hand, accountability can be understood as a mechanism for securing compliance with particular commitments or objectives. A standard point of departure is offered by Grant and Keohane (2005, 29) who suggest that accountability requires that “some actors have the right to hold other actors to a set of standards, to judge whether they have filled their responsibilities in light of those standards, and to impose sanctions if they determine that those responsibilities have not been met.” Such a definition would seem poorly suited to the domain of networked urban governance, where there are no formal “rights” with which to hold cities to particular standards of action, there are no actors endowed with the capacity to “judge” whether responsibilities have been met, and there is not authority to “sanction” those deemed to have violated their commitment or abrogated their duties. The ability to hold cities to account may instead be located in a more generic process, such as that set out by Chan and Pattberg, who define accountability as a “more or less coherent set of rules and procedures, delineating who takes part in decision-making, who holds whom responsible for what kind of actions, and by which means” (Chan and Pattberg 2008, 104). Conceptualizing accountability in this manner helpfully broadens the scope of analysis by directing attention towards objective setting as well as compliance enforcing. In this it offers a means of uncovering power relations related to setting, and vetting, the accountability agenda (Carpenter 2011).

At the same time it neglects a second element, namely the generative dynamics of accountability as a means of claiming authority, exerting power, and producing order. In other words, there is a sense of ambiguity with respect to what all that rule-setting, decision-making, and responsibility-holding is *for*. In this it is worth considering accountability as a tool of governance: a mechanism through which actors attempt to engage in “authoritative steering towards shared social objectives” in non-hierarchical domains such as city-networks (Rosenau 2003). Steering, as such, emerges from the capacity of particular actors to set the terms of, or establish the particulars for, novel systems of global accountability. Importantly, thinking of accountability as a means of governing helps orient analysis towards identifying the content of those “shared social

objectives” and the political dynamics that shape how, exactly, those objectives are selected and come to be shared (Okereke et al. 2009).

Approaching accountability as both a compliance mechanism and a tool of governance thus adopts and expands on Ebrahim and Weisband’s (2007) call for a pluralistic approach. It acknowledges the difficulty of specifying what “counts” as accountability *a priori* and signals the need for critical analysis with respect to the constitution and uptake of particular “rules and procedures” and relations of authority, responsibility, and enforcement that characterize a particular accountability initiative. Doing so moves analysis away from a narrow focus on the mechanics of accountability and directs attention towards the politics through which accountability initiatives adopt specific objectives and pursue particular ends.

Logics of Action as Accountability Imperatives

Kramarz and Park (this issue) offer a promising means of tackling this challenge, in proposing three distinct “logics of action”—public, private, and voluntary—that capture why and how actors seek out, and submit to, systems of accountability.

A *public* logic of action links the willingness to be accountable to the performance of public responsibilities or fulfillment of formal public obligations. In the case of cities, a public imperative is one that emerges as a result of politicians (mayors primarily) performing public duties so as to fulfill electoral mandates and secure electoral positioning, living up to electoral mandates, or performing assigned duties. It can also capture the motivation driving bureaucrats and officials to be accountable for their capacity to address local policy problems and enact meaningful or effective local policy solutions. In both cases the important feature is that the willingness to be accountable is driven by *elite* (political or technocratic) interests—securing and maintaining power or enhancing problem-solving capacity.

A *private* logic of action envisions actors as motivated to be accountable as a function of their responsibility to ensure or secure economic benefits. For city officials (politicians and bureaucrats) a private accountability imperative might take the form of structural pressures related to the need to maintain or enhance competitive position vis-à-vis the competition (i.e., other cities), to ensure the ability to lure capital investment, talent, or tourism (Sassen 2001). It may also take the form of political pressure exerted by local, economically powerful interest groups that employ their resources to demand accountability from city officials (Molotch 1976). In both instances the main feature of a private imperative is that it is narrow and underpinned by deep structural norms of market liberalism (Bernstein 2001).

A *voluntary* logic of action is one where the motivation to be accountable is located within actors’ sense of identity and community, and the shared ideas around which these communities are constituted. In cities this might take the form of widely shared public demands for particular sorts of representation,

participation, or governance; those that reflect shared values or ideas as to what public officials can or should do on behalf of local publics. In this sense, the main feature is that the willingness to be accountable is a function of principled, collective demand (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Whereas the first two logics are relatively narrow in scope, a voluntary logic is far more open-ended. One can detect the presence of multiple, competing normative imperatives that co-exist and in some sense compete with norms related to environmental preservation, such as those related to economic development, reducing inequality, increasing livability, social justice, and so on. This is clearly evident, for example, in the frequent recourse to discourses of “co-benefits” as means of selling climate governance to local urban audiences, such that climate or environment are a side-effect of governance actions that aim in the first instance to improve local air or water quality, save money, reduce commute times, or increase access to leisure space (Betsill 2001; Rutland and Aylett 2008).

These three logics of accountability provide a starting point, but I suggest a second distinction to gain additional analytic leverage. I draw on Bäckstrand’s (2006, 478) distinction between externally versus internally orientated accountability. External accountability links cities to a variety of transnational audiences. These include international organizations like the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); international financial institutions such as the World Bank; private actors such as philanthropic organizations or multinational corporations; nebulous and ill-defined groups such as global civil society or capital markets; or hypothetical actors such as future generations or “nature.” More importantly, an external orientation serves to situate the network in a broader governance context, and directs attention towards identifying the particular audiences towards which accountability is pursued, promised, or practiced.

Internal accountability, on the other hand, is oriented towards the actors forming the collective: governments accountable to citizens; corporate executives accountable to shareholders; or international organizations accountable to their member states. In the case of city-networks, internal accountability operates within the parameters of the network itself, insofar as cities are accountable to one another and to the shared objectives, expectations, or rules established and institutionalized in the network. In this sense, the internal dimension draws attention towards how accountability is enacted and upheld, and further sensitizes analysis to the tensions that operate between intra-network relations and those political processes that operate within cities themselves.

Parsing the Politics of Accountability

While practices of measurement, disclosure, and transparency have diffused among cities, the particular accountability gods that they serve are not immediately apparent. In public statements, city officials voice the intent of making cities more accountable to one another, to the private sector, to the international climate regime, and to local citizens. Gaining a clearer understanding as to how

these public statements translate into action, and are balanced, is thus an essential task. To do so, I employ narrative causality and engage in an abductive back and forth between analytic concepts and empirical data, discourses, and practices of accountability in the C40 (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009; Ruggie 1995). Assessing the C40 through the three logics of accountability, in combination with the distinction between external and internal orientation, leads me to propose the presence of three distinct *politics* of accountability: external accountability and the politics of recognition; network accountability and the politics of ordering; internal accountability and the politics of conformity.

An External Politics of Accountability: Securing Recognition

Accountability is not always about being accountable, but rather offers a means of securing authority and legitimacy (Bernstein 2011; Gulbrandsen 2004). Acuto (2013b, 9) argues that a rhetoric of responsibility is employed by cities as a means of offering “scientific bases for [cities’ collective] centrality in climate change issues and primary policy-making positioning in responding to the threat...” Cities seek out external accountability as a means of securing or authorizing their collective claim for recognition as legitimate global climate governors.

The C40 has pursued recognition from external audiences in the pursuit of two distinct purposes, one public and one private. The public imperative driving cities to seek out external accountability is most evident in the demands for engagement, empowerment, and resourcing by both national governments and international institutions (Hoffmann 2011, 93). In this, city officials are driven by the goal of enhancing their position in domestic institutional hierarchies; augmenting a standard claim for more autonomy and more capacity voiced in cities around the world. External recognition, via accountability, offers a means of enhancing both the political prospects of mayors and the problem-solving capacity of city officials tasked with an ever increasing set of demands.

The private imperative mobilizing the C40 to seek out accountability and secure external recognition appears largely driven by elite interests in augmenting their ability to compete for investment. This is clearly manifested in the stated aim of increasing access to capital markets. In this light, the external audience is the private sector, and the objective is to build “trustworthiness” with key audiences. Both are offered up as a means of “ensuring that local and subnational governments can finance local climate actions that could bring down global green house gas emissions and build resilience against climate change” (ICLEI 2014). In his inaugural speech as Chair of the C40, Michael Bloomberg outlined a strategy premised on measurement, disclosure, and inter-city accountability. Together these “raise our visibility, and credibility, on the world stage.... help us fill the void of global leadership, and attract the assistance, including the financing, that our cities so desperately need to meet our goals” (Bloomberg 2010). The attraction of such claims rest on the fact that they have been reflected back by the efforts of international financial institutions like the World Bank, which has taken a

variety of measures intended to offer cities easier access to greater sums of money and technical assistance (Zoellick 2011).

Given the practical need for massive infrastructure investments—the World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates the global urban infrastructure gap at roughly \$1 trillion USD per year (WEF 2014)—there is a compelling imperative for cities to be externally accountable. Measurement, standardization, reporting, and disclosure offer cities a way of demonstrating that, as per the President of the World Council on City Data, “they are open for business and are global competitors in sustainable and transparent urban development” (Balandine 2014). A recent report entitled “Investor Ready Cities” lists transparency as an essential factor driving the ability of cities to secure access to private capital and much-needed investment (Price Waterhouse Coopers 2014). As a result there is an increased emphasis on improving the “creditworthiness” of cities, with reporting and disclosure key to securing investment-grade municipal credit ratings, and novel initiatives emerging around the need to “translate” city needs into viable investment opportunities (Forster 2014).⁵

That climate governance, economic development, and accountability have been configured together around the goal of gaining access to outside investment and attracting capital investment illustrates a politics of conformity within structuring norms of liberal environmentalism (Bernstein 2001). As evident in recent surveys, virtually all (93 percent) city officials and politicians surveyed expect “their green policies to have a positive economic impact” and a strong majority understand economic development as the “primary goal of their green policies” (LSE Cities 2013, 27). City-networks like the C40 may be contesting the *who* of global climate governance, but in seeking recognition through practices of external accountability they remain firmly embedded in reproducing the prioritization of economic over environmental objectives (Gordon 2013).

A Network Politics of Accountability: Ordering without Giving Orders

The ability to secure external recognition offers a means of authorizing systems of internal accountability operating within the C40, and putting it to work as a means of producing order and conformity. In this we see a second politics of accountability, as a tool of governance and a claim to power. Given the use of accountability as a means of securing recognition from external audiences, internal accountability in the C40 is largely oriented towards demonstrating the extent to which member cities are in fact “effective” governors worthy of private investment and formal inclusion in processes of global climate governance.

This authorizes a particular expression of internal accountability within the C40. I draw on Sending, who argues that “...claims to representation can

5. Consider, as an example, the Cities Climate Finance Leadership initiative, a collaboration of financial organizations and city-networks with a stated goal of stimulating private investment in cities for development of climate-smart infrastructure.

be powerful” since they provide a means through which specific actors can present their “private” or subjective interests as “public” ones” that come to be taken as “objective, natural, or universal” (Sending 2015, 179). Critically, external claims regarding the coherence of a group are a “product of the claims made by the representer rather than vice versa” (Bourdieu 1991, 223) and at the same time the strength of those external claims can in fact be used as a means of producing coherence. With respect to accountability, the power to advance external claims on behalf of cities can itself translate into the power to impose order and secure coherence around particular ideas, practices, and expectations related to being accountable to one another.

The C40 has, in fact, set out explicitly to use accountability as a means of coercing recalcitrant members, such that “[b]y reporting on their progress C40 cities are holding themselves and each other accountable for meeting the targets they set, and continuing to demonstrate unprecedented, global leadership in taking real, measurable actions” (EV News Report 2013). Accountability is operationalized as requiring specific practices of transparency and disclosure—of emissions and governance actions—as a means of conveying the seriousness and credibility of city actions as climate governors and making performance legible to target audiences (Auld and Gudbrandsen 2010, 10; Hansen and Porter 2012, 413). In fusing internal accountability to particular public and private imperatives, the C40 is able to secure the compliance of cities in the absence of formal coercive authority.

This is manifested most obviously in the maxim, commonly voiced by C40 officials, that “if you don’t measure it, you can’t manage it.” Accountability, in this sense, is presented to cities as a means of securing access to financing and improving the competitive positioning of member cities in global capital markets. As per then-C40 Chair Bloomberg, the partnership between the C40 and World Bank goes “a long way toward leveraging private capital [and is] made possible by C40’s commitment to standardizing how we report on the climate change plans in our cities” (Bloomberg 2011). The World Bank, for its part, links “recognition of the leadership the world’s great cities are taking to meet the challenges of climate change,” to the need for quantification, standardization, and transparency (Bloomberg 2011; Zoellick 2011).

The C40 has further worked to fuse the external accountability imperative to the ordering of the network internally through the provision of technical assistance to member cities as they measure, account for, and disclose local GHG emissions. Such efforts are built on the premise that “[d]ata is the foundation upon which cities’ efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions must be built; ... [it] allows cities to target their policies and programs more precisely, ensuring they get “greater bang for their buck” (C40 2013). Measurement and disclosure thus serve the technical decision-making needs of cities, and are oriented towards the goal of identifying opportunities for cost savings and maximizing return on investment generated by investment of public or private funds. They are much less about holding actors to account, and more about maximizing the efficiency, quality, and investability of local governance.

Accountability is thus directed towards decidedly non-environmental objectives and operationalized so as to respond to narrow, material interests. The social expectations and informal sanctions informing accountability in the C40 are oriented towards fulfilling joint expectations linked to the pursuit of external recognition—a strong norm of environmental preservation and protection is, while not absent, clearly subordinate within the prevailing configuration of accountability logics. The private imperative is also, to some extent, internalized by cities as is evident in the prominent role occupied by independent consultancies and private sector organizations who have emerged as “fixers” within this new domain—providing sources of expertise and advice, offering cities assistance in developing and selling their brands, and serving as platforms for the comparison of city performance. All this suggests “new forms of technocracy” which, rather than enhancing, would seem to “pose serious problems of accountability.” As Kersbergen and Van Waarden (2004, 162) caution, “it is unclear who has enough counter-expertise to control the experts.”

An Internal Politics of Accountability: What It Means to Be Accountable

A third and final politics of accountability takes place around the translation of accountability gestures and practices into accountability outcomes or effects. What it means for cities to be accountable is, in other words, a site of political contestation. As a variety of authors have stressed, accountability is more than the weak holding those in power to their commitments and promises; it is inherent in the setting of collective goals and governance priorities and a means of asserting power, authority, and control (Auld and Gulbrandsen 2010, 115; Bäckstrand 2008, 80–81). In the case of the C40, there is little sense of a social imperative driving cities towards accountability. While sustainability movements have emerged at the community and local levels in cities around the world, the engagement by cities in climate governance is largely an elite-driven affair (Betsill and Bulkeley 2003; Hodson and Marvin 2009). This is well illustrated in the discourses adopted by city governments with respect to the framing and enactment of local climate policy. Cities, and city-networks, rely largely on the allure of co-benefits to “sell” climate policy to local audiences, or simply pursue climate policy by stealth. “Constituents,” Mayor of Philadelphia Michael Nutter has stated, “have real lives and they don’t talk about the things we talk about” (RTCC 2014). Statements such as these suggest a particular configuration of mobilizing imperatives that are driving cities to pursue external accountability. A voluntary imperative, where it is present, is clearly subordinate, and has largely been enrolled as a means of providing a normative foundation for the pursuit of private interests (as in the shared social demand for job creation and economic growth).

Evidence of contestation and struggle exists at the intersection of external and internal orientations of accountability in the C40, in the form of tension between adopting accountability gestures (reporting, standardization, disclosure,

transparency) and being accountable for the performance of particular actions or attaining specific outcomes. This tension is well illustrated in the two core accountability platforms adopted by the C40. The C40/Arup reports list aggregate governance actions undertaken by C40 cities and organize these thematically so as to make legible the cumulative efforts and impacts of network cities. The C40/CDP reports, on the other hand, list urban GHG emissions and enable performance tracking year over year. The former offers a means of counting without being accountable; the latter (especially as cities come to adopt standard measurement/reporting methods) a means of being accountable by counting. The former is driven by a public logic, focused on securing recognition for being “active” contra the inaction of states and other governance actors; the latter by a private logic, evident in the emphasis on comparability and investment evaluation. The former helps to hold cities accountable to one another; the latter, while difficult to connect to an accountability outcome, has the potential to do so should it become fastened onto social demands for environmental performance (Knox-Hayes and Levy 2011).

Prospects and Potential

As suggested above, practices of disclosure and transparency have quickly entered into and diffused across the domain of networked urban climate governance. This is no accident, as networks like the C40 have actively sought to do so, and aim to further standardize how cities identify, count, report, and track their GHG emissions (C40 2014). What accountability does, and why cities are willing to be globally accountable, remains a puzzle. Based on the analysis presented above it is possible to parse out three discrete, if interconnected, politics of accountability that can help shed some light on these questions. First, the configuration of accountability in networked urban climate governance appears heavily weighted towards both private and a particular expression of public imperatives, with voluntary imperatives rendered largely silent or passively enrolled after the fact. We see this most clearly in the absence of a strong voluntary imperative compelling cities to prioritize the pursuit of specific environmental objectives. Instead, city officials have come to align public accountability imperatives with narrow objectives informed by private interests. This suggests that quantification, standardization, disclosure, and transparency operate less as a means of enhancing accountability between cities and external audiences—in spite of the explicit outcome orientation adopted by networks like the C40—than as a means of providing cities with the symbolic value of seeming “accountable” without actually being so (Gulbrandsen 2004).

Second, the internal politics of accountability in networked urban climate governance are embedded within a broader and nominally apolitical turn to data-driven governance (Kuzemko 2015).⁶ Quantification, standardization,

6. See more broadly a 2015 special issue of the *Review of International Studies* titled “The Politics of Numbers.”

and aggregation are part and parcel of a “measure it to manage it” ethos that has come to permeate urban climate governance. Such quantification offers a means of responding to the idiosyncrasy of bottom-up climate governance, and a tool with which disparate actors and actions might be “orchestrated” so as to produce meaningful collective effects (Hale and Roger 2014). And yet, as Hansen and Porter (2012) warn, while “governance by numbers” increases the portability of norms and practices, overcoming barriers of contestation and resistance may invoke depoliticizing effects (see also Barry 2002). The language and practices of accountability are increasingly rendered as numerical data so as to underwrite claims to efficacy, authority, and legitimacy, and to illustrate the extent to which cities can, and do, matter. They simultaneously render certain practices or aims of governance natural, thus masking the need to critically assess in whose interests, or for what purpose, such governance is being enacted (Massey 2007). As Mol (2010, 140) suggests, “the growing importance of transparency in environmental politics” is likely to “become part of—and stronger ruled and fuelled by—markets and monetization.” This raises questions as to who has access to participate in accountability systems, to make accountability claims, and to establish accountability objectives. Governance by numbers privileges particular modes of knowledge and skill sets and silences others, highlighting the need to consider who bears the “cost” of employing accountability to produce internal order in city-networks like the C40.

A third and final pattern is one of unintended effects, internal contradictions, and latent novelty. While practices of quantification and transparency that have seeped into local accountability relations (between city governments and citizens) may serve to depoliticize local governance and reinforce the dominance of elite economic interests, they may also open up space for public engagement around environmental objectives (Hale 2008). Public commitments to “being accountable” can result in local politicians and officials becoming entrapped by their own rhetoric, thus creating space for public debates over the ends towards which accountability is directed (Risse et al. 1999). Similarly, local political transitions can further open up space for contestation and new rounds of “accountability politics” with respect to objectives and orientations. Configurations of these three accountability logics are neither fixed nor forever, but rather are dynamic in more or less stable ways. The politics of accountability are ongoing even if the parameters appear relatively stable.

Conclusions

Cities, Roman (2010) suggests, “govern from the middle.” This metaphorical middle is constituted by the multi-dimensional positions that cities occupy: spanning scales of governance; situated within nested levels of government; slotted into emergent global networks that are both corporate and material; and functionally dependent on hybrid partnerships with corporate and other non-state organizations so as to deliver local services and maintain/provide

adequate infrastructure. Accountability provides a conceptual lens that cuts across all of these dimensions, and the politics of accountability offers a means of assessing how cities position themselves, and are positioned, in these in-between spaces of global climate and environmental governance.

By orienting analysis towards the configuration of logics that drive cities to be globally accountable the conceptual framework set out above posits three distinct yet interconnected sites of politics. Each offers a point of entry to better understand the nature and effects of novel forms of global accountability in networked urban climate governance, and highlights possible points of intervention and disruption. In doing so, my hope is to contribute to the broader effort of critically assessing accountability relationships between governors and those on whose behalf they govern, moving beyond the “more data equals better governance” maxim that all too often characterizes public commentary, and offering a foundation on which to better understand the possibilities and limitations of networked urban climate governance.

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