

Paper Session

[C18] Low-carbon promises and realities in Shanghai: lessons from Anting, Dongtan and Hongqiao

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China's ongoing transition from an agrarian-industrial economy towards an urban-centered service economy is accompanied by ambitions to foster green growth, visions of 'eco-civilization' and other promises of an environmentally sustainable urban future. In this paper we critically assess how these promises were translated into realities on the ground in and around the city of Shanghai. Since the new millennium various actors have been experimenting with multiple sustainability-oriented newly built development projects. We focus on three of the most promising large-scale projects: Anting New Town, Dongtan Eco-City, and Hongqiao CBD Low-Carbon Transportation Hub.

We mobilize insights from the academic field of Sustainability Transitions on sustainable innovation journeys, socio-technical experimentation and the articulation of expectations. These sensitizing concepts are used to interrogate how the three projects have fared and what this can teach us about the ways in which new-town development projects to contribute to a more sustainable future for Shanghai.

Instead of merely criticizing the discrepancies between initial expectations and eventual built reality, we show how these journeys unfolded and why the original plans were derailed but also how alternative pathways of experimentation converged in parallel to realize part of the low-carbon ambitions. To deliver more fully on the promises of sustainability the actors involved should take three lessons to heart: foster a more experimentalist approach; learn to embrace uncertainty and nurture a set of promising parallel developments.
