Policy Mobility in Green Urbanism:
A Comparative Case Study of Suzhou and Tianjin

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by

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China has initiated many eco-city projects to fulfill its economic, social and environmental expectations. This paper examines the underlying driving forces of policy mobility in the context of global turn to neo-liberalism, arguing that this focus on production and consequent capital accumulation is what renders China an eager learner to absorb the policy models of other countries. Singapore, with its political resemblance to China, is a natural role model. Its surplus in capital production needs to seek a “spatial fix” to obtain relief, pushing it to export its policies and models to China. However, China’s production myopia has caused severe damage to environment and rising complaints have altered China’s environmental policies. A punctuated equilibrium policy model is used to explain China’ change in environmental policy, which converges with the neo-liberal momentum and boosts the eco-city projects in China. This hybrid force calls for both economic growth and sustainable development, and further facilitates a new round of policy mobility focusing on green urbanism. Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP) and the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-city (SSEC) are both cases that reveal this new policy trend. Under this background, it is not convincing to argue that these projects are new “sustainability fixes” for surplus capital. Sustainability and green urbanism have been gradually integrated into the national policy agenda and incorporated as part of government targets. SIP is shown to have the potential to fulfill both the neo-liberal and environmentalist expectations while the future of SSEC is still to be seen.

Key words: policy mobility; neo-liberalism; green urbanism; eco-city, punctuated equilibrium

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All are welcome!