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Viewpoint

Critical research on eco-cities? A walk through the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-City, China

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Highlights

- â€¢ The article discusses the recent emergence of eco-city projects.
- â€¢ There is a need for further critical research on contemporary eco-cities.
- â€¢ Future research needs to focus on questions of scale, definition, and resilience.
- â€¢ Research on eco-city projects needs to take into account poor and transient worker populations.

Abstract

This article uses the narrative tool of a walk through Tianjin Eco-City, China, as an entry point in raising and discussing key questions in contemporary eco-city research. Eco-city projects are becoming increasingly prevalent in policy and political-economic discourses in a variety of locations as new urban spaces where blueprints for low carbon economies can be trialled. In light of this, the article highlights the key necessity of, firstly, considering scale when analyzing eco-city ‘‘futures’’. Secondly, the article argues for the need to interrogate eco-cities’ definitions, as well as evaluation, performance and monitoring frameworks, as this will aid in critical analyses of the marketing, presentation and actually built urban environments in eco-city projects. Thirdly, the question of internal social resilience and the emergence of communities within newly-built eco-cities needs to be assessed: this is of crucial importance in light of the exclusive, gated nature of several flagship eco-city projects under construction at the time of writing. Lastly, the article argues that research on eco-city projects needs to consider not only the high-tech, new urban environments materialized as eco-cities, but also the production and reproduction of large, often transient populations of low-paid workers who build eco-cities and who form what the article calls the ‘‘new urban poor’’, forming ‘‘workers’ cities’’ on the edges of flagship ‘‘sustainable’’ urban projects worldwide.



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Keywords

Eco-city; Sustainable city; Green urbanism; Resilience

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