

Sharing economy, neoliberalism and sustainable transition: reshaping space & mobility in urban China

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Abstract

There is a revolutionary growing interest in the impacts of the sharing economy (“collaborative consumption,” “peer-to-peer economy,” or “peer-to-peer consumption”) on global and local society as well as its formal & informal regulations amongst entrepreneurs, innovators, incumbent businesses, policy-makers and academics across many disciplines. This new form of economics has reshaped the boundary of urban space and mobility, which putting the neoliberalism and sustainability discourse into a new ‘bottle of wine’. Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individualism, unencumbered markets, and free trade. In the meantime, normative notions of sustainable development (SD) advocate social-economic equity, empowerment, and environmentally sensitive economic development. However, the missing chapter of this dominant SD theory is social sustainability. How does the sharing economy reflected in service industry evolve in social science? How does this new mode of sharing economy affect the existing social-economic-environment structure? Will it lead to an effective transition towards social sustainability? This study intends to use the case of Chinese riding-sharing industry to help define the sharing economy and its effects to the theoretical discourse of neoliberalism and sustainable development. In the end, we intend to conclude that the construction of sharing economy’s leading role in social-economy will denote the triumph of techno-capitalism as well as the redistribution post-carbon centric society. Moreover, as critics increasingly characterise the ride-sharing industry (e.g., Uber or Didi) as predatory and exploitative, its increasing corporatisation of ridesharing may seem incompatible to the purported goals of a just and sustainable society?