

Transition narratives and fringes. The case of Hangzhou Zhejiang Future Sci-Tech City

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The presentation focuses on the changes that Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province and second largest metropolis in the Yangtze River Delta Region, has faced in the last 30 years due, on the one hand, to the implementation of different master plans and, on the other, to specific policies and regulations that favored also the presence of many non-state-owned industries.

In particular, the paper discusses the narrative(s) about Hangzhou urban development, modernization and “siliconization” embedded in the city planning – which intertwine also with other compelling discourses (i.e. sustainability, innovation and competitiveness) and national imperatives (e.g. New Urbanization Plan, Chinese Dream) – focusing on Yuhang district, annexed to the city in 2001 (together with another county, Xiaoshan) and now representing the city largest district. With this annexation the municipality solved the problem of land limitation to urban development and, as a matter of fact, the different rounds of administrative rescaling and adjustments have accelerated Hangzhou expansion and spatial restructuring and made it become a multi-nuclei city.

Presently, Yuhang district is experiencing a rapid development and in 2011 it was also awarded the national overseas high-level talents innovation base (demonstration zone together with Beijing, Tianjin, Wuhan) and it is now implementing the planning of Hangzhou Zhejiang Future Sci-Tech City (<http://www.zjfuture.gov.cn/english/>), which also host the Alibaba group headquarters. All over China, cities started to invest in the high-tech industry already in the late 90s but have intensified their efforts in recent years. Since then many development and high-tech zones have been planned but mainly as industrial zones with little consideration for services and quality of life. Indeed, Hangzhou Zhejiang Future Sci-Tech City presents a mix of residential, R&D and office uses, and lies on the city western fringe, in an area of great ecological value and relatively close to downtown. The paper, which is the result of one year of fieldwork conducted within the EuropeAid project MEDIUM (mediumcities-china.org), analyses the cascading effects - on landscape, environment, communities, etc. - triggered by such planning and discuss how these transformations are perceived and framed by the different stakeholders and populations coexisting in these dynamic (but also critical) social and geographical entities.