

## **Unfolding the meanings and practices of data activism in sustainability governance in China**

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This paper explores the emerging “data activism” in the sustainability governance landscape in China. Data activism is conventionally understood as a social practice that utilizes data and technology politically to foster social change. This paper is particularly interested in *how data activism manifests in an evolving Chinese sustainability governance landscape*, especially how local civil society actors navigate the interplay between three emerging phenomena: data technology as an increasingly prevalent governance instrument, changing local sustainability foci, and the shifting relations of governance actors.

We build our empirical insights from an ethnographic case study of an environmental NGO in Shanghai, who not only utilizes data technologies to hold local governments and corporations accountable for sustainability claims and impacts, but also works in collaboration with them to address sustainability challenges.

Our findings show that data activism is a matter of a balancing “act” in the Chinese context. In this “balancing act”-ivism, data technology is not only information on sustainability issues, but an instrument for civil society actors to navigate the complex governance space of sustainability issues in China. More specifically, through a range of data practices, civil society actors construct adaptable identities that help them to create conversation space and mobilize resources with state and market, and subsequently influencing the actions of state and market. This paper contributes to the discussion on data activism by enriching our understanding of the forms and practices of data activism from Global South.