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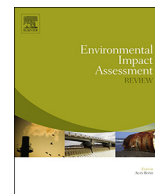
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The social impacts of a stop-start transnational university campus: How the impact history and changing plans of projects affect local communities



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ABSTRACT

Transnational higher education, in all its varied forms including offshore campuses, is a huge business, especially in relation to China. As at 2019, nine foreign universities had established campuses in China. Although generally this might be desirable, the social impacts of these campuses on local communities are overlooked. Transnational campuses take a long time to establish, and they experience delays and changes in participating parties, which creates anxiety and uncertainty for host communities. We consider the social impacts, as perceived or experienced by local residents, that arose from the attempted establishment of a transnational university campus in Yantai, Shandong Province, China. We consider how impact history and changing project plans affected residents. A major impact was prolonged uncertainty, especially now that the University of Groningen has cancelled its plans for a campus in Yantai. People felt confused about their future and some had lost trust in news about the project. Excessive expectations, impact history, changing plans, and impacts from urbanization processes generally have led to mixed feelings about the proposed campus. However, most people were willing to have a university campus nearby because they thought there would be benefits, even though they also considered they would experience negative impacts.

1. Introduction

Transnational higher education is a global trend and has been rapidly developing nearly everywhere in the world (Montgomery, 2014; Ohmori, 2015; Knight, 2016). Keen to improve the level of access to and quality of tertiary education, since the 1980s the Chinese government has opened up the higher education market to allow overseas universities and private institutions to offer academic programmes in competition with the over 2000 existing higher education institutions in China (Mok and Xu, 2008). Various transnational cooperations have emerged (Wilkins and Huisman, 2012; Fang and Wang, 2014; Montgomery, 2016). By 2019, the Ministry of Education (2019a, 2019b) had approved over 1000 transnational higher education programs, 100 transnational higher education institutions, and 9 foreign universities had established campuses in China in cooperation with a Chinese partner. The tenth campus was to have been the University of Groningen Yantai (UGY) campus, which was being developed in cooperation with the China Agricultural University (CAU), however it was terminated in early 2018.

Despite the benefits of university campuses generally (Kelly et al., 2015; Perry and Wiewel, 2015), little research has been conducted on

the impacts they have on their local host communities. Even projects intended for the public good (e.g. a university campus) can cause negative social impacts, contribute to cumulative impacts (Vanclay, 2002; van der Ploeg and Vanclay, 2017a, 2017b; Vanclay, 2017a), and need a social licence to operate (Jijelava and Vanclay, 2014a). While large projects are often considered as being in the national interest, it is local people who are sacrificed and left to experience the negative consequences these projects create over time (Hanna et al., 2014; Vanclay, 2017b). Transnational campuses take a long time to develop and can be delayed or stopped for a wide variety of reasons, including change in the participating parties (Feng 2013; Wilkins, 2017). These disruptions cause a wide range of social impacts on local residents.

This paper considers the stop-start nature of the UGY campus, its impact history and changing plans. Although plans for UGY are now cancelled, there was a long process of development, including extensive revamping of the existing CAU Yantai campus. Therefore, much can be learned from this case. As Vanclay (2012) argued, social impacts occur as soon as rumours about a project emerge. Rumours increase fear, anxieties and expectations, which are often inflated or exaggerated. Vanclay (2012) also argued that perceived impacts are real impacts, affecting people's behaviour and feelings. We examine the social

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impacts perceived or experienced by local residents that arose from the UGY project. We also analyse how impact history and changing plans influenced local people's views. We make recommendations about mitigation and enhancement that are relevant, not only to the establishment of transnational university campuses in China, but to all projects everywhere.

2. The influence of impact history and changing project plans on social impacts

Social impacts are everything that affect people and communities, either in a perceptual or corporeal sense (Vanclay, 2002, 2003). Social impacts can be corporeal in that they are felt by the human body as physical reality, and they can be perceptual or emotional. We argue that the anxieties and expectations of local residents about their future life are real social impacts. Anxiety and expectation arise from rumours, irrespective of whether or not they have any foundation, and whether or not the project actually eventuates (Vanclay et al., 2015). Therefore, a postponed or cancelled project still creates social impacts because rumours abound. An effective way to understand social impacts is to differentiate between social impacts and social change processes (Slootweg et al., 2001; Vanclay, 2002). Planned interventions cause various changes, but not all changes necessarily generate social impacts. Many social change processes are not in themselves necessarily social impacts (Vanclay, 2002, 2006). If properly managed, social changes might not create negative impacts. The extent and types of social impact generated depend on many things, including the quality of the engagement between project and community, the characteristics and impact history of the local community, as well as the effectiveness of any mitigation activities and livelihood restoration projects (Franks and Vanclay, 2013; Kemp and Vanclay, 2013; Hanna et al., 2016a; Esteves et al., 2012, 2017; van der Ploeg and Vanclay, 2018).

Social impacts are all impacts experienced or felt by humans (Vanclay, 2002). Although it is impossible to list all potential social impact variables, some frameworks can be helpful in conceptualising the social impacts that may arise. Vanclay (2002) argued that social impacts are changes to one or more of the following: people's way of life; culture; community; political systems; environment; health and wellbeing; personal and property rights; and fears and aspirations. Vanclay (2003) emphasized that social impacts include both positive and negative impacts, as well as intended and unintended consequences. Smyth and Vanclay (2017) developed the Social Framework for Projects, which used 8 categories to cover the key social issues that contribute to people's well-being and that are impacted by large projects: people, community, culture, livelihoods, infrastructure, housing, environment, and land. The Social Framework assists in identifying and addressing all issues impacting on people's wellbeing and the social sustainability of projects, including mitigating negative social impacts and enhancing benefits.

Cumulative impacts are the successive, incremental and combined impacts of one or more activities on society, the economy and/or the environment (Franks et al., 2010). Cumulative impacts interact such that they trigger or are associated with other impacts and influence community views about new and existing projects (Lockie et al., 2008). Residents have different views, expectations and anxieties about a project depending on their impact history. The generation of excessive expectations causes social impacts, and residents may feel 'ripped-off' when a project fails to fulfil their expectations. Therefore, the expectations and impact history of a community should be considered and addressed when new projects are initiated (Prenzel and Vanclay, 2014).

In order to avoid resistance, opposition and protest (Hanna et al., 2016b, 2016c), projects should gain the support of local communities; in other words, a social licence to operate (Dare et al., 2014; Jijelava and Vanclay, 2014a, 2014b; Vanclay, 2017a). How to deal with impact history and gain public trust is crucial to gain a social licence to operate (Jijelava and Vanclay, 2017, 2018). However, delays and/or long

planning and pre-implementation processes will likely cause negative social impacts leading to the loss of public trust (Koirala et al., 2017).

3. Methodology

We studied the development of the planned University of Groningen Yantai campus in Shandong Province, China. Consistent with how case studies (Yin, 2009) and social impact assessment (Esteves et al., 2012; Vanclay et al., 2015) are undertaken, a multi-methods approach was used involving document analysis, a review of media reports, key informant interviews, focus groups, and field observation. We sought to gain a full understanding of the impact history and the study area. We reviewed all relevant official documents from Chinese and Dutch government and institutional sources, as well as Chinese and Dutch media reports, which we accessed using the Google and Baidu search engines. The document analysis not only included information about UGY, but also the earlier campus (CAU Yantai), and its location in a high-tech zone in Yantai city. Where possible, we reviewed relevant internal documents from the various institutions (e.g. University of Groningen, China Agricultural University), which were provided to us by our contacts.

Between 2017 and 2018, some 21 key informants were interviewed, including managers and project staff from the University of Groningen (UG), China Agricultural University (CAU), Yantai campus and Yantai City Council. We also interviewed a further 38 local people, including staff from local Community Committees, owners of local businesses (e.g., restaurants, bars, hotels, gyms), and some Yantai residents. This enabled us to develop a community profile and analyse the various stakeholders. The local interviews included some older residents who had lived in the area before the announcement of the CAU Yantai campus (around 2002). They expressed their feelings of experienced and perceived social impacts and about the changing process. In early 2019, we did some follow-up interviews to check on any subsequent developments.

Between December 2017 and February 2018, we conducted 8 focus groups with local residents, 4 being women-only and 4 being men-only. Each focus group involved some 6 to 8 people, with the participants ranging in age from low twenties to 80+. A local person was appointed to assist in recruiting people for the focus groups. He was instructed to ensure a diverse cross-sectional mix (e.g. age, socio-economic standing etc) of people from the area. The discussion in the focus groups varied slightly, but primarily addressed two questions: *What are the social impacts you have experienced from the establishment of a university campus in your community?*; and *What social impacts do you think will occur in the future?*

Between November 2017 and February 2018, the lead author resided near the Yantai campus, gaining first-hand information and impressions. It is worth noting that he had also lived in Yantai between 2010 and 2013, and that his experiences then have informed and potentially influenced this research. The lead author is a native Chinese who is now undertaking a PhD at the University of Groningen in The Netherlands. He gained his bachelor and master's degree from China Agricultural University (Beijing), the partner university in the UGY project. He was born and raised in Qingdao, near Yantai, and thus he understands the local dialect. He was familiar with all the parties involved in the UGY project and could easily access the relevant materials.

The interviews and focus groups were conducted in conventional Mandarin, local dialect (Yantai-ese) or English, with most being audio-recorded. Interviews were done consistent with ethical social research (Vanclay et al., 2013). Where possible, data were triangulated and crosschecked.

4. Background to the university campus in Yantai

Yantai is a coastal city in the Province of Shandong, China, about

halfway between Beijing and Shanghai. It has a population of approximately 7 million people. Although there were already around 10 higher education institutions in Yantai, they were local-level institutions relatively low in the academic rankings of Chinese higher education institutions. Yantai had long been considered a desirable location for the establishment of a top quality university.

UG first entered into discussions about establishing a branch campus in Yantai in early 2015. However, ideas about a university campus in Yantai started much earlier. The proposed UGY campus involved the redevelopment of an existing educational facility, China Agricultural University (Yantai). Having two campuses in Beijing, in 2002 CAU successfully applied to establish its third campus in Yantai, and for some years there was much construction of buildings and facilities. At that time, CAU developed a grand plan to teach all its 30,000 bachelor students in Yantai and started teaching students there in 2005. However, a change in the Board of CAU around 2007 led to this grand plan being suspended. CAU was thus left with an underutilised campus in Yantai. From 2007 till now, CAU has used its Yantai campus for teaching its approx 1000 students from Shandong Province. Since the campus had been designed for many more students, this was a very inefficient use of this asset and undesirable from pedagogical and other perspectives. After considering all available options, CAU and the Yantai City Council decided to recruit a foreign university to establish a base in Yantai, and from 2010 on, a foreign institution was actively sought.

The first institution to take up the offer was University College Dublin (UCD), Ireland. We understand that CAU, the Yantai City Council and UCD came to an agreement that was submitted to the Chinese Education Administration. However, before it was approved, UCD backed out of the deal. Although there was no public statement about this, according to UCD staff this was due to the change in the University President in January 2014. Wageningen University (Netherlands) also considered the proposal, but rejected the idea.

In early 2015, the University of Groningen seized the opportunity. On 25 March 2015, CAU, the Yantai City Council and UG signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Shanghai, at an event attended by the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte. A formal agreement was signed on 26 October 2015 in the presence of the King Willem-Alexander of The Netherlands and the Chinese President, Xi Jinping.

Between 2015 and 2018, there was much planning and frequent delegations between China and the Netherlands. Although the existing Yantai campus already had restaurants, a library, cafes, sporting fields, dormitories, a hotel for international academic visitors, and other facilities, UG wanted improvements. Some Dutch features were to be added, including a Dutch-style clock tower in the middle of the square, and a main gate in Mondrian style. The UGY campus was intended to reach 10,000 students within 5 years of commencement. UGY was to be an international university (a branch campus of UG) with staff and students from China, The Netherlands and elsewhere. All courses were to be in English, and Bachelor, Masters and PhD programs were going to be offered.

Despite the signed agreements, there was much concern amongst academic staff within UG about the plan, with the elected University Council being strongly opposed and challenging the University Board on the matter. With UG being a public institution, a change in Dutch law was required to enable it to operate in China. Public discussions about this and lobbying of political parties by various stakeholders led to the law being changed (in 2017), but with Parliament requiring that UG could only proceed if the elected University Council approved the plan. During 2017, the University Board was unable to convince the University Council of the merits of the proposal, and the formal vote to action the plan was postponed several times. In January 2018, the University Board eventually acknowledged that gaining approval from the University Council was unlikely and announced that it had decided to cancel its plans for the UGY campus.

Given the late stage at which UG cancelled its plans, and the extent

of investment made by all parties, by 2018 significant modification to the Yantai site had been done, and the campus was ready for commencement of teaching for the 2018–19 academic year (and in fact even before then). Many buildings had been constructed or renovated to meet Dutch expectations. Thus, despite the UGY project not proceeding, there had been considerable construction work, and many social impacts had been experienced by local people. It is possible that a new university partner will take over the campus, but as at early 2019, this had not yet happened.

Apart from UG staff, the planned campus experienced resistance from several parties. For example, it was the view of some of our interviewees that the Yantai City Council was not fully committed to the project, given that it had experienced the previous failure of the CAU campus and the UCD proposal, and it was afraid this would happen again. Nevertheless, the Council did invest in the project (to the tune of many millions of dollars). In fact, with the UGY project now being cancelled, the Council is now experiencing a financial burden that may potentially affect the local community long into the future.

4.1. A community profile of Yantai

The rate of urbanization in China has accelerated since the 1990s, and local governments have endeavoured to establish various types of development zones, with New Areas, New Towns and University Towns emerging as new types of urban space (Liu et al., 2016). In 1990s, the national government planned a large high-tech zone (approx. 50 km²) in a mixed residential-agricultural area to the southeast of Yantai city, with the intention of attracting top firms and institutions (see Fig. 1). Declaration of a high-tech zone does not automatically mean the expulsion of residents, at least not immediately, but does indicate there will be ongoing change in land use, with the likelihood that people will eventually have to move.

The designated high-tech zone ranges from about 10 to 25 km from the Yantai railway station. A development restriction is that only high-tech organisations can be established in the zone. As at 2018, around 8 universities, 20 research institutes and many high-tech firms had located there. Despite being a designated high-tech zone, many villages remained. With the ongoing development of the region, most farmland was gradually expropriated by the government and converted into space for commercial housing developments, commercial and industrial land use activities, and the research institutions.

The planned UGY campus was located in an underutilised precinct (the red circle in Fig. 1) within the high-tech zone. Although 17 km from the main train station, the campus was easily accessible by bus. The site of the campus was previously fertile farmland and orchards. Most former residents were peasant farmers living in three villages: Dongpozi, Beizhai and Nanzhai (see Fig. 2). These people still live in the vicinity, but now have various urban labouring jobs. Dongpozi and Beizhai have been redeveloped to become modern urban communities. Residents in the former villages were relocated elsewhere during construction, and a large percentage returned to live in the new communities. Nanzhai, however, has not yet been renovated and remains a traditional village for now.

In addition to the CAU Yantai campus with its 1000 students, in 2006 two other local colleges (the Yantai Vocational College and the Shandong Business Institute) relocated from Yantai city centre to the precinct, with around 15,000 students in total. Several high-tech firms also relocated, and various facilities were established to provide services to people in the area. Consequently, local residents (former peasants) experienced a process of urbanization of their community and local environment. There was also an influx of people from other cities in China, causing social changes and impacts on the local communities. However, another part of the high-tech zone (see yellow circle in Fig. 1) developed more rapidly, capturing most of the new development activities, which had the effect of leaving the research precinct relatively under-developed. Many multi-storey housing complexes had been built

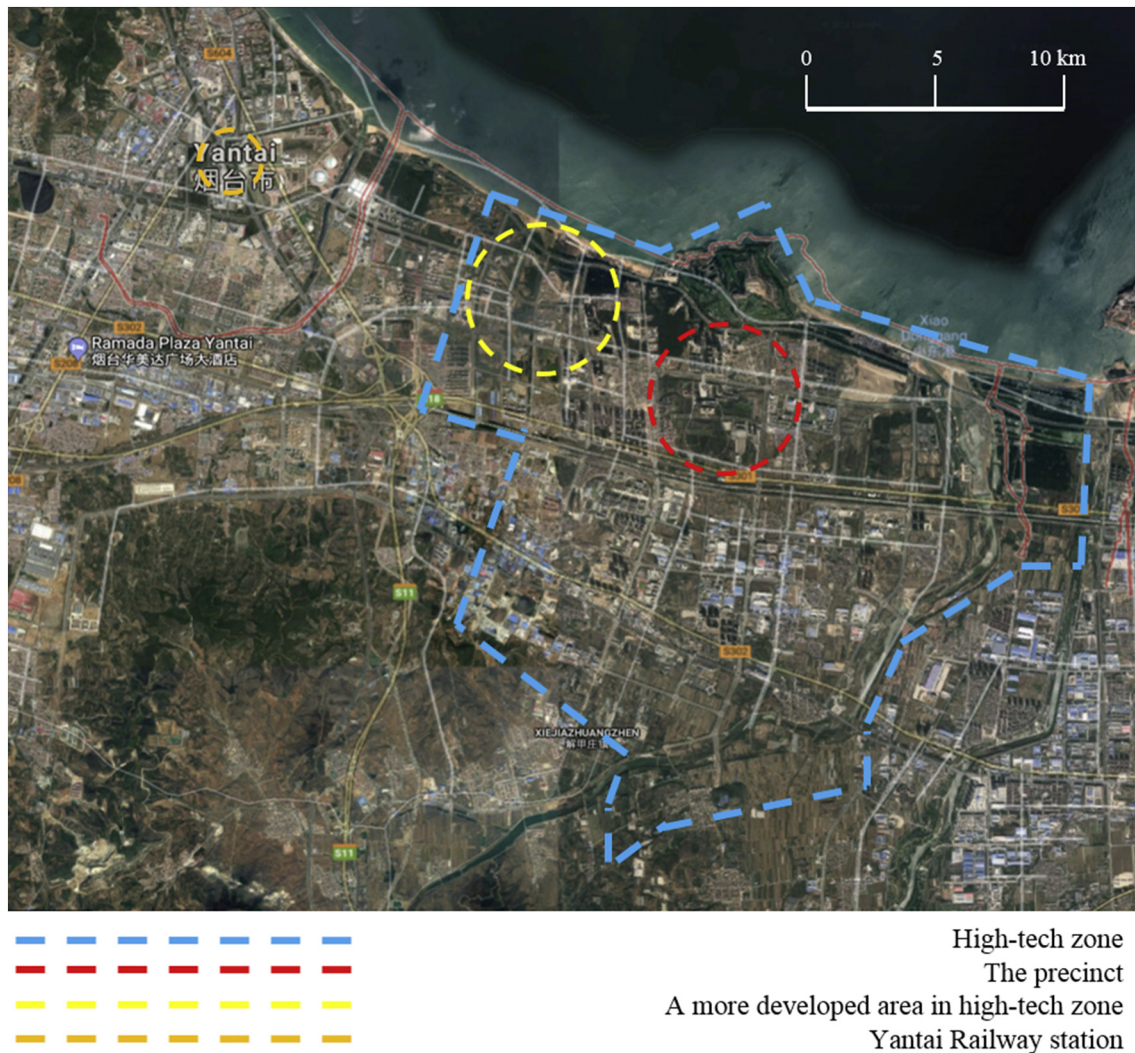


Fig. 1. Modified Google image of Yantai high-tech zone.

in the precinct, however the occupancy rate remained low. During college vacations, the precinct was very quiet. Many residents, especially those from Nanzhai village, felt dissatisfied with the slow rate of development.

5. Social impacts from the planned campus

Although the UGY project is now cancelled, the development of the campus in readiness for UGY caused many changes to the local environment. Rumours about the various plans for the site led to many expectations from local people about what would happen. The extent of building construction boosted the local economy and accelerated the process of urbanization. In the future, people from other cities, provinces and perhaps nations will move to the area, and local residents will experience positive and negative changes from this. These changes will have, and have already had, major impacts on local residents, including on their income and livelihood opportunities, and well as to their normal daily life, environment, culture, and infrastructure.

In our analysis below, we speculate about the consequences of the UGY project as if it would have proceeded, thus we say ‘the planned project’. The impacts are both past tense relating to what has happened already in terms of campus preparation to date (up to 2018), as well as future tense with respect to what would likely happen in the future if the UGY campus had proceeded (and what will likely happen with a new university partner). We believe that the likely future scenario will

be that another major university in the world will seize this opportunity left vacant by UG, thus our analysis will largely be applicable to the new consortium.

A key issue relates to how information about the UGY project was provided to local people. Typically, in China, Europe and elsewhere, when projects are successfully progressing, much information is provided to local people, but only limited information is provided when there is no progress. In The Netherlands (especially at UG), there had been much discussion about the cessation of plans for UGY and about the controversial nature of the proposal. However, in Yantai very little information was disseminated about the internal dissension within UG, or about the cancellation of the proposal. From a Yantai perspective, there had been plans and rumours since at least 2002, when CAU announced it would establish a campus in Yantai, and plans for a foreign university campus have been circulating since 2010. The protracted time to get the campus developed, and the stop-start nature of the process, means that local people did not know what to believe.

5.1. Changes in income and livelihood opportunities

The planned project will enhance the local economy and incomes of local people, but inevitably this will lead to local inflation. It will provide an increased range of livelihood opportunities, although some of these may not be accessible to local people. Residents who were business minded have established their own businesses, including

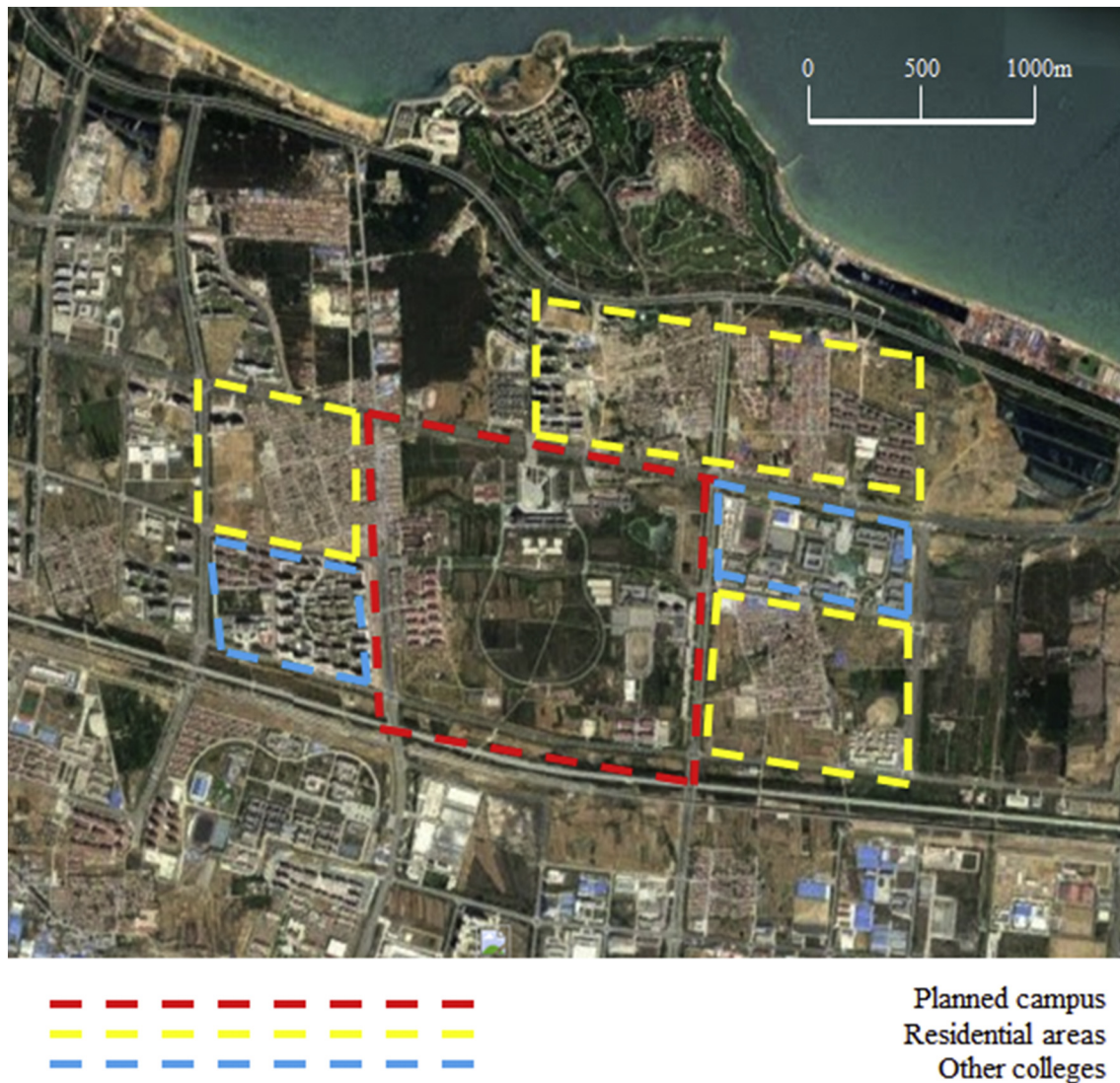


Fig. 2. Modified Google image of Yantai campus and precinct.

hotels, restaurants, cafes, bars, hairdressing salons, internet cafes, karaoke clubs, etc. Others have become landlords, especially those who inherited houses or land. In general, these individuals and SMEs considered that the building of a new campus was a great opportunity to increase their business revenues. In most cases, their businesses were highly dependent on and geared towards students, thus potentially they would benefit from the project. For many, it is difficult for them to leave the region since their whole family has settled in Yantai, and at present there are few likely buyers of their business, at least until the project restarts. However, the ongoing prospect of a future large increase in the number of students gives them hope of earning more in the future and encourages them to stay, even if times are difficult in the short term.

Arguably, a high quality university campus will attract talented students to the area and, after several years studying, some may choose to stay, becoming the skilled workforce needed by the high-tech companies being established in the area. Many returnees considered the campus project to be their last chance – if it fails they may have to leave Yantai and re-establish themselves elsewhere.

Apart from expectations about the number of students and their consumption behaviour, various entrepreneurs have considered other business opportunities. One hotel manager thought that the university project would boost his business. His hotel is atop a hill overlooking the

sea and famous for its luxury golf course and seascape. Previously, the clientele were mainly relatively-rich South Koreans. In his opinion, Dutch people are richer and perhaps more into golf, and he hopes the project will attract more foreigners (especially Dutch people) to his hotel. According to government staff, some businesspeople have shown interest in initiating high-end consumer activities in this region aiming to offer services to Europeans.

In general, people who worked in the precinct thought their salaries would not increase because of the campus development. Some thought the presence of large numbers of students may mean there would be downward pressure on wages, while they also experienced local inflation. A 40 year old woman we interviewed explained that many students work part-time in restaurants creating competition for jobs that would potentially affect her salary or make her unemployed. Even though the restaurant business would increase with more students, she considered this would only benefit the boss because “the better the restaurant's business, the harder I have to work, and my salary will not be raised correspondingly!”.

5.2. Changes to normal everyday life

According to our interviewees, local perception was that the government did provide reasonable compensation for expropriated land



Fig. 3. The deserted Yantai campus (Dec 2017). Source: Chen Chen.

and livelihood restoration. Peasants were offered various job opportunities. However, most jobs were ‘nine-to-five’, and although considered to be good, steady, reliable jobs, were perhaps not stimulating, especially for young people. Therefore, some young people left to go elsewhere to make a living, while most residents accepted these jobs or started their own businesses with the compensation money provided. Small-scale peasant farming was seen as undesirable, and most peasants who still owned farmland chose to work in paid jobs rather than farm, as was happening in many parts of China.

Local residents have experienced a rapid transformation in land use and the job market due to accelerated urbanization. Many former peasants now desire to become citizens of the city and are not satisfied with the current slow process of development. In their opinion, the establishment of a transnational university would speed up urbanization and make their region more developed, modern and international. This was especially true for the people of Nanzhai, a traditional village that has not yet been upgraded.

Many young people considered the area was not developed enough, and therefore they chose to work in the city centre (away from the precinct) or in other cities. When fully functioning, the campus will make the precinct more lively with more jobs suitable for young people. Parents generally thought the project would attract young people back to the precinct resulting in the reunification of their family or in keeping their family together. Compared to Europeans, Chinese people, especially seniors, cherish family, and family togetherness greatly enhances their sense of happiness and wellbeing.

There are around 10 universities and colleges in Yantai, but most are local level institutions. The planned campus is supposed to recruit talented students with high educational scores in both Chinese entrance examinations and in English tests. Many parents consider the establishment of a campus nearby to be good news, thinking that their children will no longer need to leave the city to obtain high quality education. However, they expect that the campus will favour local children in receiving university education. Since many universities in other cities accept local students with below normal entry scores, they think that, as some form of compensation, UGY should do the same because it has occupied their former land.

Many local young people are interested in having intimate

relationships with the anticipated talented students that will come, and some are potentially interested in foreign students. Although this could have mixed longer-term outcomes, many local elderly people considered this to be positive because they thought it would encourage their children to stay in the region. As one parent said: “Young adults can either study at this campus or find a partner who is studying there ... Either way, this prospect may keep them in this region”.

Many local residents were satisfied with the process of urbanization, but some worried about its negative impacts. The planned campus will create a new phase of development, and some residents worry that the local cost of living will increase. They are very aware they are not as wealthy as the newcomers will be, and that they have to pay the same prices as the newcomers. They also know that prices have been increasing due to the number of newcomers, and that prices will continue to rise. With the planned campus, the inevitable local inflation will aggravate the burden of the increasing cost of living on local people.

Gentrification will affect existing residents in various ways. In some parts of the high-tech zone where gentrification is taking place, low-income renters who cannot afford the increased rent are forced to move. In the precinct, however, the rate of gentrification is lower than elsewhere, at least at present, and consequently some young people who would prefer to live elsewhere, live in the precinct because of the relatively low rents. Since the planned campus will boost the whole region and rents will increase, some young people think about moving to communities nearer their workplace, while others may choose to move further away. They think the planned project is good for the region, even though it forces them to make hard choices about where they should live.

5.3. Changes to local people's environment

The planned campus was intended to be open to the public, with a range of sporting facilities available to the public and students alike. It was intended that the whole campus would have a Dutch-style landscape. A current pastime of local residents is strolling through the deserted campus in the evening. They consider the existing campus to be a huge waste of space and money, and that its only advantage is as a community park. Some do not even think of it as a park because it is too

empty and too quiet (see Fig. 3).

Some local parents felt happy to finally have a good university nearby and that their children had the chance to grow up in an intellectual atmosphere. Many were curious about whether there would be international kindergartens and schools, and most were pleased to have well-educated students in the neighbourhood. However, parents were also concerned about the increasing population and the increasing volume of traffic that would be generated because they thought it would become unsafe for children. However, they regard this as an inevitable consequence of development, and that the planned project only part of this more general process of development.

Some local people were worried that their potential future European neighbours would hold parties and barbecues every night. They worry about the noise, light and smoke that will be created, which would disturb their sleep, especially in summer. They have heard about the odd behaviour of foreigners like naked sunbathing, excessive drinking, drugs, sexual frivolity, etc. All this makes many of them feel anxious about having such neighbours.

5.4. Changes in culture

The campus locality has changed from being a cluster of villages to being a suburban area that has experienced an influx of people. Local people are excited about the prospect of having newcomers and new neighbours coming from different cities in China and different countries. They are aware and looked forward to the different cultures and habits, e.g. relating to food, dialect, clothes, lifestyle, etc., that the newcomers would bring. To date, the newcomers had mainly come from nearby cities in Shandong Province, and they were looking forward to more diversity.

At the time of our research, only about 10 foreigners were living in the area, and most local residents were interested in learning from them. Local residents thought it would be nice to have more foreign people in the precinct. Most considered there would be no cultural conflict because, given the rapid changes taking place in China, they thought their community, like most other Chinese villages, did not have unique qualities that needed to be protected. This was partly because two villages had already been transformed into new, western-style

buildings, which removed any sense of a traditional village (see Fig. 4). Most local residents were satisfied about moving from their former village bungalows into the new condominiums and were not worried about the loss of traditional culture.

5.5. Changes in infrastructure

According to the original plan of Yantai City Council, there should now be 50,000 students living in the precinct. However, due to the changing plans and the demise of UGY, there are currently only about 15,000 students. As a result, most infrastructure and services have surplus capacity and could easily cope with additional demand. For example, to the east of the campus, there is a largely unused six-lane road that some people use as a carpark. Many public servants consider this surplus capacity to be a waste and hope that UGY (or its replacement) will contribute to fully utilising available facilities and infrastructure.

In contrast, some services needed by local residents were inadequate. For example, local senior citizens complained that there were only community clinics nearby and no comprehensive hospitals, so they had to travel some distance for their medical check-ups. They had heard that UG had a university hospital and a medical faculty and they believed (or at least hoped) that there would be a hospital on the UGY campus (even though this was not part of the plan). Parents worried about the general education of their children because there was no large public library in the region, and they hoped UGY would bring not only a public library, but also other cultural facilities and cultural life.

Although two nearby villages (Dongpozi, Beizhai) had been rebuilt with new apartment towers, Nanzhai remained a traditional village, and many Nanzhai residents felt it was unfair for them to see their neighbours living like city folk while they remained poor country cousins. In their opinion, the planned campus would accelerate the process of village rebuilding and mean they would get better housing in due course.

Some car drivers thought that the new campus restricted the routes between villages and forced them to detour around the campus. Even though the roads around the campus were well planned and maintained, they felt inconvenienced because they missed the old days when



Fig. 4. The new buildings in Beizhai village (Dec 2017). Source: Chen Chen.

they could access the other villages easily. They considered that the new campus should be open, not just for pedestrians, but also for vehicles, so they can drive through the campus.

6. Discussion

Our research revealed that the construction of the Yantai campus (as CAU Yantai and UGY) has and will continue to have many social impacts on local residents, and that people's perceptions about the campus were much influenced by the project's impact history. Residents were expected to be able to cope with the urbanization process and local inflation. Some treated the project as an opportunity, others thought it was a nuisance or impairment to their current life, while some thought little about the project, regarding it as not being their business and as not likely to affect them (even though reasoned analysis suggests it would).

The proposed project has already caused many social impacts and people have started to consider and implement plans in response to the proposed campus. Nevertheless, a major impact has been uncertainty about the campus and its likely consequences, especially now that the UGY plan is cancelled. The UGY project was announced locally in Yantai in 2015 with the stated initial intention of starting teaching in 2016. Due to the obvious ongoing delays in commencement of teaching at UGY, over the years a variety of conflicting reports, news and rumours have circulated relating to continuation or cancellation of the project. Considering the impact history and the information generated since the first announcements of the CAU campus, most residents have felt confused about the situation. Some long-term residents had the opinion that, irrespective of whether the current news about the campus was true or not, there would always be some changes in plans, as they had been experiencing for several years already. During our fieldwork in 2017 and 2018, many residents were keen to know about the current status of UGY. It also seemed that some staff from Yantai City Council and CAU Yantai were misinformed or not aware of the current status. Despite the UGY plans being officially cancelled by UG in January 2018, we know from our Yantai contacts that, as at early 2019, many residents still had no idea of the cancellation. Due to conflicting reports and rumours, local residents made their plans based on the information they believed (or wanted to believe) was true.

In general, people were willing to have the campus in the precinct, mainly because they believed they would benefit from it, either directly or indirectly. Some of the expected benefits would likely be fulfilled by the campus, some expected benefits were indirect consequences that depended on other things happening, and some were unrealistic or excessive expectations. In developing projects, developers should seek to enhance direct benefits and contribute to indirect benefits, as well as consider how to deal with excessive expectations (Vanclay et al., 2015; Vanclay, 2017b). Staff from Yantai City Council considered local residents' views to be characteristic of Chinese peasants generally – welcome first, judge later. If local residents were to consider they would not benefit from a project, they would ignore the promises made about the project and potentially hinder its development.

In our focus groups, some people shared the view that the campus should establish a good relationship with local residents because, unfortunately, there can always be disaffected people who might become 'village bullies' and attack or taunt people (students and staff) on campus, or engage in other forms of anti-social behaviour. There was also a concern that UGY will engage professional contracting firms, thus replacing the services currently provided by the many unskilled people in the precinct. This concern leads to anxiety, apprehension, and depression. Amongst some current staff there is the perception that the only way to hold on to one's current job is to work harder. Because current staff are used to a somewhat 'disengaged' work style (given the underutilization of the campus), their fear of an increasing workload causes them to experience stress. For UGY (and its replacement in due course), it was/will be important to engage with these people at an

early stage to prevent conflict emerging.

7. Conclusion

To some extent, this was a story about a foreign university campus in China, but there are many wider lessons. Even with good reputation projects arguably in the public interest (such as a university), local people will still experience various social impacts, both negative and positive. The direct, indirect and cumulative social impacts of well-intentioned projects are not only positive, there can be many negative impacts as well. Getting a social licence to operate is necessary for every project, but this may be difficult because of a lack of trust due to poor impact history. Projects always take place in local situations that have histories, contextualities and local specificities that go far beyond the current project, therefore impact history and changing project plans need to be carefully considered and managed.

Developing large projects (including transnational university campuses) generally takes time, allowing conflicting news reports and rumours to spread. Impact history and changing plans contribute to expectations and anxiety, and influence local perceptions about the project. The impact history of a community is a broad concept that includes the performance and reputation of previous projects in the community, local policies, promises made by other developers (even completed unrelated to the current project), and news and rumours (which may be completely false). Because of the potential influence of impact history on the way people relate and/or react to (new) projects, we consider it important that impact history be given serious consideration by project developers. People's views about a current or future operator of a project are influenced by what has happened to them in the past. The social licence to operate of a new operator is thus influenced by past activities. Furthermore, past activities, including the extent of social licence, form part of the legacy issues of a project (Jijelava and Vanclay, 2018). Local people tend to take it for granted that a new operator is responsible for solving past problems, including the cumulative problems being experienced. If the new operator fails to fulfil their expectations and reduce the impacts, stress and anxiety they experience, they will get angry and lose trust in the developer.

In good reputation projects, there should be a focus not only on minimizing the negative impacts, but also on enhancing benefits (Esteves and Vanclay, 2009; João et al., 2011). This is important to the improvement of living conditions and general wellbeing of local people. The extent to which local people benefit affects their perceptions and trust towards a project. In China and perhaps to a lesser extent elsewhere, most people think they will benefit from projects, and fulfilling their wishes and avoiding misunderstandings will help in gaining a social licence to operate. Excessive expectations and the speculations of local people should be addressed, even if (or perhaps especially if) they are created by rumour.

Unfortunately, much impact assessment has a rather naive view about projects. Projects are not discrete, simple things with precise start and finish dates (Koirala et al., 2017). Instead, many projects have a stop-start nature, and/or long lead and implementation timeframes. Project design can change over time as the project develops. Especially where there is a lack of transparency, projects generate changing opportunities as well as rumours, fears and expectations, all of which affect local residents' plans and daily life. This affects perceptions about impacts and benefits, affecting people's wellbeing and their level of trust in the project, which together affect the social licence to operate of the current and future projects.

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