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The social impacts created by the development of transnational university campuses

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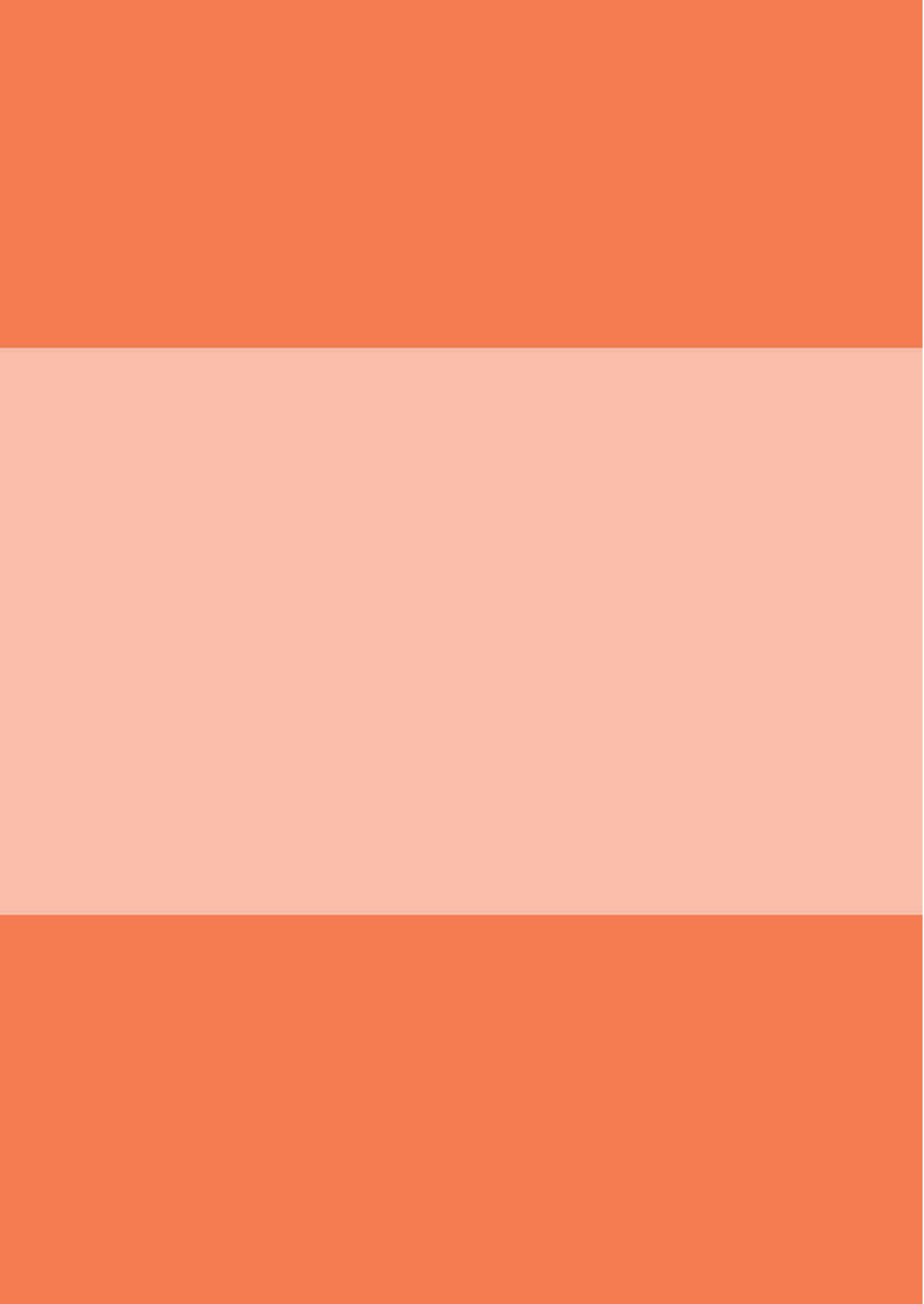
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Chapter 7

Conclusion



7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study discussed transnational university campuses from the perspective of host communities and local residents. Specific focus has been put on social issues and residents' daily life. Generally, a transnational university campus is a significant project for the host city. This thesis found that even though the economy and urbanization level, as well as the reputation of the host city, might increase, the local communities and residents were likely to experience various impacts over time. However, the affected people generally had few opportunities to show their views on such large projects intended for the public interest, and their voice was too weak to gain appropriate rights for their affected life. I tried to raise awareness that even public-good projects might create significant social impacts on local communities. I discussed the social impacts created by transnational university campuses, analyzed the performance of transnational universities in managing social impacts, and provided a special perspective to review the relationship between campus and its located community.

To answer the research questions “*What are the social impacts on host communities and local residents created by a transnational university campus?*” and “*How can a transnational university campus manage its social impacts, gain approval from local residents, and develop in a socially-friendly way?*” and the associated issues identified in Chapter 1, three key concepts have been analyzed: impact history, economic displacement and social licence to operate (SLO). Each concept provides a different emphasis on the same topic: the social impacts of transnational university campuses. By analyzing 6 transnational university campuses in China, the research questions were discussed and the key concepts were explored.

Based on the conclusions of each chapter in the thesis, this concluding chapter firstly presented the main findings of each chapter (7.2). A discussion regarding the main findings was further provided (7.3), including transnational universities' performance in managing social impacts; local government's role in campus development; the duality consideration of social impacts; and the reflection of higher education globalization. In the final section (7.4), some general conclusions were provided.

7.2 MAIN FINDINGS OF EACH CHAPTER

Chapter 2 analyzed the social impacts of a stop-start campus with a discussion about impact history and cumulative impacts. University campuses might create positive & negative social impacts on local communities. Specifically, stop-start projects (e.g., a campus) affect local residents' trust and the projects' ability to obtain a social licence to operate. The impact history of a community, as well as the cumulative impacts created by the ongoing development of the community, might generate varying new social impacts when proposing a new institution. Where the previous institutions, especially similar institutions, performed poorly in the community, residents might treat the new institution as homogeneous as the previous one, and show negative views on its potential impacts, and vice versa. Generally, local people tended to approve of a university campus because they thought they would benefit from the project. Therefore, to gain approval from local residents, the project managers should consider how to share benefits with them, and cope with cumulative impacts.

Chapter 3 extended the scope of social impacts. By analyzing the potential economic displacement and social impacts on existing employees, the concept of human rights, labor rights and corporate social responsibility were explored. I found that both physical and economic displacement (i.e., residents lost their means of making a living) might create varying social impacts. Specifically, economic displacement is under-considered in project development. In the Yantai project, all involved parties failed to adequately consider their social responsibility obligations. They neglected a fact that the upgrading of educational institutions can create economic displacement, and the existing employees may experience many negative social impacts from institutional upgrading. Many affected people belong to vulnerable groups or have a weak voice in a transnational project. They are always left to experience various social impacts, and the influence of their daily life is largely ignored. The university managers and local government should be aware that monetary compensation is not the only way to mitigate the impacts created by physical/economic displacement, and they are suggested to pay more attention to the social needs of the influenced people.

The purpose of **Chapter 4** was to introduce the notion of social licence to operate (which originated in the extractive industries) and to advocate that universities (like all organizations) need to be mindful of their SLO. The concept of SLO has been explored in the scope of transnational universities to demonstrate the value of the concept more broadly. I discussed what transnational universities should do to gain approval from local communities. They have to balance campus development, local community expectations, and comply with home and host country regulations. Consideration of social impacts and

social licence contributes to gaining a good reputation and accessing local knowledge. To earn a social licence to operate and grow, universities must understand and respond to the local context, share benefits with local communities, and have effective community engagement. In the universities I studied, they experienced high levels of trust from residents, due to the good reputation of universities generally. However, there was limited information being provided to community stakeholders and poor stakeholder engagement, which might influence local residents' future support of the universities.

Chapter 5 indicated that the social impacts on the local community, the acceptance of residents and the level of SLO are dynamic and tend to fluctuate over time. Arguably, before project implementation, there is a moderate level of SLO, which further decreases during the construction and resettlement process, but normalizes after completion. This chapter showed that the dynamic trend applied to not only controversial projects, but also good-reputation projects such as a university campus. Because of the general good reputation of universities, local residents might be acceptance of a university campus in their community at the beginning. However, the following resettlement and construction process still significantly influenced local residents' life, thus their approval of the project. Social changes created by a university campus also can generate anxiety, concern, excessive expectations and other social impacts. These changing local contexts contributed to the dynamic of SLO in different development stages. Where an institution failed to meet residents' shifting expectations or requirements, residents' approval of the institution might decline. Poor understanding of the local context limits the ability to obtain a social licence. Institutions are supposed to consider how to manage social impacts, gain and maintain approval from residents over time. Continuous improvement is also needed.

As shown in **Chapter 6**, transnational university campuses are generally large-footprint projects with massive resettlement and construction activities on the located communities. The establishment and development of a transnational university campus might significantly change the community and affect the local residents in various ways. The social impacts (negative and positive) created by transnational university campuses on local residents are complex. Many social impacts are intangible and indirect. Residents were not always aware that the disruptions they experiencing were (partly) due to the university. This chapter showed that the major social impacts created by transnational universities included impacts related to relocation and compensation; local development, urbanization and gentrification processes; income and livelihood opportunities; the presence of newcomers and outsiders; increased traffic and demand on infrastructure; other impacts on everyday life; changes in the local community environment (including safety and quietness); cultural impacts; and cross-generational impacts (especially senior

people). Many of these social impacts are neutral and are not in themselves positive or negative, but are influenced by community characteristics and mitigation and enhancement measures. The same social change process might create different types of impacts.

7.3 DISCUSSION

7.3.1 Transnational universities' performance in managing social impacts

Transnational universities are different from domestic universities in various ways, including in management philosophy, financing arrangements, and source of students. These peculiarities might influence residents' views and expectations of the university, as well as their experience of social changes and impacts. Another special part of transnational universities is that they always claim to have developed a good relationship with local residents, but often there is little evidence for this.

To some extent, universities are not good neighbors. As large footprint projects with various social impacts on host communities, many universities failed to manage their impacts as effectively as other industries. To maintain trust and approval from local residents over time, transnational universities need to conduct effective measures to monitor and mitigate negative impacts, enhance positive impacts and share benefits. This study found a lack of social impacts consideration and effective mitigation and enhancement measures from transnational universities, and they were suggested that they could learn a lot by looking at other industries.

In the transnational university market, the partner universities of home countries are always respectable, world-class, educational institutions, so the new university campuses were expected to exercise appropriate social responsibility and care. However, as is evident in my cases, the performance of transnational universities showed that they did not fully consider the impacts on and needs of local residents and existing employees, or their corporate social responsibility and environment, social and government (ESG) expectations as institutions. They expected other parties (e.g. the local government, the partner university) to address these issues, but even then they would be negligent in failing to ensure that there were no ESG issues throughout the supply chain.

For any institution, gaining a SLO and maintaining future development opportunities in a foreign country is difficult because of the cross-cultural context, and having to balance the home country and host country expectations. Consideration of social impacts has the

potential to assist in understanding the local context and in utilizing the local knowledge of communities in the development of the institution or project (Stephenson 2011; Vanclay 2012). It was clear from this research that communities could provide local knowledge and experience to assist in university activities and in getting a SLO. However, there was no proof that the case universities had taken serious consideration of the potential contribution of local residents. Besides, there was a lack of consideration of local concerns, which might lead to some misunderstanding in the local community, such as a failure of the universities to manage the public misbehavior of students. To make appropriate decisions and gain a SLO, universities need to have effective community engagement practices and to share benefits with their local communities, for example by contributing to community development, sharing facilities, having an open campus, and interacting with local community organizations.

Besides being influenced by community characteristics, the experience of social impacts can also be affected by the effectiveness of mitigation and enhancement measures. These measures are generally expected from companies in controversial industries such as mines or dams. However, I argue that transnational universities are also large footprint projects that create significant social impacts on their local communities. Communities with different characteristics might respond to the management measures differently, so transnational universities need to conduct different measures suiting the local context. This study found a lack of specific, effective, enhancement and mitigation measures conducted by transnational universities, which might lead to the loss of trust from local residents.

It was expected that all companies, projects and major activities (including any impact assessment and resettlement process) should have a grievance redress mechanism. Situations where institutions deliberately intend to harm communities are showed to be rare, however, harm frequently happens as a result of neglect, ignorance or a lack of proper consideration of social issues by the institutions (van der Ploeg and Vanclay 2018). This study mirrored that there was a lack of grievance redress mechanisms within transnational universities. Residents had no choice but to complain among the community, which created various rumors and generated a negative reputation for the university. Arguably, where transnational universities could have established grievance redress mechanisms to respond to residents' feedback, many issues could be resolved before they escalate.

There are some advantages for transnational universities to gain support from the local community. Firstly, local residents tend to accord a SLO to a transnational university due to the good reputation of universities generally. It is not likely that local residents show

strong negative views against a transnational university project or even protest for it, like the experience of controversial projects (dams, mines, airports, etc.). Secondly, a transnational university is not likely to generate significant environmental impacts on the local community, instead, it might improve the local environment by establishing a beautiful campus. A transnational university mainly needs to consider its social impacts on the local residents. Thirdly, a transnational university has the potential to share benefits with the local residents in various ways. For example, the university can share sports facilities and libraries with an open campus; the university can hold open days to which local residents were invited to inspect the campus and its facilities including laboratories, and at which there were science demonstrations and public talks; the university staff can share knowledge with the local residents by conducting free courses on topics like managing money, household chemistry, and practical household maintenance in the community; the university students can conduct voluntary activities such as visiting seniors and teaching English at local schools to support the local residents. Arguably, transnational universities have the potential to establish and maintain a good relationship with local communities by mitigating negative impacts, as well as enhancing positive impacts.

7.3.2 Local government's role in campus development

Local government tends to play an important role in developing a transnational university in countries such as China and Malaysia, and its previous performance and its level of public trust might influence residents' views on a new institution. This study found that some local residents, especially senior people, showed stubborn views on the local government derived from the impact history of their community, and were unwilling to change. Many of them treated the university as the local government's partner. They tended to transfer their views (positive or negative) from local government and/or previous institutions to the new university, and were likely to confuse the commitments made by the university and the local government. Therefore, the new university is supposed to get a decent understanding of the host community, and make sure that its partner (e.g. local government) can manage social issues and avoid harm on local residents.

In developing countries such as China, the local government is always responsible for land acquisition and residents resettlement. Many news and discussions have been focused on local government's performance on controversial projects, while few people concern good-reputation projects like a university campus. This study found that the local government might apply similar policies and procedures to university projects because they are also big projects intended for national/local interest and require land to develop,

thus the local residents might also experience significant social impacts. Arguably, transnational projects should also follow international standards and fulfill corporate social responsibility. In that case, the local government is suggested to pay attention to not only local policies but also international standards to ensure that the globalization of higher education can bring benefits to the local communities in a social-friendly way.

7.3.3 The duality consideration of social impacts

When we talk about social impacts, what are the underlying assumptions? Even though many emphases has been put forward that positive social impacts should be appropriately considered and enhanced, many people assumed that social impacts are generally negative and should be avoided or mitigated. They treated local residents as victims who are offended by the project as an aggressor. They tended to fight against large-footprint projects without a good understanding of potential benefits and the meaning to the local residents. A project inevitably creates negative social impacts on local communities, but it also generates positive impacts and local residents can benefit from it. Besides criticizing a project for being a disturbance of local residents, we also need to assess if local residents are acceptable of the negative social impacts because they expect the positive impacts. Social impact assessment experts are suggested to help local residents to balance the potential negative and positive impacts, and to make their own decisions.

Residents are never homogeneous. They have different concerns and expectations, and they are affected differently by a proposal. Some residents will benefit from a proposal while some residents might experience physical/economic displacement. Besides, different groups' concerns and expectations of a proposal are dynamic and change over time, which makes the duality of social impacts more complicated. To take social responsibility, project developers need to balance the interests of different groups under different development stages.

The duality, the paradoxes and power asymmetries of social impact consideration have made the simple victim-aggressor scheme much more nuanced and complex. Via an intricate web of relations (many groups, many economic flows) between groups today, as well as between groups today and the city residents of tomorrow, there are changes to the life courses of people. Change is just part of life and a new campus is an opportunity. The assumption that disturbance of the autonomous development of a community is something problematic is too simple. As Vanclay argued (2002), social changes are inevitable in community development. However, not all social changes will necessarily generate negative social impacts. If properly managed, social changes might not create negative impacts. All communities are in the flow and the campus is part of that flow. An

appropriate reaction to the flow is to keep the social impact consideration in mind to make sure that as many people as possible can take advantage of it.

7.3.4 The reflection of higher education globalization

Higher education globalization was described as “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (de Wit and Hunter 2015). Engaging with society and promoting public good has become a focus for higher education institutions. The social responsibility of universities includes addressing national and international social issues, community education and service activities. While the globalization of higher education has become a powerful and pervasive force in universities around the world, it is still unclear how to make a real difference in the world. This study provided a special way to re-consider higher education globalization from the perspective of host communities and social impacts management.

Transnational university campuses should be aware that their establishment and development might create various social impacts on local residents and other stakeholders (e.g., existing staff when upgrading a campus). Even though transnational universities are not likely to create serious environmental impacts as dams or mines did, activities such as resettlement of residents, construction and expansion of the campus, and an increasing number of students and staff, are likely to disturb local residents. Many transnational universities were established in developing-country by good-reputation universities of developed-country, and many claimed that they have developed a good relationship with local residents. Foreseeable, local government, residents, and other institutions expect to see examples who take social responsibility and develop in a social-friendly way. However, limited evidence has shown that transnational universities fulfilled their social responsibilities as being expected. The host communities and local residents have experienced various social impacts, while the partner universities of home countries, the new-built campuses, and the host cities gained a good reputation for being internationalization. Given that the local reputation of a transnational university might influence the reputation of the home institution and even the home country, university managers are suggested to pay enough attention to their social behavior.

There were differences in views between university managers/staff and local residents, which were partly due to universities' lack of understanding of local context. These differences might influence universities' performance in impacts management, the reputation among the local residents and the obtain of a social licence. Residents are

never homogeneous and they might be influenced differently when a transnational university is proposed in the community. Some of them might benefit from the university, and some might experience economic displacement and negative impacts. Vulnerable groups tend to keep to themselves and resist social change. Significant impacts, such as resettlement and urbanization, will severely influence their daily life. Transnational universities are suggested to understand the local context with due diligence, thus manage the social impacts with appropriate enhancement and mitigation measures.

Even though not being planned to manage social impacts, some measurements conducted by transnational universities contributed to establishing a good reputation in the community. These measurements might be initially planned to conduct courses or facilitate students to participate in social work, and enhancing positive impacts and mitigating negative impacts were usually additional benefits. Arguably, transnational universities are expected to have a specific mechanism (e.g., a grievance redress mechanism) to manage social impacts, to conduct effective community engagement, and to share varying benefits with local residents.

7.4 CONCLUSION

In densely populated countries, the land acquisition for a university normally requires expropriation of land and the displacement (and hopefully adequate resettlement) of people. Therefore, the idea that universities are harmless or only beneficial is contestable. In a university, there are also human rights issues concerning labor rights and working conditions, etc, and the extent to which they are observed (as is especially the case now in the COVID-19 context). Although academics are strongly committed to the notion of the global academy and the social/public/civil role of universities in society at all levels, this thesis mirrored that there needs to be some critical assessment of whether this myth of the virtuous university is true. As argued in this thesis, even public good institutions (humanitarian organizations, universities, etc) need to ensure that they do no harm.

There has been observed a mess of regulations in some transnational universities. Transnational universities mainly followed the values and philosophies of the home countries in managing students and conducting academic with some adjustment to the local context. However, when it refers to campus construction and expansion, local rules became their major basis. In the process of changing between double standards, many social issues have occurred, including the social impacts of local communities and the economic displacement of employees. Even though there are some international regulations intending for transnational institutions to follow, our case universities

showed limited evidence for that. A lack of awareness of social issues and insufficient international supervision partly contributed to these problems. Associated international organizations are supposed to involve more parties in and apply standards in a wider scope to ensure that transnational institutions can appropriately manage their social issues.

The public's expectations of universities are far more than a campus where students take courses and researchers develop vaccines. A university should be an independent institution that cares about society and fulfills social responsibility. Even though some governments and institutions treated a transnational university as a pure company that contributed to the economy and development, I believe that a university should consider more than just earn a profit, and it should be a model for its students and the public.

This thesis found that transnational university campuses have the potential to bring the benefits of globalization to their local communities and make a meaningful contribution to society, as long as they can appropriately manage their social impacts. Institution and project managers should be aware that any intervention to the local communities might generate negative impacts, regardless of whether it is in the name of globalization or other fancy words.

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