Transnational universities, host communities and local residents: social impacts, university social responsibility and campus sustainability

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to discuss how transnational universities create negative and positive social impacts on their host communities and what this means for campus sustainability and the expectation that universities contribute to sustainable development and to their local communities.

Design/methodology/approach – Using mixed methods, a multiple case study approach and qualitative meta-analysis, this study considers six transnational university campuses in China in terms of their relationship with local communities.

Findings – Because of the good reputation of universities generally, local residents tended to accord a social licence to operate (i.e. approval) to new university campuses. However, universities generally do not manage their social impacts, as well as many other industries and generally fail to consider the corporate social responsibility issues and the environmental, social and governance aspects of their activities. To improve their social licence to operate and grow and to meet expectations around "university social responsibility", campus developments should observe key international principles and human rights standards: full disclosure of information; effective community engagement; appropriate resettlement and livelihood restoration; effective harm reduction procedures; provision of local benefits (benefit sharing); monitoring and adaptive management and implement a grievance redress mechanism.

Originality/value – This paper encourages broader thinking about sustainability in a higher education context and about what university social responsibility entails. Specifically, this study argues that the relationship between universities and their host communities also needs to be considered, especially during campus construction.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility, Campus sustainability, Social impact assessment, University social responsibility, Social license to operate, University-community engagement

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The scope and extent of transnational higher education are increasing worldwide (Hou *et al.*, 2014; Montgomery, 2014; Knight, 2016; Marginson, 2016), typically by developed countries (e.g. Australia, Canada, France, UK and USA) establishing campuses in developing countries (e.g. China, Malaysia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) (CBERT, 2020; He and Wilkins, 2018; Guimón and Narula, 2020). Generally seen as "good reputation", public interest projects, universities are usually regarded as contributing to local development and are typically not considered to be problematic from sustainability or other perspectives (Marginson, 2011; Sedlacek, 2013; Perry and Wiewel, 2015; Leal Filho *et al.*, 2017). However, even environmentally-friendly projects for social good (e.g. universities) can create negative social impacts, generate cumulative impacts and must observe international environmental, social and governance (ESG) and human rights standards (Hill, 2004; Vanclay and Hanna, 2019). They also need to gain and maintain legitimacy and the acceptance of local people, in other words, a "social licence to operate" (Dare *et al.*, 2014; Jijelava and Vanclay, 2014; He and Wilkins, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2020).

Like most universities, transnational universities are usually large footprint projects, requiring considerable land acquisition and potentially displacing pre-existing residents (Chen *et al.*, 2020). Although there are discourses around "campus sustainability" (Posner and Stuart, 2013; Lo, 2015) and "university social responsibility" (Vasilescu *et al.*, 2010; Wigmore-Álvarez and Ruiz-Lozano, 2012; Gomez, 2014; Larrán Jorge and Andrades Peña, 2017; Shek and Hollister, 2017) and an awareness that universities should lead by example and "walk the talk" (Amaral *et al.*, 2015), unfortunately not all universities (university managers and academic staff) are sufficiently aware of what the "sustainability turn" means for campus management and the higher education sector more generally. In this paper, we explore what university social responsibility and campus sustainability actually mean in practice, especially in the context of transnational university campuses. We push the boundaries of these concepts by arguing that they should include consideration of a university's relationships with its host communities.

Interest in the concept of "university social responsibility" has been growing, especially over the past 10 years (Larrán Jorge and Andrades Peña, 2017; Meseguer-Sánchez *et al.*, 2020). We consider that there are four roots (discourses) that comprise this concept. One discourse is based on discussions around the fundamental purpose of universities (Boyer, 1996; Vasilescu *et al.*, 2010). Another discourse is linked to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the idea that CSR, human rights and international ESG standards apply to all organizations, including public and private, for-profit and not for profit (Nejati *et al.*, 2011; United Nations, 2011; Vanclay and Hanna, 2019). A third discourse relates to the concept of campus sustainability, the green university and eco-campuses (Posner and Stuart, 2013). The final discourse is that of university-community engagement and the notion that universities should participate in and contribute to the communities in which they are located (Winter *et al.*, 2006; Chile and Black, 2015; Mtawa *et al.*, 2016). These four discourses come together in university social responsibility.

Latin America has been a world leader in the field of university social responsibility. From 2001 on, a group of universities in partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank developed a network, which firmly established the concept, developed its conceptual basis and promoted it across Latin America and beyond (Gomez, 2014; Vallaeys, 2018). They were so successful that the concept became embedded in Peruvian law pertaining to universities:

Article 124. University Social Responsibility: University Social Responsibility is the ethical and effective management of the impact generated by the university on society due to the following

exercise functions: academic, research, extension, services and national development participation in different levels and dimensions. It includes the management of the impact produced due to the relations among the university community members, on the environment and on other public and private organizations that become stakeholders. The university's social responsibility is fundamental for university life, contributing to sustainable development and society's welfare. It concerns the whole university community (Law No. 30220, 2014) (cited by Vallaeys, 2018, p. 34).

Although there are many dimensions to the concept of university social responsibility, we believe that one aspect is particularly under-addressed: the assessment and management of the (negative) social impacts created by university campuses on their host communities. To explore the social impacts created by transnational universities and understand how they are experienced by host communities and local residents, we did a qualitative meta-analysis of six transnational universities in China. Three questions were considered in our research:

(1) what are the social impacts created by transnational universities?

(2) how are social impacts experienced by local residents? and

(3) what are the social responsibilities of universities?

Our research contributes to an improved understanding of university social responsibility and campus sustainability and of the social impacts of transnational universities generally. Potentially our paper also contributes more generally to a better understanding of the social impacts of transnational institutions and multinational companies on host communities.

Social impacts and the sustainability expectations of transnational universities

Although the public behaviour of students is sometimes a concern (e.g. hazing) (Salinas and Boettcher, 2018), universities are generally considered to contribute positively to local communities and to have good relationships with local residents (Sedlacek, 2013; Perry and Wiewel, 2015; Too and Bajracharya, 2015; Menon and Suresh, 2020). However, as large footprint projects, many universities (campus, staff and students) may have caused the physical displacement of pre-existing residents and are likely to create various environmental and social impacts that affect the host community over time (Posner and Stuart, 2013; Vanclay, 2017a). Like all organizations, universities are expected to meet various international standards (Vanclay and Hanna, 2019), international agreements relating to higher education (Marathe *et al.*, 2020) and contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Leal Filho, 2020). Transnational universities are somewhat different from domestic universities in various ways, including in management philosophy, financing arrangements and source of students (Wilkins and Huisman, 2012; Feng, 2013; Wilkins, 2017). These peculiarities influence residents' views of the transnational university, their experience of social impacts and the extent of social licence they according to the university (Chen *et al.*, 2019, 2020).

To become established, university campuses require land. The people living where a university campus is to be created may be significantly affected by physical displacement and/or economic displacement. Physical displacement refers to situations where people have to be physically moved to make way for the new land use. Economic displacement occurs when people's livelihoods (i.e. their means of making a living) are negatively affected by the acquisition of land and/or the new land use (i.e. the planned intervention or project, including a new campus) (Vanclay, 2017b). Displacement is multi-dimensional, multi-factor, multi-actor, multi-scalar and multi-level and can lead to multi-dimensional stress (Vanclay, 2017b). Livelihoods are the strategies individuals, families and communities use to make

their living (Smyth and Vanclay, 2017). The lack of consideration by universities about the livelihoods of people displaced by campuses and a failure to consider the social needs of local residents will generate concern in the community about the campus and will threaten its social licence to operate. In effect, such an outcome would not be consistent with the social dimension of sustainability. Due to their varying characteristics, residents are affected by a project (such as a new university campus) in differing ways (Vanclay, 2002, 2012), something we discuss further in our results section below.

The establishment of a new university can take a long time; plans are often changed and it may be postponed or cancelled for many reasons (Feng, 2013; Wilkins, 2017; Chen *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, people near where a planned university is proposed will likely experience anticipatory impacts and cumulative impacts. Anticipatory impacts refer to the impacts created in anticipation of a project (i.e. before it actually starts) and can include project-induced in-migration, wasted business investment, fear and anxiety, loss of sense of place and place attachment and inflated expectations (Vanclay, 2002). Cumulative impacts are those incremental or catalytic changes and impacts to society, the economy and/or the environment that are created by an action or project in combination with other actions or projects (Esteves *et al.*, 2012). They affect residents' views about past, present and future projects. Based on their prior experience (i.e. impact history), people hold views, expectations and anxieties about current and future projects. Excessive expectations create social impacts in that people might feel cheated or dissatisfied when a project or institution fails to meet their expectations or when perceived promises are not kept. Potentially, the undesirable behaviour of one university might influence the reputation and opportunities for the development of other higher education institutions, both locally and further afield (Chen *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, for all projects and for all project stages, residents' impact history and expectations should be monitored and managed (Vanclay and Hanna, 2019).

Social licence to operate is a way of thinking about the relationship between an organization and its local communities (Dare *et al.*, 2014). It is an indicator of the level of legitimacy, acceptability and trust in an institution by the local community (Thomson and Boutilier, 2011; Jijelava and Vanclay, 2017). Social licence is dynamic and changes as the community's views change (Dare *et al.*, 2014; Chen *et al.*, 2020). The social, economic and cultural characteristics of residents and the project's history affect community views about an organization, in other words, its social licence to operate and grow (Veenker and Vanclay, 2021). Thinking in terms of social licence helps institutions devise their community engagement strategy, enhance their positive impacts and mitigate the negative impacts of their operations (Vanclay and Hanna, 2019). Given that it is normally expected for "social licence" to be considered by all large-scale projects (Demuijnck and Fasterling, 2016), arguably universities should also consider whether or not they have a social licence and what they might do to improve their acceptability and legitimacy among local communities.

The role universities play in local community development has been much discussed (Winter *et al.*, 2006; de Rassenfosse and Williams, 2015; Murphy and McGrath, 2018; Ozias and Pasque, 2019). Campus sustainability has also been a hot topic and is now gradually including discussion of the social responsibilities of universities and their contribution to society (Posner and Stuart, 2013; Urbanski and Leal Filho, 2015; Wu and Shen, 2016; Rahman *et al.*, 2019). However, "sustainability in higher education" implies more than just campus greening, having environmentally-friendly facilities or teaching about sustainability (Shriberg, 2002; Lozano *et al.*, 2013). Issues like community engagement (Chile and Black, 2015), having a social licence to operate (i.e. a good relationship with local residents) (Chen *et al.*, 2020), contributing to community development (Mbah, 2019) and ensuring no human rights harms in supply chains (Vanclay and Hanna, 2019) should also be

important components of sustainability on campus. Arguably, universities should consider their contribution to society, not only in terms of providing theoretical knowledge to students and society but also by contributing economically, socially and culturally to local communities (Gunasekara, 2004; Essuman and Akyeampong, 2011; Stephenson, 2011; Bernardo *et al.*, 2012). We argue that universities also need to consider their interactions with and impacts on local residents (Mbah, 2019) and should mitigate the negative impacts and enhance the positive impacts that are created over time.

Arguably, universities and local communities can benefit from effective university-community engagement, especially in terms of enhancing mutual understanding, sharing facilities and knowledge, identifying additional resources that can be called upon and contributing to local sustainable development (Winter *et al.*, 2006; Kruss, 2012; Chile and Black, 2015). However, to be effective, university-community engagement must be embedded in university policy and philosophy and in academic research and teaching (Mtawa *et al.*, 2016). We argue that effective university-community engagement can help a university gain a social licence from local residents and fulfil its ESG and university social responsibility expectations.

Methodology

To understand the social impacts created by transnational universities, we undertook a multi-case case-study and qualitative meta-analysis of six transnational universities in China: University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC); Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU); New York University Shanghai (NYUS); Duke Kunshan University (DKU); Wenzhou-Kean University (WKU); and the planned (but ultimately cancelled) University of Groningen campus in Yantai (UGY). For each case, a multi-method approach was used, including document analysis, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and field observation.

All 6 universities were founded within the past 15 years. Mostly, they were large-scale projects with massive land acquisition and construction works, therefore local residents in each location would have had strong feelings about how the university influenced and will continue to influence their daily lives. We included the proposed but now-cancelled UGY project in our analysis because the anxieties and expectations of local people are real social impacts, even if they are based on rumour and/or real or fake news and because a postponed or cancelled project still creates social impacts given that news and rumours will have circulated in the community (Vanclay, 2012; Chen *et al.*, 2019). Some background information about each transnational university is provided in Table 1.

To gain an understanding of residents' views about their local campus, we conducted fieldwork in each of the communities where the case study universities were located. We analysed official reports and news postings about the universities and their location using the Google and Baidu search engines. We conducted in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews in neighbouring communities, mostly in Chinese (Mandarin), with some in English. In total, across the 6 institutions, we conducted 212 in-depth interviews, 36 with university management staff, 52 with students and 124 with local residents. We also conducted 142 semi-structured interviews with local people. All interviews were conducted in person (face-to-face) between December 2017 and December 2018. Most data collection was done by the lead author, but in the communities near UNNC and XJTLU, some local people were engaged to assist in the interviewing. Also, a research assistant was engaged in Yantai to assist in recruiting people for the focus groups. The lead author stayed in the local community surrounding each of the six universities while the interviews were being conducted and his personal observations from these visits also contributed to our analysis.

Issue	UNNC	XJTLU	NYUS	DKU	WKU	UGY (cancelled)
Founding date (first intake of students)	2004	2006	2012	2013	2014	Initial proposal 2015; cancelled 2018
Home country	UK	UK	USA	USA	USA	The Netherlands
Location	A well-developed business park in Ningbo	A well-developed business park in Suzhou	Shanghai city centre	A newly-built business park in Kunshan	A less developed area on the edge of Wenzhou	A developing business park in Yantai
Other projects in the area	Many residential and office buildings and several colleges and schools	Residential buildings and around 40 higher education institutions	Many high-level office buildings	A few small schools. No residential buildings nearby	No large-scale projects. Three villages nearby	Two colleges and many residential buildings
Residents in the area	Many newcomers living and/or working locally	Many newcomers living and/or working locally	Few residents in the immediate vicinity, but many city workers	A few people living/ working in the area	Mainly local people living nearby	Mainly local people living in the community
Campus scale	58 hectares, 8,000 students and 750 staff	25 hectares, 15,000 students and 500 staff	0.4 hectares, 1,300 students and 200 staff	13 hectares, 600 students and 70 staff	70 hectares, 2,000 students and 250 staff	200 hectares, planned 10,000 students within 5 years
Student living arrangement	Most live in halls of residence on campus	Many live in dormitories in the park and some rent houses nearby	Most live in halls in another area connected by public transport	Most live in halls of residence on campus	Most live in halls of residence on campus	Students were to live in halls of residence on campus
Nature of the campus	Gated	Open	Open	Gated	Open	Open
Impact history of the community	The first large-scale project in the community	The local government planned the business park and arranged all institutions	Only occupied an existing building	Under-utilized land in a rural area	The first large-scale project in the community, but resettlement of 2,700 people were needed	Plan was to take over an existing underutilized campus

Source: Developed by the authors based on the websites and reports of the universities and data from fieldwork

Table 1.
Background information about 6 transnational universities in China

For the 142 semi-structured interviews, local residents were approached in public places near each university. These interviews took between 5 and 20 min depending on the extent to which the participant was willing to discuss the issues. The interviewer recorded the comments of each interviewee on a questionnaire. The comments were later transcribed into a Word document. In addition, 124 in-depth interviews were done with local residents, especially village leaders and owners of businesses near each campus. These interviews varied in length from about 30 to 60 min. Where permission was granted, interviews were audio-recorded (about 30% of the time), otherwise extensive written notes were taken. We interviewed some students from the universities to obtain internal information (from a student perspective) and to understand the daily interactions of students with local communities. Access to students was obtained in a variety of ways, including by referral from staff and by approaching young people on the campus grounds. These student interviews took between 10 and 30 min, depending on the willingness and time constraints of the student being interviewed. Some interviews were recorded (with permission), but mostly notes were taken. Finally, we interviewed various senior management staff from each campus. These key informant interviews ranged from 30 to 60 min. The university websites were scrutinized for initial points of contact. In addition, a snowball or domino approach was used to identify and approach appropriate senior management staff who could talk meaningfully about the university's engagement with local communities. Summary information about the data collection methods for each institution is provided in Table 2.

The interview questions were derived from the discourses of social impact assessment (Vanclay, 2002; Esteves *et al.*, 2012; Smyth and Vanclay, 2017) and social licence to operate (Thomson and Boutilier, 2011; Jijelava and Vanclay, 2017). Where permission was granted, interviews were recorded. However, because it is not culturally appropriate in the Chinese context, signed informed consent forms were not used. Nevertheless, the general principles of ethical social research, including informed consent, were observed (Vanclay *et al.*, 2013).

The social impacts created by transnational universities
To mitigate negative impacts, enhance positive impacts and fulfil ESG and university social responsibility expectations, a transnational university needs to understand what the major social impacts on local residents are or will be, consider how these impacts will be experienced by different groups of residents and determine how they can be better managed. It should be noted that many social impacts are not in themselves positive or negative, but are experienced differently in different local contexts (Vanclay, 2002, 2012). Extrapolating from our meta-analysis of six transnational universities and drawing on the literature on social impact assessment (Vanclay, 2002; Esteves *et al.*, 2012; Smyth and Vanclay, 2017) and social licence to operate (Thomson and Boutilier, 2011; Jijelava and Vanclay, 2017, 2018; Vanclay and Hanna, 2019), we discuss how transnational universities impact local residents.

The social impacts (negative and positive) created by transnational universities are complex. Many social impacts are intangible and indirect. Residents are not always aware that the disruptions they experience are due to the university, as it is often difficult to attribute causality. Our interviews showed that local residents in the different locations were willing to accord a social licence to the university, at least initially because of the good reputation of universities generally. However, local residents also experienced various social impacts created by the university that affected their daily life.

Our qualitative meta-analysis revealed that the major social impacts that were experienced included issues related to relocation and compensation; local development, urbanization and gentrification; income and livelihood opportunities; the presence of

Data source	UNNC	XJTLU	NYUS	DKU	WKU	UGY (cancelled)
Timing of field visit	November to December 2018	November 2018	December 2018	December 2018	December 2018	December 2017 to February 2018
Document analysis	√	√	√	√	√	√
In-depth Interviews with university staff	$n = 4$	$n = 6$	×	√	$n = 5$	$n = 21$
In-depth Interviews with university students	$n = 17$	$n = 24$	×	×	$n = 11$	×
In-depth Interviews with local residents	$n = 38$	$n = 45$	$n = 12$	$n = 7$	$n = 3$	$n = 38$
Semi-structured interviews with local residents	$n = 34$	$n = 82$	×	×	$n = 26$	×
Field observation	√	√	√	√	√	√

Source: Developed by the authors

Table 2.
Indication of data sources used for each campus

newcomers and outsiders; increased traffic; increased demand on infrastructure; various impacts on everyday life; changes in the local community environment (including those that affected their perceived safety and the character of their community); cultural impacts; and inter-generational impacts (especially for senior people).

People experience social impacts differently. Social impacts can be experienced as being either positive or negative or both at the same time, by different people and/or under different contexts (Vanclay, 2002). The experience of social impacts is influenced by community characteristics and can be improved by increasing the effectiveness of the management actions taken by the university in question and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. the local government or entity that developed the campus). To develop a positive relationship with local residents and to ensure an effective contribution to sustainable development, universities should have a good understanding of how the various different groups of residents will be differentially affected. We considered the varying experiences of social impacts by using the following topics: demographic, economic, geographical, health, institutional and socio-cultural characteristics.

Demographic characteristics
Demographic characteristics include the demographic structure of the local community (e.g. age and gender), the experience of in-migration and out-migration and level of education, etc. A major difference in the experience of social impacts was between elderly people and young people. Our interviewees indicated that senior people usually dislike social change. For example, in the community near to Wenzhou-Kean University, where seniors were a large proportion of residents, people tended to have negative views about the resettlement needed to make land available for the university. However, elderly people were often encouraged by their relatives to accept the project and to be resettled because their descendants (i.e. their children and grandchildren) would benefit from the arrangements, especially because the new apartments that resettlees were to be given could be bequeathed. In other locations, many young people regarded resettlement as desirable because they might also receive financial compensation and/or job opportunities.

Across the six universities, most senior people indicated that they would have preferred to maintain their life in the traditional style they were used to and they disliked the urbanization of their community and the presence of newcomers. Conversely, most young people regarded these changes as positive impacts that improved the community.

The experience of impact is also affected by gender. Female residents were more likely than men to consider future generations and regarded the social impacts as being positive or negative based on how they thought their children will be impacted. They understood that the improvements brought about by a new university have the potential to transform their community into an educational and cultural centre, which was considered to be beneficial for future generations. Female residents tended to dislike the presence of many newcomers, as this created negative impacts in terms of traffic, safety and tranquillity, however, the presence of foreigners was generally accepted because many female residents hoped their children would grow up in an international community.

In-migration (as well as out-migration) changes the demographic structure of a community and potentially influences community cohesion (Vanclay, 2002), thus affecting the experience of social impacts and views about the university. However, we found that residents of communities with high levels of in-migration were more likely to have positive views of universities and their impacts. Newcomers who moved to a community to search for better job opportunities and/or a more comfortable living environment tended to be psychologically prepared for change and more accepting of the social impacts they would

experience. Thus, a community with a large proportion of immigrants is likely to be more accepting of ongoing social changes and impacts and, perhaps, more attractive to newcomers. When large numbers of newcomers become fully resident, a community is likely to become more inclusive. In contrast, a community with much out-migration tends to be regressive. The residents who are left behind are generally seniors and children, who tend to keep to themselves and, perhaps, resist social change. Significant change processes such as resettlement and urbanization will negatively influence their daily life, often severely.

Economic characteristics
Economic characteristics include the stage of development of a community, types of livelihood, infrastructure conditions and trends in property prices, etc. When reasonable compensation is paid, people in less-developed communities will likely be more accepting of resettlement than people in more-developed communities, as they will be keen to improve their quality of life. In contrast, people in more-developed communities might prefer to maintain their current situation (sense of place, etc). They tend to be concerned about the negative impacts of development such as the presence of newcomers, traffic congestion and a worsening community environment.

The type of livelihood a person has influenced how they experience social impacts. For example, a university is likely to contribute to local development, create job opportunities and attract people to a community, generating more income for local businesses and creating jobs in hotels, restaurants, supermarkets etc. People who own local businesses or seek to work in these industries will benefit from a university. In contrast, some other types of livelihood will be negatively affected, especially those that are more suited to non-urban areas and those that will be forced out when land prices increase due to urbanization and gentrification.

The infrastructure of a community includes utilities (water, energy supply, etc), communications, essential public services (health care, education, rubbish collection, policing, social and recreational facilities, etc), as well as transport and other forms of infrastructure (e.g. sanitation, drainage). Generally, communities with inadequate infrastructure and services regard the establishment of a university as an opportunity for these to be improved, while communities that already have adequate services might regard newcomers as placing additional demand on their facilities, thus negatively influencing their quality of life.

Geographical characteristics
Geographical characteristics include local attractions, the features of the local environment, other projects in the area, plans for future development, etc. Potentially, a university could be located anywhere, for example, in different locations within a city. Many newly-built transnational universities are located in business parks or science parks. In such locations, the whole park is zoned for special-purpose institutions, light industry or business and local residents (if there are any) tend to be accepting of any social impacts from these activities. A different setting (e.g. a suburban area), however, will mean that there could be very different expectations and experiences by local residents. Duke-Kunshan University was located in a newly-built business park without any residential buildings nearby. The local residents lived far away from the campus and enjoyed the urbanization of the area and did not identify any negative impacts from the university. In contrast, the Wenzhou-Kean University campus was close to three villages and its construction displaced over a thousand local residents and severely disrupted their lives (Chen *et al.*, 2020).

In China, it is the responsibility of the local government to decide on the location of new universities, which they do on the basis of regional plans. In general terms, various options exist for locating a new institution: a science or higher education park with other scientific institutions; a cultural precinct with other cultural facilities; a business park with office buildings and businesses; a city centre with government institutions and businesses; or an international area where foreign companies are located. Different people hold different views about the relative desirability of these options and their expectations and anxieties about the future affect their experience of social impacts.

Residents are likely to have experiences from other facilities that exist in their neighbourhood, which might influence their views about a new institution. For example, XJTLU was established in a higher education park with around 40 other higher education institutions. Here, the local government developed and managed several halls of residence and other facilities for the students from all institutions collectively. Consequently, the residents were likely to accept additional universities. However, if the previous institutions had performed poorly (at least from the perspective of local people), residents would likely regard the new institution negatively.

Residents living in an under-developed or undesirable location generally want improvement and they will likely regard resettlement and urbanization as opportunities for this. However, residents living in a pleasant location may cherish their landscape aesthetics and natural characteristics and may have strong place attachment. These residents will likely treat a new university as a disruption to their environment and any resettlement, construction impacts and/or the presence of newcomers would be unwanted and, perhaps, resisted. When residents have strong feelings about archaeological sites or any tangible or intangible cultural heritage that may be affected, they will likely have strong negative views about the project. For example, the development of Wenzhou-Kean University destroyed several ancestral temples and religious sites, which made the residents very upset (Chen et al., 2020).

Health characteristics

Health characteristics involve both the physical and psychological aspects of health. In China, the elderly, disabled persons and other vulnerable groups sometimes see urbanization and development as opportunities to gain more health facilities such as hospitals and nursing homes. However, the increasing noise levels, number of vehicles and reduced safety that comes from development negatively impacts their health. Urban development, the presence of newcomers and increasing competition for jobs might increase the level of stress they experience.

Institutional and legal characteristics

The institutional and legal characteristics of communities include many things. Key issues in terms of how impacts are experienced are information transparency, the trustworthiness of government and the level of trust local people have in government at different levels. Residents' views about a new institution are also influenced by their impact history. Some universities have a stop-start nature and/or long lead and implementation timeframes. Where there is limited information, rumours, fears and expectations are promulgated, which may influence residents' plans and actions, even though they may be completely incorrect. The proposed UGY project was initiated in 2015 and was cancelled in 2018. However, even in 2020 many Yantai residents still did not know that the project had been cancelled. Given that the campus had a long impact history before the UGY project, the social impacts residents experienced included cumulative impacts created by all the previous projects (as

well as the UGY project), which collectively negatively influenced their life and future plans (Chen *et al.*, 2019).

Residents' trust in local government is influenced by many factors, including their personal and collective impact history and their psychological characteristics. The effectiveness of law and regulation, the performance of government agencies, the strength of civil society and human rights legacies all contribute to the number of trust residents have in local government (Liu and Raine, 2016). As local government always plays an important role in large-scale projects, its reputation and relationship with the community will likely strongly influence residents' views about a new project.

Social-cultural characteristics
Different communities have different socio-cultural characteristics and levels of willingness to embrace social inclusion. When transnational universities attract people from different cultures, a community with an inclusive nature might regard the social changes as an enrichment of their culture, while a less-inclusive community might reveal negative views, express hostility and experience cultural conflict. In general, well-educated residents are more accepting of development and they tend to be capable of dealing with the social impacts created by new projects and newcomers. In forming their opinion about new development, well-educated residents are likely to consider issues such as the general well-being of the community, the existence of adequate facilities, services for the elderly and education opportunities. In contrast, poorly-educated residents tend to be concerned that they might lose their jobs due to increasing competition in the local job market.

Residents obtain information about the performance of similar projects (both nearby and elsewhere) from various sources and their initial impressions about an institution are likely to be influenced by the reputation of similar projects elsewhere. If a proposed development was in the "good reputation category" such as a university, local residents might initially accord it a social licence. However, these initial positive views and trust are only temporary. To maintain its social licence, the institution will need to undertake appropriate activities to meet ongoing expectations. When people think they will benefit from the institution in the future, they will tend to be more accepting of it and will tolerate the various negative social impacts that might be created.

The social responsibility of universities
By combining the fields of social impact assessment, social licence to operate, business and human rights and the international ESG standards that pertain to projects generally (Esteves *et al.*, 2012, 2017; Vanclay, 2017a; Vanclay and Hanna, 2019; Veenker and Vanclay, 2021), it is possible to identify the management actions that projects and organizations are normally expected to undertake: full disclosure of information; effective community engagement; appropriate resettlement and livelihood restoration; effective harm reduction procedures; provision of local benefits (benefit sharing); monitoring and adaptive management; and implement a grievance redress mechanism. These actions are especially expected from companies in controversial industries such as mining or dams (van der Ploeg and Vanclay, 2017). However, especially, as the United Nations (2011) *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, all organizations (including state-owned companies, government entities, not-for-profits, etc.) must be mindful of the human rights issues across their whole supply chain, must be responsible for these issues and must plan to address them. As was evident with several of the campus developments we examined, universities are large footprint projects that can create significant social impacts on their local communities, and therefore they also need to be mindful of their human rights

responsibilities, including relating to how the land was obtained, the people who were displaced to make way for the university and whether those displaced were treated fairly. Universities should also undertake appropriate actions to manage their social impacts on local communities and to meet community expectations. In short, they must be mindful of CSR and university social responsibility concerns and they should comply with international ESG standards and principles (Rahman *et al.*, 2019; Vanclay and Hanna, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2020).

Full disclosure of information

Full information disclosure means that project proponents must reveal all details about their plans in an open and transparent way and in a language suitable to affected community members. There should be regular updates, especially when there are changes to plans. Full disclosure encourages inclusivity, open debate and mutual learning. Information disclosure is not only about sharing intentions but is also about sharing meanings and achieving a common understanding with local residents. Information should be communicated in ways that are appropriate to the audience and content, using appropriate media and dissemination channels that are regarded as legitimate by the target audience (Dare *et al.*, 2014). Full information disclosure should mean that local community members will be able to adequately understand what the project and its impacts will mean to them (Hanna and Vanclay, 2013). However, organizations tend to provide information to local communities only when a project is proceeding successfully and are often unwilling to inform residents when projects are delayed or postponed and they typically try to hide negative information. This facilitates the spread of rumours and misinformation. Rumours and conflicting reports create misunderstanding and unrealistic expectations and consequently residents lose trust in the organization, affecting its social licence to operate and grow.

Effective community engagement

To have good interactions with local communities and to promote mutual understanding, effective community engagement is needed. Effective community engagement helps build trust and legitimacy while reducing conflict with and within local communities. The timing and form of the engagement should be adapted to suit the social context, the people involved and the objectives. Activities should be well-managed and respect community values. It is important to recognize that communities are dynamic, constantly changing, therefore community engagement needs to be ongoing and adaptive to changing circumstances (Dare *et al.*, 2014). Effective engagement should be embedded in university policy and philosophy (Murphy and McGrath, 2018; Ozias and Pasque, 2019). Our interviews suggested that an open campus is more accepted by residents than a gated campus because residents are not excluded, they have more opportunities to contact university staff and students and to be involved in university-community engagement activities. A gated campus prohibits residents from enjoying the campus and isolates the university from local communities.

Appropriate resettlement and livelihood restoration

Effective resettlement is not just about ensuring that people have somewhere to live, it is also about ensuring that social networks and social services are maintained and that livelihoods are restored or preferably improved (Vanclay, 2017b). Although compensation for physical or economic displacement is usually provided, it is not always fair or adequate and does not always address all impacts associated with the loss of livelihood (Vanclay, 2017b). Having an ongoing sustainable livelihood is essential for well-being and prosperity (Smyth and Vanclay, 2017) and the enhancement of livelihoods is an international

requirement (Vanclay and Hanna, 2019). Where a university was on land from which people had been displaced, to be compliant with international ESG standards, the university would need to ensure that people who were resettled were not made worse-off and it would be expected to monitor them over several years (Vanclay, 2017b).

Local government always plays an important role in the development of a new university, especially regarding issues of land acquisition, resettlement of people and restoration of livelihoods. However, to be consistent with international standards, especially the *United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, a university should take responsibility not only for managing the social impacts it is directly responsible for, it should also ensure that its business partners (e.g. the local government) create no harm to local residents. Ultimately, it is the university that will carry reputational risk from any harm that is created.

Effective harm reduction procedures

Every organization must ensure that its operations create no harm to local communities (United Nations, 2011; Vanclay and Hanna, 2019). Even though organizations do not usually purposely intend to create harm, they are still responsible for unintended harm. Harm often happens inadvertently, largely by ignorance of potential social issues, a failure to anticipate, not taking sufficient care, inadequate planning and/or a lack of monitoring (van der Ploeg and Vanclay, 2018). Although a transnational university would generally not intend to harm local communities, our interviews showed that many residents complained about the negative impacts created, including by university students. A university should ensure that it avoids, not only environmental harm, but also any social harm to local communities.

Benefit-sharing and social investment

There is an expectation that all projects should make a positive contribution to society and to their host communities. It is well-established that enhancing benefits to local residents covers a range of issues, including modifying project infrastructure to enable community use; providing social investment funding to support local social sustainable development; a genuine commitment to maximising opportunities for local content (i.e. jobs for local people and local procurement); and providing training and support to local people (Vanclay and Hanna, 2019). We argue that transnational universities should also provide benefits to local communities, given that higher education is generally expected to contribute to local sustainable development. Our analysis provided some suggested actions universities could do to create benefits with local communities, including contributing to community economic development; creating job opportunities for local people; sharing facilities such as sports facilities and libraries; having an open campus for residents to enjoy the campus; and cooperating with local community organizations to conduct joint activities.

Monitoring and adaptive management

Monitoring and adaptive management are part of the plan, do, check, act procedure and are an essential part of continuous improvement. The effectiveness of mitigation measures intended to reduce social and environmental impacts can be monitored and addressed and organizations should quickly address unanticipated issues when they arise. Actions should be based on a thorough understanding of the local context and involve all relevant stakeholders (Esteves *et al.*, 2017). We found that, unlike controversial industries such as mines or dams, transnational universities did not regard themselves as bad neighbours, even though they have created various social impacts. Most universities failed to consider or monitor the impacts they impose on local communities.

Grievance redress mechanisms

A grievance redress mechanism is a process to identify, assess and address concerns about a project or organization and to enable community feedback and complaints. It should be accessible to all stakeholders and be known and accessible to them (United Nations, 2011). Apart from signalling that the organization understands and is compliant with its human rights responsibilities and international ESG standards, a grievance redress mechanism will build trust, maintain and grow the organization's social licence, reduce harm in the community, reduce business risk and reduce the likelihood of minor concerns escalating into significant protest (Hanna *et al.*, 2016; Vanclay and Hanna, 2019). All universities should have grievance redress mechanisms, not only for their staff and students but also for their host communities. We found that many local residents had been negatively affected by universities and had complaints, but generally did not know how to raise attention to their concerns. There was a lack of awareness of the need for grievance redress mechanisms by senior staff in the universities we studied, who were generally unaware of local residents' complaints and thought that local residents were supportive of their university. We argue that the lack of a grievance redress mechanism potentially will create misunderstanding and conflict in local communities. The establishment of a community grievance redress mechanism by the university (perhaps, together with local government) is essential to fulfiling ESG and university social responsibility expectations.

Conclusion

In addition to contributing to global learning, the education of students, community development and various other positive changes in society, universities also impose a wide range of negative social impacts on their host communities. Although many universities claim that they work together with their host communities and develop a good relationship with local residents, there is often little evidence for these claims. Furthermore, what a university might regard as its community typically refers to a much larger area (i.e. the whole city or region) than to the very local communities that are directly affected by its presence and activities. Consequently, many universities fail to consider and manage the social impacts they create on their host communities and they tend not to think in terms of needing to have a social licence to operate and grow.

To some extent, universities are not good neighbours. As large footprint projects with a wide range of social impacts on local communities, universities typically fail to manage their impacts as effectively as other industries and university management staff are generally unaware of their obligations to consider CSR, human rights and ESG issues. Nevertheless, because of the good reputation of universities generally, local residents typically accord a social licence to operate the university, at least in the beginning. However, to build the trust and approval of local residents and maintain a social licence to operate and grow over time, all universities need to implement effective procedures to ensure: full disclosure of information; effective community engagement; appropriate resettlement and livelihood restoration; effective harm reduction; provision of local benefits (benefit sharing); monitoring and adaptive management; and a grievance redress mechanism. We found that there was a lack of awareness of these matters among the transnational universities we examined and we suggest that the higher education sector generally could learn a lot by looking at how other industries manage their social issues.

We note that our research was conducted in China. The system of government, cultural norms and other characteristics of China might influence how local residents interacted with the transnational universities we examined. Consequently, although we suggest our

findings are likely to apply elsewhere and more widely than just the transnational university context, it is possible that there will be differences in other contexts. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the universities we studied were transnational, with home bases in the USA, the UK and The Netherlands. The six institutions we examined have to meet governance requirements in their home country and they have to meet international standards and expectations around ESG and university social responsibility. Universities are also generally expected to be committed to sustainability and to contribute to sustainable development goals. However, our research found that there was ignorance of the social impacts of universities on local communities and an attitude of arrogance from university management. We, therefore, believe that the discourse of campus sustainability must be broadened to bring in a much more social understanding and that much greater attention should be given to the social impacts created by university campuses.

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