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How a new university campus affected people in three villages: the dynamic nature of social licence to operate

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ABSTRACT

Social Licence to Operate is a framework for thinking about the relationship between an organisation or project and its host communities and other stakeholders. Key aspects are the extent of acceptability, legitimacy and trust local people accord to the project. A social licence is not necessarily enduring, rather it is dynamic, varying over time. Little research has been conducted into the dynamics of social licence and how it responds to changes in local context. By examining a new university campus, we highlight how all organisations need to consider the dynamic nature of their relationships with host communities. We assessed Wenzhou-Kean University, a partnership between Wenzhou City Government (Zhejiang Province, China), Kean University (a public university in New Jersey USA), and Wenzhou University. Three villages were resettled for the campus, experiencing many social impacts. Although residents initially allocated a high social licence to the project, this varied over time. To maintain and improve an organisation's social licence to operate and grow, having a good understanding of the local context and periodic assessment of social licence are needed.

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Introduction

The concept of social licence to operate (SLO) emerged in the late 1990s (Prno and Slocombe 2012; Boutilier 2014; Cooney 2017; Jijelava and Vanclay 2018). Originally applied only to the private sector, especially the extractive industries, SLO can be considered as a way of thinking about the relationship between any organisation or project and its host communities (Dare et al. 2014; Lacey and Lamont 2014; Jijelava and Vanclay 2014a). All organisations and projects (whether public, private, or partnerships) need to manage their relationships with local communities and other stakeholders, and reflect on their organisational/corporate social responsibility (CSR) and social investment strategies (Piggott-McKellar et al. 2019; Vanclay and Hanna 2019; Wang et al. 2019; Pasaribu et al. 2020). SLO is an indicator of the level of acceptability, legitimacy and trust in an organisation or project by local communities (Thomson and Boutilier 2011; Jijelava and Vanclay 2017). Consideration of SLO assists an organisation in managing its engagement with local residents and in tailoring its CSR and social investment strategies (Esteves and Vanclay 2009; Jijelava and Vanclay 2014a; Gulakov and Vanclay 2018, 2019; Gulakov et al. 2020). Therefore, consideration of SLO should be a feature of all organisations and projects, especially those with significant social and/or environmental impacts (Demuijnck and Fasterling 2016; Vanclay 2017a, 2017b; Vanclay and Hanna 2019).

Most studies about SLO have focussed on controversial projects such as mines or dams (Prno 2013; Boutilier 2014; Moffat et al. 2016), while only a few have discussed good reputation projects such as universities (e.g. Jijelava and Vanclay 2014a). In general, universities are part of the process of development of a community and tend to have a good relationship with local residents (Sedlacek 2013; Perry and Wiewel 2015; Chen et al. 2019). However, as a large footprint project, a university (i.e. its campus, staff and students) can be responsible for physical and/or economic displacement, and over time can cause various and varying social impacts on local communities (Chen et al. 2019). Social impacts are everything that affect people and communities, either in a perceptual or corporeal sense (Vanclay 2002). In order to mitigate the negative impacts on local communities, enhance the positive impacts, and fulfill CSR expectations, we suggest that all organisations and projects should carefully monitor their SLO and adapt their CSR and social investment strategies accordingly (Esteves and Vanclay 2009; Chen et al. 2019; Rahman et al. 2019).

This paper emphasizes that a SLO is not permanent, enduring or unchanging, instead it must be considered as a dynamic process that varies over time, including across the different stages of a project. The reasons people have for being supportive or critical of a project or organisation are also likely to change over time. To date, there has been little research that has explored

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the dynamics of SLO or how it responds to changes in the local situation. Using a newly-constructed university as our illustrative example, we discuss how all types of organisation and project need to be mindful of the dynamic nature of their relationships with local communities. We studied the establishment of Wenzhou-Kean University (WKU), a partnership between Kean University, a public university based in New Jersey, USA, Wenzhou University, and the Wenzhou City Government in the Province of Zhejiang in China. Three villages (about 2,700 people in total) had to be resettled to make way for WKU, and they experienced many social impacts, both positive and negative. Thus, the WKU project is an interesting case to consider the concept of social licence. Our analysis specifically contributes to understanding the dynamic nature of SLO, especially in 'good reputation' situations (like universities) where the concept of SLO has not yet been widely applied.

The dynamic nature of social licence to operate

Numerous papers have discussed the meaning of SLO (Owen and Kemp 2013; Bice and Moffat 2014; Boutilier 2014; Moffat and Zhang 2014; Parsons et al. 2014; Cooney 2017; Ehrnström-Fuentes and Kröger 2017; Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2018; Vanclay and Hanna 2019), and the concept has been explored across many sectors (Prno and Slocombe 2014; Hall et al. 2015; Overduin and Moore 2017; Zhang et al. 2018). In essence, SLO is a metaphor (Dare et al. 2014), and an intangible 'licence' representing the extent of approval of a project or organisation by local communities and other stakeholders (Gunningham et al. 2004; Bice 2014). Emerging in industry circles, especially the extractive industries (Prno and Slocombe 2012), SLO is only a rhetorical device (Boutilier 2014; Moffat et al. 2016; Vanclay and Hanna 2019) that is often reified (Bice 2014). SLO is a way of thinking and a framework that helps in: considering local community perceptions about an organization; taking the approval of local residents seriously; and in understanding what organisations need to do to balance their activities with community expectations (Edwards and Lacey 2014; Jijelava and Vanclay 2017, 2018).

Thomson and Boutilier (2011) developed a conceptual model that represented SLO as a pyramid with four levels (withheld/withdrawn, acceptance, approval, and psychological identification) that were achieved, respectively, by establishing legitimacy, credibility, and trustworthiness in the community. This model is useful to organisations in helping them think about their community relationships, in understanding the different levels of SLO, and about what they need to do to gain a SLO (Jijelava and Vanclay 2017, 2018).

Although the notion of being a licence conveys the idea that this approval is determined at some specific

time by some sort of authority, it is important for organisations to realize that communities are never homogenous (Vanclay 2012) and therefore multiple SLOs will need to be obtained in every situation (Dare et al. 2014; Jijelava and Vanclay 2014b). Also important is that the level of approval and the underlying concerns of local people will change over time as their knowledge, experiences and perceptions about the project change and as their vision of their community changes (Prno and Slocombe 2012; Dare et al. 2014; Luke 2017).

There have been many studies on community attitudes towards projects of various kinds. These generally show that attitudes towards the project in question change over time. Typically, views about a project tend to be negative before and during project implementation, and turn positive sometime after completion (Wolsink 2007; Wustenhagen et al. 2007; Mottee et al. 2020). There are many reasons why people oppose and/or resist projects, and many different forms of protest action can be taken (Hanna et al. 2016; Vanclay and Hanna 2019). In this paper, we argue that all kinds of organisations (including universities) can be affected by local community opinion, must manage their community relations, and therefore should consider their SLO. Because the SLO concept has seldom been applied to universities (or similar good reputation projects), we consider how the concept can be applied to a new university being established in China as a result of a partnership between an USA-based university and a Chinese university.

Methodology

We explored the dynamic nature of an organisation's SLO by looking at the development of the Wenzhou-Kean University campus. WKU is a partnership between Kean University, a public university based in New Jersey (USA), Wenzhou University, and the Wenzhou City Government in the Province of Zhejiang (China). Various research methods were used, including document analysis, media analysis, in-depth interviews with key informants, semi-structured interviews, and field observation. Fieldwork was conducted by the primary author in December 2018 in the three villages affected by the development of WKU: Litang, Boao and Wangzhai.

To understand the background of WKU and its local communities, we checked all relevant online information by using the Google and Baidu search engines. We interviewed 5 senior staff and 11 students from WKU to gain the perspective of internal stakeholders about the connections between the three villages and the university's staff and students. We also interviewed the Mayors of the three villages to gain an understanding of the background of each community and the general views of residents. Interviews were done in Mandarin or English at the request of the participant. The

interviews were around 30 minutes long. It was intended that these interviews would be recorded, but most participants, although willing to talk to us, were reluctant to be recorded. Consequently, extensive notes were taken during the interviews. Due to it being inappropriate in the Chinese context, signed consent forms were not used, but the general principles of ethical social research and informed consent were observed (Vanclay et al. 2013). Participants were informed that they would remain anonymous, and that the results would be used in academic research and the writing of journal articles.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 8 to 10 residents in each village. These interviews were completed face-to-face, with people in public places being approached and asked to participate. These interviews took between 10 to 20 minutes depending on the extent to which the participant was willing to discuss the issues. The questions asked related to what the residents thought of the university, what their experiences were, and related matters relevant to understanding the social licence of WKU.

The Wenzhou-Kean University project and its host communities

WKU is a transnational university co-established by Kean University, USA and Wenzhou University, China, with support from the Wenzhou City Government. WKU is located in the Liao community, within the City of Wenzhou, a coastal city of 9 million people in the Province of Zhejiang, China. Wenzhou lies between Shanghai and Hong Kong. WKU started teaching students in September 2012. On commencement, WKU had expected to rapidly enroll 5,000 students and to reach 8,500 students after some years. However, at the time of the research (2018–2019), there were only around 2,000 students and 250 staff on the campus, including 100 international staff. In 2019, the campus occupied 70 hectares, although the City Government had promised that the campus could expand to 200 hectares in total. Various academic buildings, halls of residence, cafes, and a sports center had been established, other buildings were still under construction, and more were planned. WKU was planned and implemented as a campus that would be open to the public and have a strong connection to its host communities (WKU 2019).

Liao community, where WKU is located, is a less-developed part of Wenzhou City, about 10 km from the city centre, bordering a mountainous forest park. In order to make land available for the university, three villages (Litang, Wangzhai, Boao) had to be redeveloped by the City Government. This was done in a way consistent with Chinese regulations, and after consultation with the affected communities. Approximately 700 residents lived in Litang, 500 in

Wangzhai and 1,400 in Boao. The general process was that, village by village, people would be relocated first to temporary housing for some years, and then after the redevelopment of the area, which included construction of the university and new tower housing blocks, they would be relocated back to the general locality where they had previously lived, but now to modern apartments. People also had the option to make their own accommodation arrangements during the temporary accommodation stage or permanently, and were given compensation so they could do this, if this was what they chose to do, however most people preferred to stay together. The City Government was responsible for the overall concept, the planning process, acquiring the land, enacting the resettlement of existing residents, and constructing the university and replacement housing. The reputation (i.e. social licence) of the university is thus highly dependent on how effectively the City Government conducted these activities.

One important aspect of these three villages is that they are the hometowns of many people who have gone overseas as low-skilled migrant workers. Over two-thirds of young people from these villages were working overseas and only went back home once every few years or so, thus the villages comprised mostly elderly people, all of whom had a strong attachment to their land and house. Most people, therefore, chose to participate in the collective scheme and to remain together as a community, rather than make their own arrangements.

The WKU campus is located in a mountainous valley on the boundary of a forest park (see [Figure 1](#)). The setting is regarded as highly desirable, having excellent feng shui properties. The local villagers were pleased to be able to return to the area, and were generally very satisfied with their new accommodation, although the temporary accommodation was not so well regarded. Nevertheless, the local people considered that they had made a great sacrifice for WKU. One reason for this was that there were many recently-built houses in the old villages that had been paid for by the people working overseas. Unfortunately, some of the overseas workers did not get the opportunity to see the houses they had paid for before they were demolished for the WKU.

In 2002, a private real estate developer had attempted to acquire much land in the Liao community to develop the precinct as a high-end residential area, but the plan was eventually canceled due to strong opposition from the local villagers. Aware of this opposition, when the Wenzhou City Government decided to develop the site for WKU, they first had to gain the support of the residents of the Liao community (i.e. get a social licence to operate) by negotiating satisfactory arrangements with them and the people working overseas.

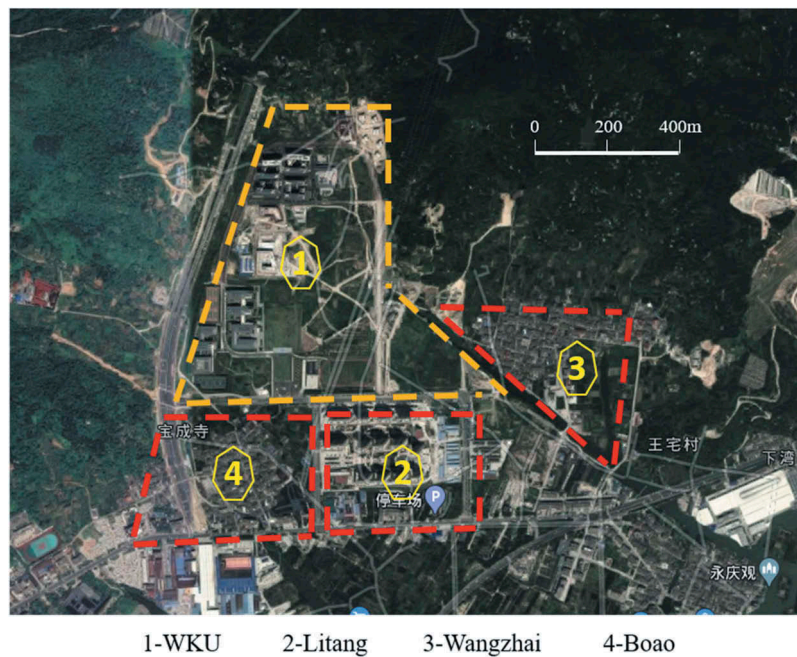


Figure 1. Modified Google image of WKU and the three villages (circa 2019).

The first phase of construction work for WKU started in early 2012, and the campus was ready for teaching in September 2013. For the first year of its operation as a university (from September 2012), the small number of students temporarily lived and studied at Wenzhou University. From the beginning, the residents were aware that the land was to be used for a new campus and for their future accommodation. In 2012, the residents of Litang and some residents in Boao were relocated to temporary accommodation nearby, and they moved into their new homes in 2017. In 2018, the village of Wangzhai was demolished and most residents were relocated to the temporary buildings. It is planned that these residents will be relocated to new housing blocks which will be completed in a few years. Even though the land of Boao village is part of the overall WKU plan, at the time of the fieldwork, most parts of Boao had not yet been touched, and there was no public statement about when relocation was going to happen. Some people thought that the development of the university was progressing more slowly than originally planned and that more land was not immediately needed.

Before WKU, the few young people who lived in the villages were mostly working in horticulture and stone-cutting, stone-masonry and stone-carving industries, while some elderly people still cultivated the land and grew crops. The establishment of WKU and its demand for land had a big impact on people and their livelihood activities. In the beginning, the residents of Litang lost the land used for these activities (and thus they lost their livelihoods). In the Chinese household registration system (*hukou*), the classification of most affected people was changed from rural to urban. For the elderly, this meant that they became

eligible for an old age pension, paid monthly for the remainder of their life. A few young people, however, did need to look for new jobs. Since the precinct was not well developed and had only a few job vacancies, only a small percentage of them were able to find new jobs nearby, for example working in WKU as security guards or cooks. To get work, they generally had to commute elsewhere in the city.

Vignettes about how three villages experienced the establishment of the campus

Litang (already resettled in new housing)

Litang was the first village to be redeveloped. In the beginning, the process for developing the site and the compensation arrangements were discussed with the residents and they were in agreement. In 2012, residents were moved into temporary accommodation, and were established in their new apartments in tower block housing in 2017. Litang residents were generally positive about WKU, primarily because they considered that the establishment of the university had contributed to improvement in their life in that they had received a new apartment, could now live like urban citizens (rather than as rural peasants), and the elderly citizens were now eligible to receive a monthly pension payment. Many senior people regarded the new apartments as a great asset, which they could bequeath to their children (and possibly grandchildren), many of whom were working overseas. The new apartments were worth much more than their previous housing. Because the majority of the resettled residents were senior people, no training or skills

development program was deemed necessary. The relatively few local residents who wanted to re-enter the labor market needed to solve this by themselves.

For people who preferred to rent an apartment elsewhere rather than stay in the temporary accommodation provided, a minimal housing allowance was paid until they moved into the newly-built housing. People who did not want to move into the new accommodation were given a payment so that they could find permanent housing elsewhere.

For elderly residents, the monthly pension payment they now received was better than their pre-project income (or subsistence livelihood situation) and many were dependent on the remittances that their children working overseas provided. Although generally admitting that WKU had improved their life, residents also complained about some negative impacts of WKU, which we discuss further below, including: the failure of WKU to fulfill some commitments; insensitive planning practices; inconvenience in daily life; and lack of benefits to residents.

Many residents had the view that WKU had failed to fulfill some commitments to the community. First, the promised rate of urbanization and development of the precinct was too slow. The considerable construction work for the WKU was disproportionate in comparison to the number of students who had eventuated. WKU had not achieved its planned 5,000 students in 7 years after establishment, only enrolling 2,000 students by 2019. The lack of student numbers retarded the expected development of the community. Litang residents were dissatisfied about this because WKU had made a commitment to developing the community quickly. Second, it had been announced that WKU would be an open campus and residents would be allowed to share some facilities such as a gymnasium and swimming pool complex. Due to the low student intake, the construction of these facilities had been delayed and residents did not know when they would be able to have access to these facilities. Third, WKU had committed to improve the roads connecting the three villages and the access road to the main road to Wenzhou city. However, these roads had not yet been improved, and the residents still had to use the existing poor-quality roads.

Residents also complained about the overall plan for WKU. Although they notionally agreed to the overall Master Plan, a particular point of contention was that the construction of WKU destroyed 7 ancestral temples and 2 religious sites, with only one Taoist temple remaining. However, the site plan failed to consider this temple and its grounds, incorporating part of the temple yard within the campus, forcing the temple priests to demolish its heritage boundary-wall and build a new wall several meters back. To make matters even worse, compensation for the loss of the temple land had not yet been paid to the temple management body. Therefore, residents considered

that the WKU planning process was disrespectful of local culture.

The establishment of WKU created inconvenience for the residents. For example, there were primary schools in each village before 2012 and all children were able to reach a school easily. With the establishment of WKU and redevelopment of the villages, all primary schools were merged into one, which created inconvenience for residents since many now had to drop-off and pick-up their children from school some distance away. Furthermore, this was made complicated since several roads in the area had been blocked due to construction work or had been closed-off altogether. The residents felt disappointed that WKU had not built alternative roads for them, even though this had been a commitment.

In many residents' opinions, WKU occupied good land that used to belong to them, so WKU should provide benefits to the villagers, such as lowering the entry requirements for local students or reduced tuition fees. The residents regarded these benefits as being quite reasonable since this was offered by many other Chinese universities to their local communities. However, WKU refused to lower the entry requirements and only slightly reduced the tuition fee for local people.

Because of the community engagement and negotiation process the City Government used, at the beginning of the development process the people of Litang were accepting of the campus (SLO level acceptance). While there were some concerns during the stage of temporary housing, they did not doubt that they would be better off when they would move into their new housing. When that happened in 2017, many of their concerns about the 5 years of temporary housing vanished. However, during the temporary stage and after the move into the new permanent housing, they did experience various social impacts and felt that many of the promises had not been met, so there was some disillusionment. Nevertheless, with the mixture of benefits (new apartment) and negative impacts, the social licence remained at the acceptance level. The failure to recruit the expected number of students and the consequent slow rate of development of the site had negative impacts for local residents. A major issue which affected the reputation of the university was disrespect towards the remaining temple. To maintain or improve its social licence into the future, WKU will need to ensure that the agreements with the villagers are kept, especially their access to on-campus facilities and the upgrading of local roads. The university must ensure that the due compensation is paid to the temple for the loss of temple grounds and replacement of the fence. Given that this had been a matter of community concern, potentially the university will need to say sorry, and/or engage in other activities to reconfirm its respect for local people's religious views.

Wangzhai (recently put into temporary accommodation)

At the time of the fieldwork in December 2018, Wangzhai residents allocated a low level of SLO to WKU, primarily because they had only just been relocated to the temporary accommodation and they felt uncertain about their future life. Even though the City Government had involved them in discussions around compensation and they had obtained commitments that they would be moved to new apartments in tower blocks in the reconstructed Wangzhai, residents felt insecure in having to live in temporary housing for many years. Many people were dissatisfied with the arrangements and proposed compensation.

Wangzhai residents were confused about how their land will be utilized by WKU and/or why it was even needed. Even though the land of Wangzhai was within the site plan of WKU, it was unclear which organization would take over and/or use the land. Some residents thought that the development of WKU was going more slowly than planned and that the land of Wangzhai village might be allocated to other businesses in the near future, although it might be handed over to WKU if needed. Some residents were concerned that this lack of obvious need might retard construction of their new apartments and thought that they would be stuck in the temporary accommodation for a prolonged period.

Most young people were working overseas, leaving the village full of elderly people, some of whom could not speak Mandarin and found it difficult to communicate with people from outside. In the temporary accommodation, the government provided a recreation center for the elderly. Some WKU students volunteered to serve the community by assisting senior people, which was appreciated by the residents. However, some senior people thought these students were from the government and distrusted them.

Even though many young people would stay overseas and not come back to the precinct, many elderly people hoped to get an apartment to pass on to them. Given that the salary of many young people working overseas was not high, a high percentage could not afford an apartment. Many senior people were encouraged to support the resettlement because they believed they would acquire an apartment in tower blocks that were to be built, which they would be able to leave to their descendants.

As with Litang, Wangzhai residents were initially in favour of the project. However, at the time of the research, and at the beginning of their displacement in temporary housing, there were quite some negative feelings, especially as many people were worried that they would be stuck in the temporary accommodation for quite some time. Since their approval of the project was all around them getting apartments, any delay in getting the apartments undermined the SLO. As much

as we can establish, given the context, perhaps the process went as well as it could, however, critical for getting its SLO back will be to re-establish confidence that the promised apartments will be provided within a reasonable time. Given that Wangzhai residents are concerned that their land seemed to have been taken for no reason, creating awareness of what the land will be used for will also be important. WKU should ensure that they have some community engagement staff who can speak the local language. Increasing the number and range of community engagement activities for this group of people in temporary accommodation will be important. A major risk to the reputation of WKU will be if this cohort of people have a prolonged stay in temporary accommodation.

Boao (awaiting resettlement some time in the future)

Although it was originally intended that the remaining Boao residents would be resettled within a few years, the slow rate of growth of student numbers meant that plans for the resettlement of this community have been postponed. Consequently, many Boao residents considered that the development of WKU was not a matter of major concern for them. Given that they were aware of the outcome for Litang residents and those Boao residents in the first phase of resettlement, most of the remaining Boao residents were unconcerned about their future relocation, believing that, should it occur, they would be relocated nearby and given appropriate compensation (notably a new apartment), all of which was acceptable to them. However, due to their many life experiences, some senior people were distrustful. Therefore, potentially it might be difficult for the City Government to convince these senior people to cooperate in the relocation plans. Nevertheless, the Mayor of Boao claimed that he had learned from the experience of the resettlement processes of the other villages and that he would ask the relatives working overseas to convince the elderly people of the benefits of the project.

The thing that dissatisfied Boao residents the most was the way in which the development of the campus was planned, which they called 'drawing lines on a map'. They thought the planning failed to give adequate consideration and respect to the local context. In the unfolding of the plan, the village of Boao was split in two, with some villagers being relocated alongside Litang residents, while the remaining Boao residents had to wait till much later and, at the time of the research, were still living in their old village and making their living as before. There was uncertainty about when (and even if) they would be resettled. This was of concern, because like the other villagers, they also wanted to get new apartments. There was some envy

that the residents of Litang (and some Boao residents) had already been resettled into new apartments. The difference in treatment between people in the same village created many issues, complexities and jealousies, and many residents had protested about this inequity. A further issue was that some Boao residents found that part of their land was in the plan, while other parts of their landholding were outside, creating uncertainties about compensation, which made them confused and angry.

When the plans were first discussed, there was general support for the project (SLO level acceptance). The relatively positive experience of Litang and the quality of the new apartments meant that there was a lot of desire by Boao residents to gain such an asset, and there was some frustration that there were delays and that Boao was the last village to be resettled. The concern about the inequality in treatment is real, and WKU will need to ensure that the promised apartments are actually provided.

Differences in perception between WKU staff and the local villagers

Many WKU staff thought the residents should be supportive of the university since it had contributed to the development of the precinct and had improved local people's quality of life. The staff considered the WKU campus to be relatively inaccessible, thus student activities were mainly within the local communities (rather than in the city centre), which should stimulate the development of the precinct (especially if the full 5000 students would have eventuated). However, the students and residents complained that there were few entertainment opportunities available in the precinct, and therefore they often went to other parts of the city. The staff thought that many residents had seized business opportunities to serve students and/or the university (and therefore they should be grateful), whereas the residents said that only a few people could develop businesses since there were not many students to serve.

An annual activity called the Wenzhou Kean Town Culture Festival started in 2017. The festival utilized the transnational feature of WKU to conduct various activities with the community. WKU staff considered the festival to be a great success, that it attracted numerous visitors to the precinct, and that the residents should regard the festival as a contribution made by the university. However, the residents regarded the festival as mainly held by the local Community Committee (and not WKU). The residents admitted that the 2017 festival was a huge success, however, in 2018 there were few innovations or new exhibitions and the number of visitors was much less. By following up with our contacts, we understand that the situation in 2019 was rather similar to 2018.

WKU staff were aware that there were many students volunteering to teach in local schools or to assist senior people in the community, which they thought was an effective way of the university establishing a good relationship with local people. However, WKU students told us that many of the volunteering activities were conducted in other areas of Wenzhou City instead of just in the three villages. Even though the majority of the few residents who knew of the student volunteering scheme had positive views about it, most residents in the three villages were unaware of these activities.

WKU staff thought that the university offered many job opportunities to residents, such as security guards and cooks, in order to solve the problem of unemployment created by the establishment of the campus. The residents, however, thought that there were only a few positions offered by WKU, and many people who wanted to work had to commute to other areas of the city.

The university staff we interviewed (including senior managers) had no explicit knowledge of the concept of social licence. Furthermore, they had no understanding of the underlying notion that a project like a university needed to have community approval or that they should be concerned about this. They were not particularly aware of the notion of university community engagement, and admitted that WKU had no specific strategy for this, although they mentioned with some pride the student volunteering activities. Even though the staff we interviewed had been with WKU since inception, they were not particularly aware of the resettlement that was required to make way for the campus or of the social impacts experienced by the villagers, although they were aware of the three villages in general.

Conclusion

Social licence to operate is a rhetorical device that facilitates thinking about the relationship between a project or organisation and its host communities. It is intangible and metaphorical. Although aspects of it can be measured or at least assessed, what is intended by the concept is more than what can be measured. An important dimension of SLO is that it is inherently dynamic, responding to changes in the situational context and potentially in relation to external events. The level of SLO assigned by a local community to a project or organisation at any point in time is dependent on many factors, including what the organisation and its supply chain partners have done, but also on the knowledge, expectations and experiences of the local community.

In the case of a new university, as a generally good reputation project, it is likely to have a relatively-high initial level of social licence. However, this will inevitably change, with the level of SLO likely to decline for a time during construction, and potentially rising in the post-

construction stage if local residents are appropriately resettled and experience benefits. However, residents' expectations will increase over time, and they will have opinions about the extent to which the organisation (university) is prepared to listen to their concerns and be responsive to them. Effective community engagement is, therefore, an important dimension of getting and maintaining a social licence to operate and grow.

Given the dynamic nature of SLO, organizations need to regularly consider their social licence and how it changes over time, and think about what they must do to improve their approval from their host communities. What was evident in our research was the stark differences in views between the university staff and those of local people. In any organization, a discrepancy like this would be an obstacle to fully understanding the local context and appreciating how local people are affected and/or perceive the situation. Therefore, to gain, maintain and improve its social licence to operate and grow, organizations need to undertake ongoing monitoring, conduct effective community engagement, and provide appropriate benefits to residents.

Compared to controversial projects, such as dams and mines, universities are generally regarded as being beneficial. However, our analysis showed that even a university can create major social impacts for local people, including displacement and resettlement, loss of livelihoods, construction impacts, temporary relocation, disruption to daily life, broken promises, stress and anxiety, etc. We believe that many organisations potentially operate on land that has unclear provenance and that could have been acquired inappropriately, or at least without regard to whether the previous landholders were treated fairly. Much more due diligence is needed by all organisations. All organisations have a responsibility to ensure that they and their business partners are not involved in any violation of human rights, whether deliberately or inadvertently, and that they adequately manage their impacts, have effective community engagement strategies, and implement genuine grievance redress mechanisms.

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