

Project report for Youth International Competition on Global Governance 2018

Km China: Towards the revitalization of rural China

Participants: Julia Pallanch, Miquel Salvadó Gracia, Angelica Vidal

The Youth International Competition on Global Governance is an event organized by Fudan University (复旦学), which brings together students from all over the world in an effort to collect valid proposals that seek to find alternative and innovative solutions to the current most urgent transnational issues.

Sponsored by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the competition is the first of its kind and is organized annually by the School of International Relations and Public Affairs of Fudan University. So far, YICGG has seen more the 1250 participants from 81 different countries and 143 universities.

My name is Julia Pallanch, I am a MEAS+1 student and along with my fellow classmates from the CEAS program Angelica Vidal and Miquel Salvadó Gracia, I have participated to the 11th edition of the YICGG in Chongming, Shanghai.

On the cue of the emphasis put by the 19th National People's Congress on the importance of a feasible rural revitalization strategy, the agenda of YICGG 2018 revolved around "Rural revitalization: Green Development, Innovation & Sharing Economy". To participate, we were asked to submit an innovative and feasible solution to the issue of rural Revitalization, which we have contextualized for the particular case of China, as a country with large rural-urban income inequality ratio, alarming urban migration tendencies, and severe environmental degradation. The goal of our project was to find a replicable solution to the issue through the framework of green development, as to invigorate a more conscious sustainable growth for the western regions of China, which are at risk of falling in the trap of land exploitation in their quest for economic development.

Important questions are yet to be explained: What exactly is rural revitalization? Why is it so important? Rural Revitalization refers to the idea of bringing back to life or at the very least sustain the vitality of a certain area by maintaining or increasing its population. Rural areas are economically, socially, and culturally vulnerable (Community Research Connections, n.d.) because they tend to grow in reliance to single industries. On the other hand, green development can be considered as the evolved version of the ideas that sustainable development stands for. We understand it as an innovative eco-friendly model, which takes action by stimulating the economic, political and social fields into taking concrete measures in the fight against environmental pollution and irresponsible resource exploitation. Bearing in mind that the traditional model of economic growth is not sustainable, it advocates a dramatic change that goes beyond a mere change of strategy. We must accept and embrace the idea of a slower development, made of responsible choices and long-term goals that will enable, in time, a steady and sustainable growth. Based on this premise, our project is not meant to provide with a tool for intensive exploitation of land, but it's rather to be understood as an attempt at creating a slower, steadier economic development to be implemented through the establishment of a high quality production-consumption relationship.

This project that we will from now on refer to as *Km China*, exploits the weak link between the demand of the growing Chinese middle class for high quality products and the capacity of China to supply it within its rural areas. Therefore, it seeks to revitalize rural China through the establishment of specialized areas where high-quality farming production is to be created. This idea is based on the green concept "Kilometro 0" (Km 0) which we have shaped around the characteristics of China to suit its needs best. Its main value resides in its potential of creating a positive virtuous cycle which will, in time, boost the economy of rural areas using environmental friendly ideas and technologies. Our project has eight stages:

1. Creation of the product.

The first step regards an expert-guided selection of areas to be rehabilitated as organic farms. According to the particular features of the land and the culture, specific products are to be linked to specific areas as to create a bond transmitting reliability to the consumer. Once set, this production system is to be constantly improved through the enforcement of updating courses aiming at guaranteeing environmentally up to date practices.

2. Creation of an Eco-Label System.

The goal of this step is to build prestige around the newly established eco-quality products. Quality standards are to be ensured through eco-labels, which have the function of guaranteeing the quality and safety of the product through the prestige of the brand. This step draws on the success obtained by the European Community policy to guarantee authenticity, quality, reliability and tradition. For this to work, a team of scientists, whose task is to define the exact parameters defining the eco products, must set standards and methods of production.

3. Reach the market.

Local governments should support brick and mortar shops, weekend's farmers and e-commerce platforms in promoting these goods. Existing poverty relief plans should be enhanced to direct consumers in the choice of sustainable products.

4. Generate Marketing Support.

The aim of this step is to create a solid sense of brand, quality and prestige around the products and its specific region. The main challenge is to make these goods appealing and attractive to the Chinese middle class that fancies foreign goods.

5. Facilitate Eco-Tourism.

Rural housing needs to be adapted for touristic purposes and education in touristic services must be perfected. The latter will help to adjust rural areas to urban standards of hygiene and demeanors. The target of this stage is to develop a sense of commitment of the locals to maintain the touristic areas clean, preserved and ready to operate.

6. Involve the population in the process of marketing.

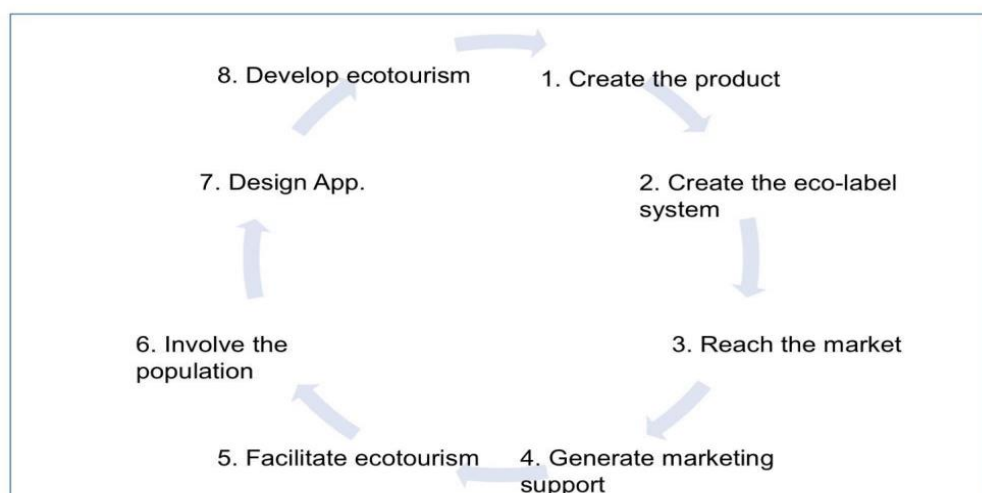
Blogs and competitions promoted through social media (rural photography, touristic experience, culinary experience, etc.) are to be organized and financially supported by local governments. The goal is to raise awareness on the importance of health and a balanced life style while promoting the products and the rural areas.

7. Design a detailed and inclusive App.

The app needs to be as detailed as possible as to provide information on location, products, offers, and activities related to the products. The goal of this stage is to help boosting sustainable ecotourism and facilitate access to information and production processes.

8. Develop Eco-Tourism.

Considering path dependency, there is room for new behaviors to arise in rural areas in rural areas through the implementation of eco-tourism. The use of eco-products in the eco-touristic urban project and the establishment of rules for tourists to abide to (like waste sorting, recycling, etc.) can be part of the process. Games of children can be promoted at this stage (creating composts, having fun waste sorting). At the same time, this attitude can be exported to locals, thus leaking new eco behaviors and models. New generations in this areas are the most likely to introject this positive concepts.



We believe that China has the characteristics needed for this project to be successful. The advantages that characterize rural China are as it follows:

Path dependency: Having yet to develop at their fullest, rural areas have plenty of margin to select completely different and innovative developmental paths. Moreover, they can calibrate their growth based on the experience accumulated so far, thus avoiding the (environmental) mistakes of their more developed counterparts.

Lower density: This factor can be exploited on two levels. On one hand, lower density gives more room for local governments to enforce experimental policies, on the other hand, a lesser dense population could be an attracting factor that could push migrants to return once the economic situation be stabilized

Unspecialized workers: This project offers a large spectrum of employment possibilities to those people whose academic background is low. The skills required by Km China are neither hard to obtain nor time consuming. Km China only requires its workers to attend periodical updating courses.

Existing infrastructure: Km China can be facilitated by the expanding railway system present on the Chinese soil. Trade is to be encouraged not only within the national borders but also cross nationally as long as the distance remains reasonable as to guarantee the freshness and quality of the product.

Social resistance to change: Because rural life is usually more in touch with traditions and nature, its inhabitants might be resilient to change. Km China offers the opportunity to modernize without breaking completely with the past while protecting the environment. This sense of continuation will ease the transformation.