

Solving the pollution problem

- A small town's journey to a cleaner environment

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Abstract:

Sustainable development has been set forth as one of the main goals by the United Nations. There have been some good research on the topic in the last two decades. There are often questions about whether doing good will help companies do well – the instinct is, engaging in environmentally responsible behavior often results in loss of profit.

In addition to promoting corporate responsibility, there have been strong interest from both academia and practitioners in the development of sustainable communities. Will the environment be improved at the expense of economic growth? How would various parties in the community work together to achieve the goal of building a sustainable environment without sacrificing economy?

China as a country experienced heavy pollution in early 2000s and improved air quality in the last few years. The country's leader Xi Jinping pointed out, “绿水青山就是金山银山”, meaning in English, “clean waters and green mountains equal silver and gold”. Xi's message posits that improving the environment will help with economic growth instead of hurt the economy. But how do people clean up the environment without hurting the economy? How do we deal with the conflicts between business owners, local residents, and government agencies?

Our paper intends to investigate the case of a small town, dissect its pattern of environmental problems and economic development over the last two decades, and provide insights on improving environmental health without sacrificing economic growth.

Our paper intends to take a close look at the transformation process, identify key factors of success, and discuss areas for improvement.

In addition to introducing the success story of this small town, we attempt to gauge the awareness of environmental problems from local residents. We have conducted in-depth interviews with a few residents of the town, and observed varying levels of awareness and understanding of the environmental issues, sustainable development, and green consumption. We plan to conduct more interviews on a wider range of residents (such as consumers, students, and other parties) to have a better assessment of the public awareness and knowledge of the environmental issues as well as the concept of sustainable development.

We hope to provide implications for future research, and recommendations for policy makers.

Keywords: environmental health, sustainable development, public awareness