

University of Wales Trinity St David

Community Engagement Assignment 2:
The Victoria Place project

Name: Iuliana Dudan

Student Number: 2227304

Module Code: LCBB4002

Module: Community Engagement

Table of contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<u>3</u>
----------------------------------	-----------------

<u>Understanding community engagement and its principles.</u>	<u>3</u>
---	-----------------

- Defining community engagement
- Discussing the principles and standards of community engagement
- Explaining the benefits of community engagement
- Relating principles and benefits to the Victoria place project

<u>Community engagement planning.....</u>	<u>4</u>
--	-----------------

- The importance of community engagement and achieving its objectives
- The planning of community engagement
- Challenges faced during the planning phase.

<u>Implementation of community engagement strategies.....</u>	<u>5</u>
--	-----------------

- Different approaches and strategies
- Role of communication with stakeholders
- Research and the utilisation of social media platforms
- What was successful?

<u>Evaluation and reflection.....</u>	<u>6</u>
--	-----------------

- Best practices in community engagement
- Impact of community engagement
- Areas for improvement
- Challenges faced during evaluation.

<u>Lessons learned, recommendations and post-project sustainability.....</u>	<u>7</u>
---	-----------------

- Lessons learnt.
- Recommendation for future projects
- Post- project sustainability

<u>Conclusion.....</u>	<u>7</u>
-------------------------------	-----------------

<u>References</u>	<u>8</u>
--------------------------------	-----------------

Introduction

According to Bentley (2020), community engagement is not solely a procedural element, but rather a transforming influence that significantly impacts the effectiveness of social development endeavours. As we commence this endeavour, my objective is to emphasise the utmost significance of community engagement, namely within the realm of social development initiatives.

The Victoria Place project in Woking is a noteworthy illustration that showcases the potential of community engagement in driving significant and impactful change. The primary objective was to rejuvenate the western part of Woking town centre, with the aim of mitigating urban deterioration and underutilisation. This was pursued through the implementation of a comprehensive strategy. In addition to its tangible goals, this project sought to foster a sense of community pride and identity, aligning with the fundamental principles of social development (Council, W. 2022).

In this reflective essay I will analyse how community engagement become one of the, if not, the most important factor when a developing a huge social project such as the Victoria place project in woking.

Understanding community engagement and its principles.

Defining community engagement

Community members, institutions, and organisations actively participate in the community engagement process, which is a collaborative and inclusive approach. It includes a broad range of initiatives, techniques, and tactics meant to encourage interactions, spread knowledge, and involve people in a neighbourhood. By amplifying people's opinions, concerns, and goals, community engagement fundamentally aims to empower individuals and ensure that their distinctive viewpoints contribute to forming ideas and activities that benefit the entire community. Building relationships, trust, and collaborations is given first priority, which encourages a sense of shared ownership, inclusivity, and reciprocal accountability among all participants. (PennState College of Agricultural Sciences, 2011).

Discussing the principles and standards of community engagement

The ethics and operational framework that directs sincere communication between project initiators and the community is provided by the principles and standards of community engagement. Significant concepts include:

Transparency: Honest, open communication that makes sure all parties are aware of the objectives and status of the project.

Inclusivity: Diversity is taken into account by including all relevant parties, including marginalised or underrepresented groups.

Respect: Respect is shown through recognising the efforts of community members, acknowledging their knowledge, and displaying cultural awareness.

Responsiveness: Being responsive is actively taking into account community feedback and concerns and making necessary adjustments to plans and activities.

Explaining the benefits of community engagement

The benefits of engagement with the community are numerous for both project organisers and the community at large. These advantages consist of:

Community Ownership: Communities that are actively involved in initiatives feel a higher feeling of pride and ownership in them, which increases support and decreases resistance (Ray Morgan, 2021).

Informed decision making: Making well-informed decisions is facilitated by incorporating a variety of viewpoints and local knowledge (Ray Morgan, 2021).

Credibility and Trust: According to Kate Mair (2018), transparent and inclusive involvement increases credibility among stakeholders, which lowers conflict and strengthens project legitimacy.

Enhanced Outcomes: community engagement frequently produces better project outcomes that are in line with community needs and ambitions.

Relating principles and benefits to the Victoria place project

Open communication regarding the objectives and development of the project ensured transparency. By aggressively obtaining feedback from a variety of stakeholders and ensuring that marginalised groups had a voice, and that inclusivity was exhibited. Recognising community knowledge and experience demonstrated respect and responding to community suggestions and concerns throughout the project demonstrated responsiveness (Council, W. 2022).

The Victoria Place initiative demonstrated the advantages of community involvement. The initiative that resulted from the community's active involvement promoted communal pride and identity in addition to addressing physical degradation (Council, W. 2022). The project's success was largely due to the community's trust and support, demonstrating the legitimacy and credibility that community engagement can bring to social development programmes.

Community engagement planning

It is essential to start with a thorough overview before I go into the specifics of the Victoria Place project and its journey through community participation. In the western part of Woking Town Centre, the Victoria Place project, which was nothing short of transformative. Its combined goals, to combat urban deterioration and underutilisation while reviving life in this frequently ignored area of town, were not just ambitious but also profoundly influential. The concept was created to bring about a comprehensive revitalisation that went beyond the actual environment. It included a variety of aspects, including residential spaces, retail, recreational facilities, an educational institution, and a hotel (Council, W. 2022)

The importance of community engagement and achieving its objectives

The crucial part that community engagement played in the Victoria Place project's success was at its core. This stage wasn't only a formal necessity; it also served as an encouragement for turning community goals and concerns into workable plans (Bentley, 2020). The project's goals and the needs of the local population were connected by the thread of community engagement. It evolved into a platform for the expression of shared ownership, empowerment, and respect for one another in every choice.

The planning of community engagement

The Victoria Place project's planning phase of community participation was meticulously carried out and supported by a solid strategy. During this phase, it was necessary to identify important stakeholders, establish precise goals, and create specialised engagement strategies. It served as the project's compass, directing it towards a conclusion that actually resonated with the neighbourhood (Ray Morgan, 2021).

Challenges faced during the planning phase.

Community involvement was important, but it also had its share of difficulties. It was a difficult undertaking to reconcile conflicting views and interests within the community. Finding common ground in these situations required expert mediation and frank discussions and it was difficult to communicate with a variety of stakeholders, therefore it was necessary to create channels of communication that were both clear and accessible.

These difficulties emphasised the value of careful preparation and adaptability in community participation and the requirement for adaptability to answer changing community demands and concerns.

Implementation of community engagement strategies

Different approaches and strategies

The regular scheduling of town hall meetings and public consultations was one well-known strategy. These events provide a public forum for neighbourhood residents, local companies, and organisations to express their views, issues, and ideas (Council, W. 2022). These conversations were priceless because they gave us the chance to get information from the community directly and incorporate it into project planning and design.

Focused group formation was another beneficial tactic. These smaller, more personal gatherings made it possible to have in-depth conversations with particular stakeholder groups, such as neighbourhood residents or representatives of regional community organisations (Council, W. 2022). By interacting with these groups, we were able to better understand their particular requirements and preferences, which helped us create solutions that would appeal to them.

Role of communication with stakeholders

The success of community participation initiatives was heavily dependent on communication with stakeholders. In order to share project updates, solicit feedback, and respond to commonly asked questions, a dedicated project website was used. Additionally, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were crucial in involving locals and companies. These platforms enabled real-time updates on project progress and gave community members a place to express their opinions and grievances.

Research and the utilisation of social media platforms

To fully comprehend the distinctive qualities and demands of the community, extensive research was done. This required in-depth analyses of the local economic conditions, cultural quirks, and demographic trends. We identified significant community resources, assets, and possible partners to provide a complete picture of the community's makeup and assets (Council, W. 2022).

In order to increase interaction, the initiative made use of social media sites. Through these venues, the community was regularly informed of project updates and design concepts. They

acted as active avenues for comments and ideas, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity among stakeholders.

What was successful?

Several elements stand out as remarkable triumphs when considering how community involvement initiatives have been put into practise. A thorough grasp of the needs and preferences of the community was made possible by the variety of involvement strategies. The community members' engaged participation in meetings and consultations revealed their dedication to and sense of ownership over the project. Additionally, the openness of communication lines made sure that everyone could easily access project advancements, which promoted trust and responsibility.

Evaluation and reflection

Best practices in community engagement

The adopted community engagement strategies led to the development of several best practises. The variety of involvement strategies made sure that all of the community's perspectives were heard. Participants developed confidence and credibility through consistent dialogues and open communication. Additionally, cooperation with neighbourhood community organisations improved unity and allowed for more cohesive decision-making.

Impact of community engagement

Active dialogue, open communication, and significant community involvement had a significant influence. It produced a project that was firmly entrenched in the values and aspirations of the neighbourhood. The inclusion of stakeholders engendered a sense of shared accountability, ensuring that the project's success was truly shared. A more inclusive development resulted from embracing diversity since it made sure that the demands of all community segments were taken into account. Multi-agency partnerships improved the project's overall quality and sustainability by adding more resources, knowledge, and viewpoints.

Areas for improvement

Although there is no denying that community engagement was beneficial, reflection spurs thought about what may have been done better. The openness with which community input was incorporated into the project's final design is one area that need attention. Some community members voiced their displeasure because they believed that some of their proposals or feedback had been ignored or had only been partially incorporated. Increasing transparency in this area would encourage a deeper feeling of community satisfaction and confidence.

Challenges faced during evaluation.

Addressing differing viewpoints and balancing conflicting interests within the community were difficulties experienced during the review process. Finding common ground in certain situations needed protracted mediation and constructive discussion. Additionally, there were issues with the representation of particular populations in engagement activities, with some groups feeling underrepresented. Reaching out to marginalised groups and making ensuring their perspectives were appreciated were necessary for overcoming these obstacles.

Lessons learned, recommendations and post-project sustainability.

Lessons learnt.

This project, above all, highlighted the importance of genuine community involvement from the start. I've discovered that early involvement enables more thorough communication, criticism, and group decision-making, which fosters trust and guarantees that community requirements are taken into account throughout the project from the beginning). In order to ensure that the perspectives of all community segments are heard, it is also crucial to represent marginalised groups.

Recommendation for future projects

On the basis of these experiences, I advise that future community engagement projects prioritise early involvement and set up procedures to guarantee the representation of marginalised groups. To successfully reach various audiences and promote more accurate and pertinent input, specific engagement mechanisms like focus groups or workshops should be implemented by including the community in crucial phases of project planning and design, the engagement approach should emphasise empowerment and ownership.

Post- project sustainability

A thorough post-project plan was created in order to guarantee the sustainability of the Victoria Place project's advantages and effects. This strategy calls for continual evaluation and monitoring of the project's impact on the neighbourhoods social, economic, and cultural growth. Community members' data and opinions will be gathered through surveys, focus groups, and feedback systems. In the future, improvements can be made to create events that are more inclusive, empowering, and community-focused thanks to this ongoing evaluation process (Woking Council, 2022).

Conclusion

In summary, this reflective report underscores the pivotal role of community engagement in social development projects, as demonstrated through our exploration of the Victoria Place project. The importance of early involvement, open communication, and active participation of various stakeholders are stressed in the key takeaways. Inclusion, diversity, and cooperation are just a few examples of the community involvement tenets that are useful tools that help projects succeed. This paper essentially captures the transformative potential of community involvement in social development and offers a road map for making significant community impacts. These lessons will continue to direct us as we advance in our quest for good change through participation in the dynamic field of social development.

References

Bentley, R. (2020). *A project for the people: the regeneration of Woking town centre / Design + Insights / Benoy*. [online] English. Available at: <https://www.benoy.com/design-insights/a-project-for-the-people-the-regeneration-of-woking-town-centre/>.

Council , W. (2014). Planning committee. [online] The Victoria Place Project. Available at: <https://documents.woking.gov.uk/ecoworld/core%20documents/8.1.1%20Victoria%20Square%20committee%20report.pdf>.

Council , W. (2022). Woking Town Centre Masterplan. [online] Available at: <https://www.woking2027.info/supplementary/towncentremasterplan/draftmasterplan.pdf>.

Kate.Mair (2018). *Victoria Square development*. [online] www.woking.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.woking.gov.uk/major-developments/victoria-square-development>.

PennState College of Agricultural Sciences (2011). *What is Community Engagement? (Center for Economic and Community Development)*. [online] Center for Economic and Community Development (Penn State University). Available at: <https://aese.psu.edu/research/centers/cecd/engagement-toolbox/engagement/what-is-community-engagement>.

Ray Morgan, R. (2021). *Victoria Square Update*. [online] Victoria Square update. Available at: <https://moderngov.woking.gov.uk/documents/s16222/Victoria%20Square%20Update.pdf>.

Woking council (2022). *Report outlines Victoria Place development's positive performance*. [online] www.woking.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.woking.gov.uk/news/report-outlines-victoria-place-developments-positive-performance> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2023].