

ENHANCING SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (SIA) WITH GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS) STRATEGIES IN ENGAGEMENT

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In the contemporary context of urban regeneration, policymakers encounter a multitude of challenges, with one prominent obstacle being the effective engagement of local communities in the planning processes. An essential action plan in this regard is the implementation of SIA, which entails the active participation of communities through survey questionnaires. This engagement aids researchers in identifying necessary improvements to alleviate the residents' daily activitiesⁱ. Furthermore, factors contributing to residents' potential participation in prospective activities dictate the introduction of requisite institutions aimed at enhancing residents' quality of life.

A significant finding from the SIA report for the Darul Hana Redevelopment Project in Sarawak, Malaysia, in 2018 emphasized the importance of community engagement. The findings highlighted various key aspectsⁱⁱ:

- (i) Involving the community from the planning stage fosters trust.
- (ii) Engagement serves to resolve conflicts and delineate roles effectively.
- (iii) Decisions must involve the community to ensure inclusivity.
- (iv) Collaborative efforts sustain community participation.
- (v) Proper consultation and motivation are pivotal in conflict resolution.
- (vi) The community possesses unparalleled knowledge of their context and geography.
- (vii) Identifying the most challenging facet of community engagement is imperative.

The case study on the Darul Hana Redevelopment Project also revealed that incorrect planning in engagement types can lead to several issues:

(i) Low attendance rates:

Insufficient planning or ineffective communication strategies can result in low attendance rates at community engagement events. This could be due to lack of awareness, disinterest, or perceived irrelevance of the topics discussed. Low attendance rates hinder the effectiveness of community engagement efforts as they limit the diversity of perspectives and voices represented in the discussions.

(ii) Misidentification of target groups:

Failure to accurately identify and engage the relevant target groups within the community can undermine the effectiveness of community engagement initiatives. This can result in key stakeholders being overlooked or marginalized, leading to a lack of representation and participation from those most affected by the project or decision.

(iii) Domination or monopolization by instigators or minority groups:

In some cases, certain individuals or minority groups within the community may apply unnecessary influence or dominate the engagement process, overshadowing the voices and concerns of others. This can lead to a misrepresentation of priorities and outcomes, as well as feelings of marginalization among the broader community.

(iv) Loss of trust:

Poorly executed or biased engagement processes can erode trust between community members and project developers or decision-makers. This loss of trust can contribute to lack of transparency, fairness, or genuine interest in community input. Without trust, community engagement efforts are unlikely to produce meaningful outcomes or garner support for the project.

(v) Misallocation of resources:

Inadequate planning or mismanagement of community engagement initiatives can result in the misallocation of resources, including time, manpower and funding. Resources may be expended on ineffective or poorly attended events, detracting from other essential aspects of the project or decision-making process.

(vi) Inadequate management of engagement initiatives:

Effective management and coordination of community engagement initiatives are essential for ensuring their success. This includes clear communication, timely dissemination of information and responsiveness to community feedback. Inadequate management can lead to confusion, frustration and disengagement among participants, undermining the overall effectiveness of the engagement process

In the realm of community development and urban renewal planning, GIS have emerged as essential tools, profoundly transforming engagement methods by providing a computer-based platform to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage and present spatial or geographic data. Its technology integrates spatial data with analytical tools, enabling users to create interactive maps and derive profound insights into various aspects including of community perception towards development, supporting decision-making processes across diverse fields.

In Sarawak, Malaysia, GIS technology finds widespread application in diverse sectors for planning, management and development purposes. The following explains the key roles of GIS in community engagement planning:

(i) Spatial Visualization:

GIS facilitates the visualization of spatial data through maps, aiding in comprehending the geographical context and identifying best engagement approaches.

- (ii) Data Integration:**
Integration of diverse datasets enables a comprehensive understanding of community characteristics and needs.
- (iii) Stakeholder Engagement:**
GIS promotes inclusive decision-making by providing a platform for stakeholders to contribute local insights and concerns.
- (iv) Needs Assessment:**
Evidence-based decision-making is facilitated by conducting spatial analyses to identify specific community needs.
- (v) Impact Assessment:**
GIS facilitates the assessment of potential project impacts and aids in devising mitigation strategies.
- (vi) Scenario Planning:**
GIS enables the creation and analysis of various development scenarios, aiding stakeholders in informed decision-making.
- (vii) Visualization and Communication:**
Powerful visualization tools simplify complex data, fostering dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders.

In conclusion, GIS serves as a basis in community engagement planning, enhancing spatial understanding, stakeholder participation, decision-making and communication. Leveraging GIS empowers experts to create inclusive, responsive and sustainable communities that cater to the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders involved in development initiatives.

References:

ⁱ Abu Bakar, A., Osman, M. M., Bachok, S., & Zen, I. (2014). Social Impact Assessment: How do the public help and why do they matter? In Proceedings of the Asian Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies (AcE-Bs) (pp. [70-77]). Chung-Ang University, Seoul, South Korea.

ⁱⁱ Ramly, S. B. A. (2023). Social Impact Assessment (SIA) in Urban Renewal Projects in Sarawak. Paper presented at the International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA) Conference 2023, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia