

The Applicability of Community-based Facilities Management Approach to Regeneration: A Case Study

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Abstract

The downward spiral of former economic and industrial powerhouses of European inner cities due to decades of collapse of local industries, e.g. shipping, textiles and engineering, has led to ripple effects in the social, environmental and economic realms of local communities, which has proved a challenge for the Europe Union and national governments to reverse through regeneration, including the construction of community facilities. This research examined the role of Facilities Management (FM) in such a facility in the United Kingdom; and investigated the opportunity for FM to play a critical role in the local community; the extent to which FM was aligned to its community setting; and the potential benefits to be offered by taking a FM approach to managing community facilities. An Empirical study was undertaken involving a review of relevant literature on FM in the corporate, public and community settings, primary data collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a sample of key stakeholders, and observations in the case study organisation. Findings were analysed against a conceptual framework for FM in the community (CbFM), and identified that community user participation was severely limited by local government structures, and services did not meet the core needs of the local community.

Keywords: Facilities Management, Community-based Facilities Management (CbFM), Service-user involvement

1. Introduction

Regeneration is a holistic process of reversing economic, social and physical declines in areas where market forces alone will not suffice (Dodds, 2011); adopted as a springboard to launch redemptive strategies aimed at reversing inner city communities blighted by industrial decline. There is a growing trend for local authorities/public sector agencies to collaborate with the private sector to construct and manage public facilities, and deliver services to communities. This has created an opportunity for Facilities Management (FM) to make its mark in these local communities, and to position itself as a credible agent in public/private sector partnerships and regeneration. Despite this, some in FM (Brackertz & Kenley, 2002;

Roberts, 2004; Brown & Alexander, 2006) have opined that the predominant use of private sector models in the community setting is denying local communities the chance to be involved in decision making and service delivery; hence, the need for FM to adapt its models to suit the needs of community settings in which it operates.

Using a case study approach, this research examined a public library constructed in 2010 in the North West of England. The area is currently undergoing a massive regeneration programme following years of economic, social and population declines as a result of the collapse in the early 1970s of its industrial base (Future Communities, 2009). This led to a loss of over half of the communities' manufacturing jobs and a 10% fall in its population, with 20% of the area's property becoming empty due to abandonments (Bartlett, 2009). Consequently, house values collapsed; residents who remained suffered from poor health, poor environment, low educational achievements and high levels of crime (Bartlett, 2009; Future Communities, 2009; Grant, 2010; Muers, 2011). The area was also known to have a high crime rate and bad reputation (Hitch, 2003; Future Communities, 2009). The Office of National Statistics showed the area's mid-year population estimate for 2010 as 498,800 and ranked it 4th on the Multiple Deprivation Index (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

2. Rationale for the research

Developing community services (including libraries) has been viewed as a means of retaining local populations and attracting new ones, in order to create vibrant and cohesive local communities. Community ownership was seen as key to ensuring community facilities continue to meet the demands of local communities, and to build the capacity of the local communities. Research evidence (Brackertz & Kenley, 2002; Roberts, 2004; Alexander & Brown, 2006; Moss et al., 2009; Michell, 2010) however suggests that some FM practices and models in a community setting do not reflect the needs of the local community, fail to involve the community in decision making, and have led to under-utilisation of community facilities. The changing context of FM practices and the importance stakeholders attach to sustainability issues make it critical for FM to align its practices and models to reflect the settings in which they operate (Alexander, 2003; Brown & Alexander, 2006).

This study investigated the extent of local communities' usage of the facility as well as their participation in decision-making. Secondly, it examined FM's alignment with the interest of the public through adopting a social perspective to its approach (Roberts, 2004; Brown &

Alexander, 2006). Adopting a social perspective to FM entails services reflecting the needs of the local communities in which they are situated (Brown & Alexander, 2006). Therefore, successfully aligning services to reflect the needs of a community implies involving local communities in decision making through engagement and participation in service delivery. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (ODPM, 2003), recognised involving community groups in service delivery as a key factor in reviving communities in regeneration areas.

Dominant use of private sector customer-oriented facilities performance measurement tools for local government services has resulted in treating the community as the “user or customer” Brackertz & Kenley, (2002) as opposed to “citizens” (Roberts, 2004). Implications of the use of this tool according to Brackertz & Kenley (2002) are that “issues of governance, political management and responsiveness to the community’s service needs are taken into account primarily in a top-down manner at the level of strategy formulation and planning, rather than at the user interface”. CABE (2006) suggested that the processes of designing, developing, implementing and managing public buildings can often lead to local residents being far removed from feeling a sense of ownership or belonging and not taking pride in these facilities. These suggest that to add value to these processes, FM needs to both contribute to local socio-economic objectives (Brown & Alexander, 2006), and promote social cohesion and engagement.

The concept of Community-based Facilities Management (CbFM) (Brown & Alexander, 2006), took a broader approach to FM encompassing “place, work and folk”; this was developed further in doctoral studies by Michell (2010). This research builds on these studies, and adapted the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) (EN15221:2006-5) definition of Facilities Management, defining Community-based Facilities Management to mean “the integration of processes within a community to develop and maintain services which support and improve the effectiveness of its social objectives”. (Abowen-Dake, 2012). ‘Community’ in this respect comprises all individuals, groups, businesses, and enterprises that reside and work within a spatially bounded locality (Delanty, 2003).

It is against this backdrop that this research undertook a case study of a public library to assess whether the facility is being used in a way that maximises its full potential, whilst meeting the needs of local communities. The research questions investigated centred around:

- Managing community expectations: does the current FM practice allow for the use of the building in meeting the needs of the local community?
- Asset use optimisation: does the current FM role take into consideration the needs and wants of the local community in order to ensure optimum use of the library facilities?
- Engagement and integration: do FM services reflect the communities in which the facility is located?
- Empowerment: are the residents empowered as citizens to make decisions, or are they simply consumers of the services provided?

The research sought to determine whether the strategic and operational aims, objectives and actions of the facilities management function and the collaborating organisations were aligned towards meeting the complex, multiple and inter-related needs of the local communities. This is seen as critical in ensuring that the use of the facility is being optimised for the benefit of the community. CbFM in practice would mean making the library facility a place where people want to come to, as well as a place that promotes economic opportunity and better quality of life for the local community.

3. Facilities Management

FM definitions (Becker, 1990; Barrett, 1995; Alexander, 1996; Barrett & Baldry, 2003; CEN, 2006; IFMA, 2011) have evolved to reflect its changing nature, scope and importance. There are major differences in opinions regarding the definition, purpose, scope and priorities of FM (Chotipanich, 2004; Drion et al., 2012); highlighted by practices and viewpoints in countries such as the UK, US and Netherlands where FM has been the most developed (Drion et al., 2012). These varying scopes of the discipline are indicative of the challenges of having a universal definition; viewpoints echoed by Tay & Ooi (2001) and Price (2010), who stated that the definition and scope of FM still remain a contentious issue. Price (2010) went further to state that not only does FM lack a universally accepted definition, but it is also unclear what constitutes its core. Irrespective of the FM definition, the essence of facilities is to ensure the infrastructure supports the core business activities of organisations. Infrastructure in this case refers to buildings, floor space, communication strategy, technology, security, workplace design and ergonomics, auxiliary services and environmental impact (Langston & Lauge-Kristensen, 2002). The nature of infrastructure differs depending on the business type, therefore approaches to co-ordinating it to deliver core business strategy vary to meet business needs. This view of FM focuses on support services and the physical space in a

business environment. This perception is limited in a community setting, where profit for shareholders is not necessarily a factor of success, but rather FM's role in service delivery to better meet the needs of the local communities. Therefore a social perspective to FM focussing on stakeholder value was required. Nutt (2004) spoke about "the realignment of FM with the public interest"; whilst Roberts (2004) noted a deep and broad relationship developing between the private and public sectors in providing community services. He stated that these collaborations have given rise to Urban FM, seen as a flexible "platform" in which agencies and the private sector can come together in new and innovative settings for the benefit of the community" (Roberts, 2004). Citing Disney's "Celebration" town as an example of a private company providing for the public good under the control of customer-oriented managers, Roberts opined that FM had to move away from traditional contracting models to models based on public interest companies; and proposed a new FM model of governance that allowed for "citizens" i.e. the community to play a full role in co-producing the services that are provided (Roberts, 2004).

A previous case study of another public library in the same region focused on the use the building for community benefits (Moss et al., 2009) that was seen as "a community hub and a source of pride for the local community". The researchers discussed how the library manager maximised the use of the library building through organising various local community engagement activities. It called on facilities managers to "look outside the box", and search for ways to fully maximise the potential of buildings (facilities) and deliver some of the benefits to the local population.

This followed on from Kasim & Hudson's (2006) call for a new perspective and alignment of FM. They proposed that FM takes a social enterprise perspective in integrating organisational and community support services; as social enterprises have a unique ability to create socially inclusive and sustainable communities and opportunities for all people. Therefore, in a community setting where multiple stakeholders have joint public and social objectives, FM has to move away from its conventional perspective on achieving the primary objectives of a single organisation, to a more holistic approach of delivering services for public benefits.

Research evidence from studies carried out in offices, hospitals, retail facilities and universities indicate that FM has not attained a strategic status within organisations, despite the operational risk of failure and negative impact on customers or a revocation of a business

licence to operate (Price, 2004). This is in spite of Brackertz & Kenley's (2002) assertion that strategic management of facilities is generally accepted as best practice. The disparities in the strategic importance of FM appear to relate to the perspective or setting in which FM takes place. Whilst in the corporate world, claims of FM's strategic importance (BIFM, 2012) is strengthening, research evidence from the local authority/ public sector points to a different picture (Price, 2004; Michell, 2010).

One of the reasons proffered for this is pressure in the business environment to reduce expenditure on "non-core" activities (Shohet & Lavey, 2004), whilst at the same time maintaining competitive advantage. Decades of its existence and popular assertion of its contribution to business success through adding value (Price, 2002; Brown & Alexander, 2006) has not improved FM's ability to gain strategic recognition or status in many organisations. Whilst (BIFM, 2012) suggested that FM has attained strategic importance, (Michell, 2010) identified that it is still largely regarded as an operational activity; hence facilities managers are tasked with responsibilities such as security, cleaning and maintenance, and hardly getting involved in decision-making at strategic level.

Hodges (2005) and Tucker (2007) suggested that facilities managers understand the three key areas of business: social, economic and environment in developing sustainable strategies for organisations, and revealed FM's increasing importance in sustainable development practices to ensure long-term economic, environmental and social improvements for businesses. On the bases of evidence suggesting that the prevailing approaches of FM practices have proved ineffective at winning government attention (Brown & Alexander, 2006), a different strategy is required.

4. FM in the public sector

It is generally agreed that the public sector is not profit oriented, rather focussed on delivering best value (OGC, 2007); so not about profit and increasing shareholder value, but about organisational efficiency and effectiveness. Effective property asset management has been a challenge for public authorities and agencies, depending on identifying strategic (property) requirements of authorities (Byrne, 1994). Research evidence from the early noughties (Clark & Rees, 2000) identified that FM had an increasing profile in the health and local government sectors in the United Kingdom (UK). However, comparisons of the two sectors showed that the health sector viewed support services as essential in meeting the needs of users, whilst the

local government sector perceived FM as an internal function with no impact on meeting the needs of the consumers of its services. Clark & Rees (2000) further noted that the level of integration of FM activities varied between these sectors. In health, FM services were fully integrated, whilst in the local authorities, FM services were spread over a number of departments. This phenomenon resulted in inefficiency in terms of cost saving, customer satisfaction and ease of contact or the development of good practices (Price et al., 1999). Recent evidence however suggests that the local authority sector is becoming more innovative in the delivery of public services, its use of outsourcing, and management of its facilities (Medway Council, 2013).

Research by Brackertz & Kenley (2002) on local government in Australia noted tensions in strategic management of local government facilities within service delivery context. It observed the use of private-sector customer-oriented management models, and argued that even if strategic objectives of service delivery in the private and public sectors were similar, desired outcomes and responsibilities varied widely. These customer-oriented management models treat the community as “users” or “customers” of services. The implication therefore is that issues of governance, political management and responsiveness of services to the community needs are considered in a top-down approach, that is, at the level of strategy formulation and planning rather than at user interface. They suggested a new service-oriented model for evaluation of community facilities in the context of local government.

In Michell (2010), a pilot study on the practice of FM within the Overstrand Municipality area of South Africa revealed that the majority of FM issues were operational in nature. There was also little emphasis placed on the strategic management aspect of public facilities in terms of the achievement of best value of the asset. Michell (2010) also revealed that community participation in the development and management of public lands and buildings in this municipality was little or none.

Researchers in FM in community-based settings have argued that government policies have propelled FM into the limelight as the undisputed vehicle to deliver added value and socio-economic benefits to the public sector through the management of its infrastructure (Roberts, 2004; Alexander & Brown, 2006; Kasim & Hudson, 2006); proposing other methodologies (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) to identify and mobilise local skills, talents and experiences to achieve sustainable community development.

5. Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, as it places emphasis on the context as opposed to quantification in data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2004). This was perceived as critical to this research as it is an emerging area of study, with very little documented evidence, and the focus on context provided insights into the experiences of all research participants in response to the research questions asked.

An empirical study, based on a case study approach was used to investigate FM practice and alignment with regeneration objectives, and how these impacted on the use of the facility and user involvement in the case study library. Research participants (stakeholders) were classified into four categories, namely: local residents, strategic level managers, facility manager and operational staff of the library. Whereas members of the community were randomly selected for the interview, senior managers, frontline staff and the facility manager of the library were selected based on their roles within the organisation. Selective and random sampling was used for data gathering as individual groups had specific characteristics, which were central to the aims and objectives of the study (Naoum, 2007). The age range for residents interviewed was from 19 to over 65 to capture views across different user groups.

This methodological approach was deemed appropriate as it offered the opportunity to gain comprehensive insights into strategic and operational aims of the library and its resultant FM arrangement and practices. A pilot study of the questionnaire used for the semi-structured interviews was undertaken in a local community centre to eliminate ambiguity in the questions (Bell, 2005), thereby helping to make questions clearer to all respondents. Feedback from the pilot study led to a redesign of the questions. The interviews were undertaken using “canonical dyadic” and multiple interviewees formats (Have, 2004). Observations were made during the researcher’s visits to the library, and memos used to capture observations; some of which were discussed in the interviews with relevant research participants, who offered clarifications on the researcher’s observations. Data capture through multiple sources (triangulation) ensured the validity and reliability of the research data. Interviews were transcribed and verified by research participants as to the accuracy of data captured. These were analysed with the observations and literature using content analysis and thematic coding based on the principles of Alexander & Brown’s (2006) CbFM model.

6. The Case Study

For the purpose of this paper, the case study organisation will be referred to as ‘the Library’. The Library is a collaboration between the local regeneration company, the Council and the local Education Academy (high school), aimed at delivering a positive change to education in the area, and delivery of a new Academy library that is accessible to the general public. Libraries have evolved over recent years from being the vestibules for books and printed material, to one-stop shops to access community services. They also act as learning centres to encourage non-learners to pick up necessary skills to get jobs or live in today’s digital age. The Library plays an important role in the community delivering a range of services from children's holiday activities to health information to free computer use for members; and also help people find entertainment, jobs and answers to questions about their local communities. The Library venue and facilities also play host to regular Councillor Advice Sessions and “Tiny Tot and Toddler Time” activities for the local communities. It is co-located on the site of the Academy, and a Service Level Agreement (SLA) is in place to manage the FM services delivered to the Library. Co-location offers more than just cost savings, and illustrates partnership working in a community setting for the benefit of all.

Another example of a community library looked at by this research identified that the community was truly involved in all the affairs of this community library. This example had a governance structure made up of key community representatives, voluntary, and charitable agencies in the community. Evidence also shows early intervention work with the youth by local police, the community and voluntary agencies through the community library, in educating the youth against teenage pregnancy, crimes and other antisocial behaviours, which could blight their future. Its facilities were being used to build a cohesive and a prosperous community. Similar to the Library, it offered computer literacy to some unemployed people in the community which has led some into employment. Volunteers benefitted from work-based National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training in Customer Services. Volunteers are therefore not only giving their time, but also acquiring qualifications for future jobs. The cleaning is done by local people, creating jobs in the community for the non-skilled. These initiatives have caused a ripple effect in the local community.

The Library’s key performance indicators identified increased usage of the Library’s facilities across six areas in the first year of opening in its new location. Visits were up 238%, issues and renewals up 49%, active membership up 53%, and PC usage up 372%. The highest

increases were in the number of events held, up 1268%, and the number of attendees which went up by 555%. There was little evidence available from sources regarding the reasons for these marked increases. Some of the increase in events held could be attributed to the use of the Library by the Academy for parent/teacher meetings. Increase in attendees would also have been boosted by the mentoring programme for the Academy students which the Library provided. However, the FM function had no input into the delivery of services in the Library, and no involvement in strategic decision making. The FM function was provided by the Academy and limited to general repairs, security, fire alarm tests, lighting and legionella tests. There was no evidence of alignment of regeneration objectives with FM operations. Some FM functions however had an impact on user experience such as cleaning and the physical environment.

The lack of citizen's participation in strategic decision making of the Library facilities and services resulted in decisions being taken which have failed to meet the needs of the community. Current users stated that computer literacy training and homework clubs, which were strategically commissioned to help residents attain computer skills and to raise educational attainments for the local children have all been shelved as part of cost saving exercises. Likewise, the reduced opening times in addition to the facility shutting down at lunch times, was viewed by residents as not meeting their requirements, and excluded a proportion of the community from accessing services. This is in contradiction of the Council's objective to provide access to computers and increase literacy.

The structure and governance of the Library did not allow for community participation in decision making, unlike the example of the community library. It effectively created a barrier to community participation which will need to be addressed when looking at future collaborative provision of library services.

Majority of respondents (75%) from the community centre pilot interviews were not aware of the Library's existence and complained about poor signage and lack of advertisement. Those who were aware of its existence assumed it was not accessible to the public, and only for the use of the Academy. Field observations identified that some of the Library users were not aware of the opening and closing times, as residents tried to access services during lunch break, and were disappointed to find it closed. User experience of the Library was however positive with regards to staff customer service, and maintenance of the physical environment.

71% of residents interviewed accessed the Library daily, the remainder weekly. The over 60's were the only group who did not access the Library to use computers or borrow books. They only accessed the Library for reading. However 50% of users interviewed suggested they would like support in acquiring IT skills. This shows a demand for its services, which would help improve optimisation of the facilities resources. The lack of incentives such as earning qualifications whilst volunteering is reflected in the numbers of respondents who would volunteer to work in the Library (14%). The majority (57%) said maybe, whilst 29% would not volunteer. All the respondents from the community centre pilot study would not volunteer to work in the Library.

Impacting directly on the principles of CbFM which includes community participation in decision making, 71% of users did not want to take part in decision making for the Library. This has serious implications for engagement and empowerment if citizens do not want to participate in decision making. Amongst respondents from the community centre pilot, only 25% wanted to be involved in decision making.

7. The CbFM Approach

CbFM is a vehicle for achieving local socio-economic objectives. The research identified that the Library provides a safe environment for the community to access services and socialise, with the added benefit of being free to use. Figure 1 shows the Library at the centre of the strategic partnership. Using the CbFM approach, its services would be closely aligned with the objectives of the regeneration organisation and the library services division of the Council. The ripple effect of the alignment of objectives with community participation will address all the identified requirements of the community in the outer circle.

Through seeking active participation in assessing the needs of the community and engaging the community to draw up the specifications in SLAs, FM can ensure that important services are provided to meet the community's needs. This research identified that users suggested improvements to the service including training in voluntary work/hobbies, extension of opening hours, up-to-date academic books, and access to a variety of newspapers. FM is well placed to assess needs where it interfaces with users of the facility (Atkin & Brooks, 2009; Brackertz & Kenley, 2002); which is not the case in the Library. This will need to be addressed strategically as it will require that FM has a user interface with the community, and that it is involved in strategic decision making.

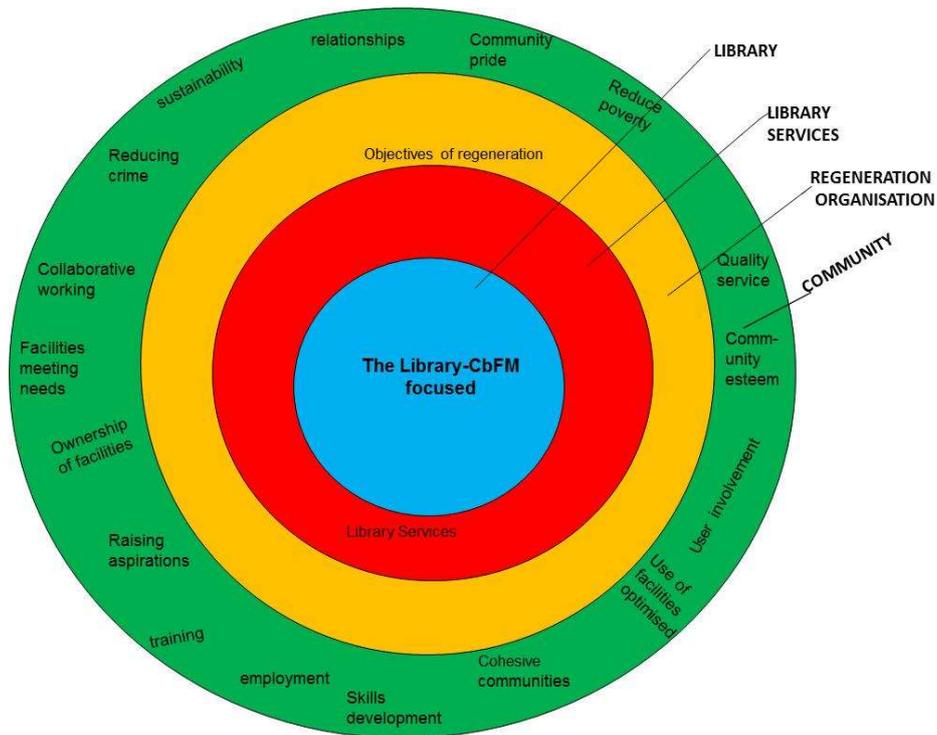


Figure 1: The Ripple Effect of Library Services

8. Conclusions

This research identified two main challenges to taking a CbFM approach to regeneration, and the management of community facilities. The first is related to the structure and governance of the facility itself which creates a barrier to achieving the full potential of the CbFM approach, as there is neither FM interface with users, nor representation at strategic level. The second and perhaps more important challenge is to do with the community members and their lack of willingness to engage in decision making nor civic activities related to the Library. The contrast in approaches between the Library and the community library highlight the disadvantages in the former's approach to the management of its community facilities. The incentives offered by the community library, and its empowerment of the community through their representatives, shows the way forward for similar facilities to fully engage with delivering to the socio-economic objectives of their communities. Community participation in decision making should result in the provision of services which meet community requirements; and engender local people to feel a sense of ownership and therefore take pride in their local community and be more willing to serve in their local facilities. Communities have not been empowered to engage in the democratic process that could lead to building an economically sustainable community, instead, the current approach is rather disempowering.

There is no alignment between the Library's FM function, the strategic objectives of regeneration in the area, nor the requirements of the community. Cost saving decisions has led to cuts in library hours and activities most needed by the communities. FM is currently delivering services mainly to comply with legislative requirements, hence the focus on cleaning, security, health and safety etc. The aspect of social enterprises has not been explored in relation to this facility, despite the contracting out of cleaning services to local residents.

These findings support the demand for change of approach from literature and new models to support delivery of public services. These approaches should involve local communities in decision making and service delivery. The underutilisation of public facilities because services do not reflect the needs of users would be addressed, leading to optimisation of use. A strategic approach to FM in the community facilities would lead to significant contributions towards achieving the socio-economic objectives of the community.

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