

Policy Implications of Community Volunteer Organizations as Development Catalyst and Governance Partner: The Case of Artist Groups in Angono, Rizal

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Abstract

Robert Putnam shares that ‘volunteerism’ is necessary for building vibrant civil societies and in creating social capital networks of trust and cooperation that promote citizen participation in public affairs (Smith 1999). It also improves the quality of governance by refraining from precautionary or unnecessary state provision and administration of services that civic associations are equally capable of performing, if not better. Moreover, it is believed that these volunteer groups serve as assets to call on during a crisis. Using social capital growth will enable a stronger position in dealing with poverty and vulnerability (Putnam 2002). There is value in understanding how volunteer groups contribute to supporting programs and projects. They do not only improve the capacities of the government, but also the quality of life of people who are in most need of assistance. In the municipality of Angono, Rizal, a collaboration between the local government and volunteer groups highlights cultural expression through art as a development catalyst. As a governance tool, this benefits partner communities, thus enhancing Angono’s art-based tourism agenda and overall competitiveness.

This paper discusses the challenges and opportunities of art as a development catalyst and governance tool for collaboration. The author interviewed local officials and group leaders from art-engaged community groups to find out how collaboration helps the poor members of Angono and its contribution to the development of the municipality. In studying the mutual benefits of the relationship between the local government and community-based groups, the study explored ways to increase the scope of engagement in cities to develop a broader societal base that promotes progress.

Keywords: volunteerism, community, poor and marginalized sector, cultural development, art

1. Introduction

Cities with volunteer groups and government collaboration can exceptionally use cultural development in dealing with the prevailing instances of social exclusion experienced especially by the poor and marginalized (P&M) sectors (Putnam, 2002; Smith, 1999; Larsen and Montelpare, 1990). This research paper looks into the following concepts: (1) government recognition of the local and unique identity of its people (Burt, et al., 2001).; (2) art-engaged volunteer groups that are active participants of government initiatives; and (3) skills development to enhance human capital. Figure 1 shows the interrelationship of these concepts.

Government recognition of the local and unique identity of its people maintains that the use of cultural service of art as a development medium, when linked to governing national and local policies, benefits the poor and marginalized. It will also help the latter accept and appreciate the community they grew up in and the communities they felt excluded from.

Through skills development opportunities, the poor and marginalized can participate in cultural development policymaking.

Volunteer groups refer to groups that are engaged in a particular cultural development service (e.g. art-engaged). The members actively participate and benefit from their local governments’ cultural development plans, programs, and projects. They are part of civil society that is engaged in activities that assist communities through skills development, community relations, and social access. Specifically, because of the members’ similar interests in art, they share a common passion to learn and develop skills. This allows them to demonstrate the cultural values and beliefs in the place where they gain inspiration for their craft. As partners of government, volunteer art groups offer an alternative means of implementing cultural development plans, programs, and projects, thereby offsetting multiple challenges faced by local leaders related to resources for skills development (Fig. 2).

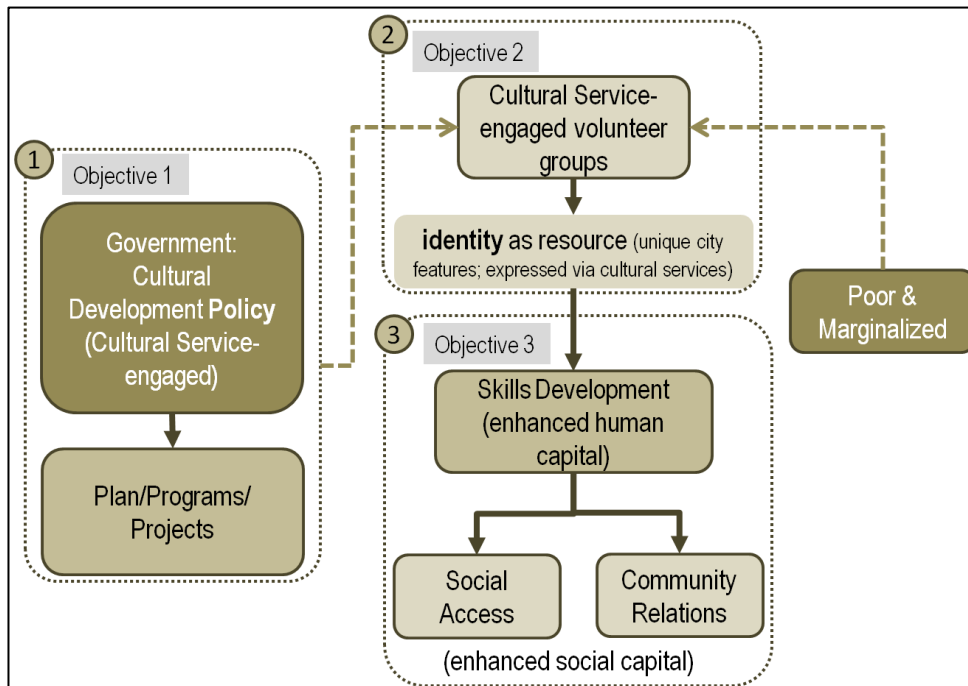
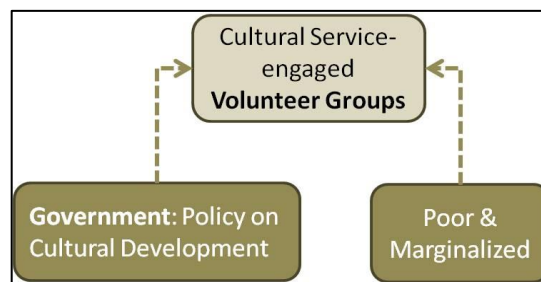


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Source: Community Relations, Social Access

Figure 2. Volunteer groups as government partner: enabling cultural development to directly benefit the poor and marginalized

2. Volunteer Groups: Partners in Cultural Development through Art

By volunteering in various capacities such as logistic and technical expertise, these poor and marginalized groups can help maximize the use of limited government resources. This ensures the continuity of programs and projects given budget constraints and policy directions of government officials. When human capital is developed, social capital is likewise improved as they interact with surrounding communities. The city or municipality benefits from the support of culture-based tourism initiatives provided by volunteer groups when art as a development medium is used to tie together a place's unique socio-spatial features such as culture.

Following the work of Hofstede in terms of the influence of culture in social groups, the economic gap observed between volunteers is lessened as they share a common passion for cultural values and beliefs, prioritizing it more than other factors.

Quoting Hofstede (1980):

Culture affects organizations in a variety of ways. One of which is it affects them through its influence on the distribution of power. The control of human behavior necessary for organizations is achieved through the unequal distribution of power. Any organization has its dominant coalitions. The fixity of this coalition and the distribution of power between its members can vary widely under the influence of, among other things, culture.

Hofstede's "dominant power" concerning group dynamics among cultural service groups is culture itself rather than money or socio-economic status. Discriminatory issues are set aside when using art as a cultural expression in creating a volunteer group. When seeking to develop and excel in cultural development service, art emerges as a bridging agent that socially binds these volunteers together.

3. Research Methodology

The case study methodology was used to determine how cultural development policies are applied at the national and local government levels as a means to alleviating poverty and marginalization. Focusing on art as a unique cultural service from which the poor and the marginalized may benefit, case studies on the cultural medium of art as a major development catalyst were identified. The identification of the study area was confined to the main island of Luzon because it hosted about 57 percent of the Philippine population as of 2010 (NSCB, 2012). The mission and vision of 51 local government units within Luzon island were checked for statements pointing to the role of culture as a major policy thrust in overall development.

The municipality of Angono in the province of Rizal was chosen as the study area. Policy documents were collected to understand how Angono uses culture as a development catalyst. Qualitative research supplemented by statistical data was conducted and aided by field researchers. Key informant interviews with local government officers were conducted and focus group discussions with volunteer group leaders were administered to understand the nature of the volunteer groups as government partners in facilitating inclusive growth.

4. Background of the Study Area: Angono Municipality, Rizal Province

Angono, Rizal is a small town situated 30 kilometers east of the capital city of Manila with a land area of 23 square kilometers (Angono MPDC, 2012) (Fig. 3). Bounded on one side by the Laguna de Bay, it started as a fishing village. It has since excelled in arts particularly in the fields of painting and music. Angono is known to be an 'art capital' of the Philippines. It was declared by UNESCO as an 'ASEAN Culture Capital' in 2010 (Soriano-Bax, 2012). Today, Angono is known for its numerous art shops, galleries, and art studios lining its streets. These are part of the active community-based artist's movement of the local government in using culture through art as a development catalyst for the municipality (Angono MPDC, 2012). Two notable artists, namely, Carlos "Botong" Francisco, an outstanding post-war painter, and Maestro Lucio D. San Pedro, one of the country's famous musical composers, hail from this small town. Both have been proclaimed as National Artists and have significantly contributed to the rich artistic tradition cultivated among Angono's citizens.

Angono supports a cultural development-based tourism strategy by giving priority to art skills development as part of its local programs and projects.



Source: wikimedia.org

Figure 3 Location map of Angono, Rizal

5. Role of Local Government as Cultural Development Catalyst through Art

Interviews revealed that local government officials are actively engaged with the private sector and various civil society organizations (i.e., volunteer groups) in promoting cultural development. Since 1998, the local government of Angono has been focusing on art as a cultural development medium for an inclusive growth strategy. The local government has been pushing for their local events and activities to be recognized as part of the national annual festivities. Through these events, the LGU generates cultural tourism-based jobs and creates tourism-based industries to improve the lives of its people. Further, these activities also raise the value of local identity and instill pride among the young generation. To attract tourists, the local government promotes its art-based cultural assets (Fig. 4).

The municipality provides scholarships to deserving individuals involved in the development of Angono's cultural heritage (Morales, 2013). The partnership between the government and volunteer groups helps in finding individuals who want to further develop their skills in their chosen art form. The outputs of these individuals and groups who were given the scholarship will be incorporated into Angono's overall cultural development agenda.

The key informant interview revealed that funds are granted to successful applicants. However, the criteria for its distribution are not fully disclosed. One of the leaders of an art-engaged volunteer group shared that they had some problems in tapping the scholarship funds due to political reasons. The lack of government support was cited as one of the reasons why the group became inactive for two years.



Source: angonodreamnews.wordpress.com

Figure 4. Tourism assets of Angono, Rizal “Art Capital of the Philippines”

5.1 Formation of Art-Engaged Volunteer Groups

It was found that most of the volunteer groups that work with the local government were created by art-engaged individuals who have successfully mastered a particular art form. These are individuals who came from a relative state of poverty. Driven by the motivation to give back and help people like them improve their status in society, they, later on, became leaders of their respective volunteer groups.

Data analysis shows that art-engaged volunteer groups in Angono are predominantly community-based groups. These groups play an important role in cultural development, specifically in searching and developing talent. They train individuals and make them more competent in a particular art form so that they may have a strong chance to get art scholarships (Fig. 5). These groups help members to improve their art skills, pursue formal art education, and provide art-based employment opportunities to lift them out of poverty. The government supports art-engaged volunteer groups by funding the implementation of its cultural development strategy and creating collaboration opportunities through its cultural development activities and events.



Source: Morales, 2013

Figure 5. Community-based volunteer art group in Angono during practice

Interviews showed that the primary objective of the volunteer groups is to promote excellence in certain art forms. As partners in local cultural development, they aim to excel in developing art skills, help members to continue their training and education, and support their members to access art-based employment opportunities (Tab. 1). They likewise advocate for the government to develop and maintain accessible public open spaces where the groups can perform or practice.

Volunteer groups mentioned that among their initiatives is performing in public areas such as the local public market or a nearby jeepney terminal to make art more accessible to the majority of the local population. These groups become partners of the local government in maintaining public spaces. Table 1 summarizes the initiatives of the volunteer groups in Angono, Rizal.

Table 1. Summary of volunteer group projects

Theme	Description
Skills Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct free seminars and workshops to promote art-based skills development opportunities, especially for those who cannot afford it - Make apprenticeship work available to allow new members to benefit from the expertise of established artists and provide them with art-based employment opportunities - Participate in various government projects even outside of the municipality - Participate in projects to secure financial allowances for indigent members and fund seminars and workshops - Coordinate with institutions that offer scholarships or employment opportunities to benefit individual members
Policy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participate in tackling local and regional issues or concerns from a cultural standpoint - Assist in developing and maintaining public spaces where volunteer groups can perform and practice

5.2 Issues and Concerns of Volunteer Groups

One of the concerns of art-engaged volunteer groups is the availability of financial support from the government. One group mentioned that without financial support from the government, looking for other sources of funds can be time-consuming. This time could have been used by the members to master their craft or promote their group activities. Another group raised concerns on political motives attached to accessing the funds of the government, as these funds may come from rival political entities.

According to interviews, it is challenging for the LGU to select which volunteer group to support financially. The volunteer groups proposed more transparent criteria for selection and mechanisms for consideration. These measures are perceived to minimize politically motivated decisions that will influence cultural development.

5.3 Benefits of Volunteer Group Members

Among the poor and marginalized members of these volunteer art groups, the benefits of participating include networking opportunities, improving self-confidence, pursuing formal education (with scholarships), as well as accessing employment opportunities. The table below contains the details of the perceived benefits of joining volunteer art groups.

Table 2. Perceived benefits of joining volunteer arts groups

Social/ Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Escape from a life of gang violence, drug addiction, and other negative peer pressures common among the youth - Gain self-confidence through networking opportunities
Financial/ Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receive financial allowances to support their education, usually given by the local government or other non-profit groups - Provide access to employment opportunities
Organization/ Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop skills to apply for art scholarships

6. Summary of Findings

The study shows that cultural development is a way of acquiring and developing skills that improve community relations. It also lessens social issues related to poverty based on the review of local cultural development policies and initiatives of art-engaged volunteer groups.

The study also reveals that the local government of Angono, Rizal recognizes the important role of art-engaged volunteer groups as partners in cultural development. The LGU has given these groups a platform to showcase their skills by performing in cultural activities and events of the municipality.

The volunteer art groups help promising and deserving individuals from the poor and marginalized sectors to access opportunities in developing their skills and showcasing their talent. As the members become more focused on achieving their objectives, they are kept away from illegal drugs and other crimes, which in turn benefits the LGU.

Most of the founders or leaders of the volunteer art groups are already established artists who use their connections to provide exposure for their newer members. Correspondingly, the LGU finds willing volunteers from the groups to assist in implementing cultural programs and projects. They also help in the development and maintenance of public spaces where the groups can perform and practice. As a result, policy implementation becomes more sustainable as it lessens the effects of non-availability of funds or budget cuts, government logistic shortages (lack of personnel, equipment, facilities), or even changes in the political landscape.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, this research has established how cultural development through the collaboration of local government and volunteer groups helps the poor and marginalized.

It also highlights how art establishes local cultural identity and enhances social capital.

A general policy direction to promote and support the activities of art-engaged volunteer groups is recommended. The local government may promote competition among artists, support initiatives on cultural development, and develop and manage public spaces where the groups can perform and practice their craft. These policy measures are expected to hold events where volunteer groups can compete in a fun and friendly atmosphere. The competitions will also help the local government identify which groups are qualified for financial support. Moreover, such activities will make the existence of these groups more meaningful, and more people will see and appreciate their cause.

With a strong presence of volunteer art groups, competitions in various art forms such as on-the-spot painting competitions, community dance or singing contests may be integrated into the local cultural development and tourism agenda. This will encourage more people to join such community-based groups. The local government of Angono may sponsor the creation of school-based volunteer groups, particularly in public elementary and secondary schools, thereby increasing the impact of its community-based volunteer groups. The LGU can also finance art scholarships to promising residents in their pursuit of higher education.

To further engage community-based volunteer groups, they should have a designated place where they can perform and practice. This will not only support the advocacy of the groups but also provide space for economic activities. In cases where the government has a limited budget for cultural development, they can still provide an enabling environment for cultural activities to take place.

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