

Creativity as a platform for sustainable development in the economic periphery: The case of Masbate City, the Philippines

Jofer B. Asilum*

jbasilum@alum.up.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Creativity is integral in sustainable urban development. However, its effective use as a development platform is particularly challenging for the economic peripheries. Applying the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, this study explores the sustainability of creative activities as a development platform in Masbate City, a periphery city in the Philippines. Using qualitative data from focus group discussions with three local creative groups, this study finds that Masbate City's cultural festivals and the national programs for arts education were integral in the participants' involvement in creative activities. By utilizing creative activities as a livelihood, the participants either

**Jofer B. Asilum is currently finishing his MA Urban and Regional Planning at the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. Prior to this, he graduated from the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand with the degree MSc Natural Resources Management and with a Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) Scholarship in 2023 and also from the UP Diliman with the degree BA Philosophy in 2016. He is a licensed environmental planner serving as the Planning Officer of Dr. Emilio B. Espinosa Sr. Memorial State College of Agriculture and Technology in Mandaon, Masbate. He has also worked with several local government units in his home Province of Masbate in the Philippines as a development consultant.*

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enabled or improved their access to financial capital, which became their avenue to also enable or improve their access to other livelihood capitals. These contributed in improving their wealth and poverty situation, well-being, capabilities, and employment options, were crucial in adapting to external shocks. However, sustaining Masbate City's creative economy is hindered by its local government's weak capacity in supporting the creative workers' needs and in creating stable markets for their products. Thus, to make creativity a sustainable development platform in Masbate City, this study recommends building its institutional capacity in creative economy management, and developing its creative economy infrastructure, labor force and markets.

Keywords: creative city, cultural and creative industries, sustainable livelihoods approach, culture and arts planning, Masbate

Sustainable development is a type of development wherein the present generation's needs are met while ensuring the future generations' ability in meeting their own needs (United Nations, n.d.). As a sustainable development platform, creativity has long been acknowledged to promote inclusive social progress and people empowerment (Ðtreimikienė & Kaèerauskas, 2020). It drives people to create innovative solutions and fulfill societal needs (Concilio et al., 2018). Ultimately, creativity serves as the foundation of cultural and creative industries which include creative activities such as advertising, architecture, arts and crafts, design, fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television, and radio (Newbiggin, 2014). These constitute the creative economy, which is defined as "knowledge-based economic activities and the interplay between human creativity and ideas, knowledge and technology, as well as cultural values or artistic, cultural heritage and other individual or collective expressions" (United Nations, 2019, p. 2). Given these, creativity is considered integral in realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Awan et al., 2019) and has become a crucial aspect of the development agenda of many cities around the world (Richards, 2020).

Creativity in cities, or essentially in all places, is not a random phenomenon. Eric Weiner, in his book *Geography of Genius*, argues that there are three conditions that make creativity flourish and make the rise of creative geniuses in a city happen. These are disorder, diversity, and discernment. He describes,

Disorder...is necessary to shake up the status quo, to create break in the air. Diversity, of both species and viewpoints, is needed to produce not only more dots, but also different kinds of dots. Discernment is perhaps the most important, and overlooked, ingredient...*in which, as Nobel laureate Linus Pauling said, "You have a lot of ideas and throw away the bad ones."* (p. 324)

On the other hand, several studies assert that for creative cities to be sustained, appropriate government interventions should be in place. For

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example, Sasaki (2010) and Cohendet et al. (2011) argue that there needs to be a well-balanced system of cultural production and cultural consumption, or in other words, a permanent exchange of new knowledge and innovative ideas among different actors in the city.

In the Philippines, at the center of the government interventions to sustain and develop the national creative economy is the Philippine Creative Industries Development Act. Enacted recently in July 2022, the law aims “to promote and support the development of Philippine creative industries by protecting and strengthening the rights and capacities of creative firms, artists, artisans, creators, workers, indigenous cultural communities, content providers, and stakeholders in the creative industries” (Philippine Creative Industries Development Act, 2022, Sec. 2). It also 1) creates the Philippine Creative Industries Development Council, which shall spearhead the development and promotion of the country’s creative industries, 2) institutionalizes the formulation of the Philippine Creative Industries Development Plan, and 3) establishes the Philippine Creative Cities Network (Philippine Creative Industries Development Act, 2022). The third serves as a platform to incubate cities with potential to become members of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Creative Cities Network (UCCN), which is created in 2004 “to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development” (UCCN, n.d.). In 2022, the Network had 295 member cities from 90 countries, each as a creative city representing one of the seven creative fields that it covers, namely, 1) Crafts and Folk Arts, 2) Media Arts, 3) Film, 4) Design, 5) Gastronomy, 6) Literature, and 7) Music (UCCN, n.d.). The Philippines is currently represented by Baguio City, elected as a Creative City of Crafts and Folk Arts in 2017, Cebu City, as a Creative City of Design in 2019, and Iloilo City, as a Creative City of Gastronomy in 2023 (UCCN, n.d.).

Unfortunately, successful policy implementation is usually hampered by various institutional challenges. These include the differences in beliefs and priorities of implementing agents (Cerna, 2013), the lack of a monitoring and evaluation system, poor governance, lack of funding and

resources, lack of effective multi-sectoral platforms, poor organizational culture and structure, among others (Phulkerd et al., 2017). Such challenges are particularly detrimental to the peripheries of the socioeconomic order, which are places that are often backwards, dependent on external aid, marginalized, and deprived (Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochanska, 2019). These conditions also make the peripheries unattractive to the creative class, which is composed of the creators of innovation and is often concentrated in their opposite, the economic cores (Klimczuk & Klimczuk-Kochanska, 2019), such as in the context of the Philippines, the creative cities mentioned earlier.

This study contributes to the literature by answering the question “Can creativity become a platform for sustainable development in the economic periphery of the Philippines?” The specific objectives aim to 1) understand the impacts of creative activities on people’s livelihoods, 2) analyze the institutional arrangements for creativity as a platform for sustainable development, and 3) evaluate the sustainability of creative activities as a sector in the local economy. However, this study has two major limitations. First, it only focuses on one case area, hence only its local creative economy and major existing creative activities are considered. This limitation warrants the need for other case studies focusing on similar research objectives to be conducted to attain a more complete picture of the issues surrounding the sustainability of the local creative economies of communities in the peripheries. Second, this study only relies on qualitative data, hence the need to consider its findings with caution. Nevertheless, this study provides support for the effective implementation of the Philippine Creative Industries Development Act particularly in the peripheries of the Philippines and a deeper understanding about the better integration of creativity as a tool for sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

Analytical Framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) is applied considering the objectives of this study. Several studies have applied this framework in

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assessing the livelihood impacts, institutional structures, and sustainability of various cultural and creative endeavors, such as Bok et al. (2013) and Liu et al. (2022). It is used for analyzing a development platform by considering that:

- 1) People have some assets, which are the framework's central points: the overall objective is to increase them;
- 2) The context in which people live, with an emphasis on their vulnerability;
- 3) The institutions and organizations with whom they relate and that mediate people's access to the said assets; and
- 4) All.... result in people adopting strategies to achieve certain livelihood outcomes. (Pons, 2008, p. 14)

These assets are individually described with their indicators in Table 1. This study focuses on the sustainability of creative activities as a livelihood in a periphery city in the Philippines.

Table 1. The Livelihood Capitals

Capital Assets	Indicators
Natural Capital	The natural resource stocks from which resource flows useful for livelihoods are derived (e.g. land, water, wildlife, biodiversity, environmental resources)
Human Capital	The skills, knowledge, ability to labor and good health important to the ability to pursue different livelihood strategies
Physical Capital	The basic infrastructure (transport, shelter, water, energy, and communications) and the production equipment and means that enable people to pursue their livelihoods
Financial Capital	The financial resources which are available to people (whether savings, supplies of credit or regular remittances or pensions) and which provide them with different livelihood options

Capital Assets	Indicators
Social Capital	The social resources (networks, membership of groups, relationships of trust, access to wider institutions of society) upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods
Cultural Capital	The practices, traditions, and resources that are central to a people's identity and the means and processes to maintain these
Political Capital	The policies and legislations, political supports, governance processes, and formalized institutions that facilitate or hinder the transformation of the other capital assets

Figure 1 shows the interconnected factors that affect the sustainability of creative activities as a livelihood. A modified version of the SLA framework (Bennett & Dearden, 2014), the figure also presents the analytical framework which guides the methodology of this study. The analytical process of the study begins with the policies, institutions, and processes, which include the government action supporting the local creative economy, as well as the cultural and social structures driving it. This is followed by the major historical events, trends, and shocks, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic and the local political instability. Then, this study focuses on creative activities as the strategies that the people apply to sustain their livelihoods. The outcomes of which are also examined, namely, the people's wealth and poverty situation, well-being, capabilities, and job diversification. Ultimately, this study investigates how the people's livelihood capitals are either improved or impaired by the aforementioned factors. These capitals, which are the resource base of a people to sustain their livelihoods, to improve their quality of life, and to be resilient (Pons, 2008), include natural capital, human capital, physical capital, financial capital, social capital, cultural capital and political capital.

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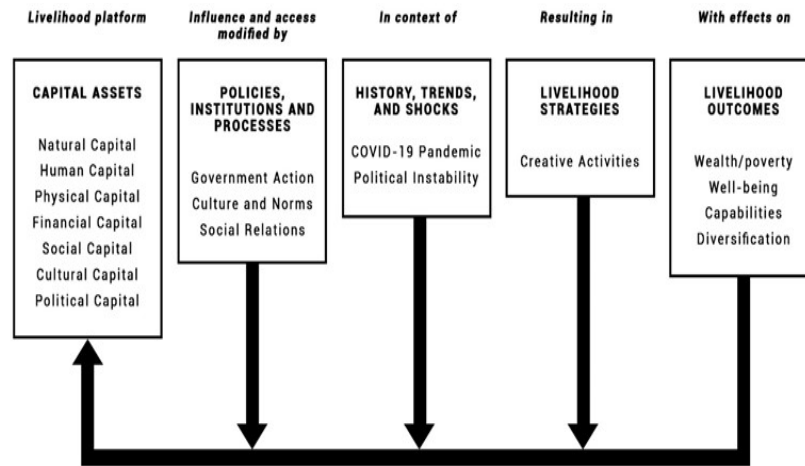


Figure 1. Modified Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
Source: Adapted from Bennett and Dearden (2014, p. 109)

Study Site

This study focuses on the case of Masbate City (Figure 2). It is the capital of the island Province of Masbate in Bicol Region in the Philippines with a total land area of 187.89 square kilometers, and as of the 2020 Census, a total population of 104,522 and a population density of 556.29 persons per square kilometer (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021). The city is selected because it sits as a periphery in the national socioeconomic order and it satisfies Eric Weiner's (2016) conditions for the emergence of creative cities: 1) disorder, 2) diversity, and 3) discernment.



Figure 2. Map of the Philippines with Masbate City highlighted
Source: Wikimedia Foundation. (n.d.). File:Philippines location map.svg. Wikipedia.
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Philippines_location_map.svg

Status as a periphery. Despite being the capital and economic center of the Province of Masbate, the city is outperformed by other cities in the Philippines in terms of relying in its own locally sourced income for its development programs. In 2020, Masbate City had an Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) Dependency Ratio of 85%, making it among the 50 out of the 146 cities in the Philippines with the highest IRA Dependency Ratios (BLGF, 2022). This means that of the total income of the local government unit (LGU) of Masbate City in 2020, 85% came from the IRA, which is an LGU's share of revenues from the Philippine national government, for its total income (BLGF, 2022), while only 15% came from locally generated revenues. Masbate City's figure is very high compared to the IRA Dependency Ratios of the economic centers of Bicol Region, Naga City with 56.8% and Legazpi City with 53.8%, and compared to the IRA Dependency Ratios of the Philippines' capital Manila with 27.8% and of its second major city Cebu with 33.7% (BLGF, 2022). While the general

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socioeconomic conditions of Masbate City have been consistently improving through the years (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021), its IRA Dependency Ratio alone shows that it is still highly dependent on the national government's resources, and it is still highly marginalized and deprived of opportunities to independently lead its local economy.

Experience of disorder. Disorder in the city, as part of the Province of Masbate, is largely characterized by the following major events: 1) the Muslim raids of the 17th century that enslaved and killed its natives (Mallari, 1986), 2) the Philippine Revolution in the late 19th century that drove the Spanish colonial forces out of the province through the leadership of a local revolutionary peasant group called the *pulahanes* (Pelorina, 2020), 3) the Japanese Occupation during the Second World War that caused large-scale food insecurity in the province (Gerona, 2012), 4) the turbulent and violent national political climate under the Marcos and Aquino presidencies in the late 20th century that normalized extra-judicial killings, "disappearances," and other forms of human rights abuses (Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, PREDA Foundation, and WEDPRO, 2003), and 5) the violent rivalry and killings among the political families in the province also in the late 20th century which are highly influential to the extreme poverty situation of the province in the recent decades (Mendoza et al., 2016).

Presence of diversity. Being the capital of the Province of Masbate, an island province at the crossroads of the island groups of Luzon and Visayas, Masbate City is in a strategic position as a melting pot of languages and cultures (Rosero, 2011). The inhabitants of the different towns of the province converge in Masbate City for its institutional, transport, and social services bringing with them their cultures that are influenced by other cultures as well. For instance, the towns southeast of Masbate City, such as Cataingan, Palanas, and Dimasalang have cultures influenced by the Waray people (Rosero, 2011). On the other hand, the towns south of Masbate City, such as Placer and Cawayan have cultures influenced by the Cebuano people, while the towns to its west, such as Mandaon and Balud have cultures influenced by the Hiligaynon people (Rosero, 2011).

The cultural diversity of Masbate City is highlighted during its two major annual festivals, the Rodeo Masbateño Festival and the Lapay Bantigue Dance Festival. These festivals serve as the main platform for creative expression of the local inhabitants especially through the creation of different forms of crafts and through folk performing arts. The Rodeo Masbateño Festival showcases the cattle industry of the Province of Masbate and competitive rodeo events, such as calf wrestling, calf lassoing, and carambola, participated by cowboys and cowgirls from different parts of the Philippines. On the other hand, the Lapay Bantigue Dance Festival showcases the Lapay Bantigue, a folk dance mimicking the movements of a heron locally known as *lapay* and being used as a dance for courtship and to honor Saint Filomena (Estoquia, 2009). Its main event is a street dancing competition participated by different schools in Masbate City, whose choreographies and props are done as a community co-creation process (Estoquia, 2009).

Capacity for discernment. Being an almost consistent awardee of the Philippines' Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG)'s Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) since 2015 when it was launched (DILG, 2022) attests that the local government in Masbate City has a clear direction for its development goals. The Seal "gives distinction to remarkable local government performance across several areas, highlights integrity and good performance to institutionalize local governance reforms in the continuing pursuit for meaningful local autonomy and development" (DILG, 2022). These areas are 1) financial administration and sustainability, 2) disaster preparedness, 3) social protection and sensitivity, 4) health compliance and responsiveness, 5) sustainable education, 6) business-friendliness and competitiveness, 7) safety, peace and order, 8) environmental management, 9) tourism, heritage development, culture and arts, and 10) youth development (DILG, 2022).

Data Gathering

This study is based on qualitative data from three focus group discussions (FGDs). The method was chosen due to its flexibility in drawing out the experiences, thoughts, and perspectives of the participants and because the study greatly benefits from an in-depth understanding of how the creative

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economy can become a sustainable development platform of a periphery city in the Philippines. Two key informant interviews (KIIs) were also conducted to support the findings from the FGDs.

The FGDs involved the three most active local creative groups in Masbate City and were participated by a total of sixteen individuals. Conducted in separate dates in December 2022, the first FGD was participated by three individuals, while the second by five individuals and the third by eight individuals. Open-ended questions were asked to guide the focus group discussions whose aim was to acquire a thorough understanding of how creative activities influenced the members' livelihoods and quality of life and of the factors and their strategies to sustain such creative activities as a livelihood. On the other hand, the KIIs involved the Masbate City Tourism, Culture and Arts Officer and the Masbate Provincial Tourism, Culture and Arts Officer, and were conducted in separate dates in January 2023. Open-ended questions were also asked to elicit information about the existing local institutional arrangements in Masbate City that enable creativity as a development platform.

Both the FGDs and KIIs employed non-probability purposive sampling, in which there was no necessary quota filled and simply the best and most accessible participants meeting the objectives of the study were involved (Bailey, 1994). Furthermore, both were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded with consent of the participants. The audio recordings were transcribed for thematic analysis. Given that the languages used were Minasbate and Filipino, the qualitative data collected was translated by the author to English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Creative Groups

The three creative groups that participated in this study are 1) the Masbate Tudlo Artists' Group (MTAG), 2) the Masbateños' Tattoo Artists (MTA), and 3) the Sining Masbate Artist Guild (SMAG). All of these groups were established by full-time professional artists. Additionally, while these groups mainly operate in Masbate City, some of their members come from the other municipalities of the Province of Masbate. Majority of the members is involved in the creative economy to supplement their income from their primary occupations.

The MTAG was established in April 2015 during an open art exhibit at the Rodeo Masbateño Festival 2015 by friends and sculptors Abril Dominic Valdemoro and Jay Belaguin. They are mainly composed of professionals in their 30s who started arts since their childhood. The group is mainly engaged in sculpture, painting on canvas, and festival crafts making, while its youth apprentice branch groups are mainly engaged in mural painting. Their niche in the local creative economy is their deep connection to the construction of Masbate City's local culture, given their regular participation as crafts makers during its most important festivals and religious events. On the other hand, the MTA was established in December 2019 by tattoo artist Bhong Besoña. The members' ages range from 17 to 37 years old. While the group is mainly engaged in tattooing, its members are also engaged in other livelihoods (e.g. commissioned sketching, convenience store business) as secondary occupations. Their niche in the local creative economy is the highly commercial nature of their creative activity. Lastly, the SMAG was established in December 2020 by interior designer Ann Grebel Villanueva. While the founder is in her 40s, the group is mainly composed of students in their 20s, who mostly started arts since their childhood as well. Majority of them utilizes their creative skills to support their educational needs. The group is mainly engaged in painting on canvas and mural painting, and their niche in the local creative economy is being the most youth-oriented creative group. (See Table 2)

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Table 2. Background of the FGD Participants

Participant Code	Age (years)	Hometown	Primary Occupation
MTAG1	In his 30s	Masbate City	Sculptor and painter
MTAG2	In his 30s	Masbate City	Teacher
MTAG3	In her 30s	Masbate City	Teacher
MTA1	32	Masbate City	Tattoo artist
MTA2	25	Masbate City	Tattoo artist
MTA3	17	Masbate City	Senior high school student
MTA4	21	Masbate City	Barber
MTA5	37	Masbate City	Tattoo artist
SMAG1	22	Masbate City	College student
SMAG2	21	Masbate City	College student
SMAG3	18	Masbate City	Senior high school student
SMAG4	21	Masbate City	College student
SMAG5	22	Cataingan	College student
SMAG6	20	Milagros	College student
SMAG7	22	Mobo	College student
SMAG8	In her 40s	Mandaon	Interior designer and teacher

Policies, Institutions, and Processes

The existing cultural events, such as the Lapay Bantigue Dance Festival and the Rodeo Masbateño Festival, the old national educational programs for the promotion of arts among Filipino students, the positive regard of parents about arts as a hobby of the youth, and the harmonious

member relationships within creative groups were crucial in the promotion of creative activities among the participants. However, the development of the local creative economy as a whole is hampered by the weak institutional capacity not only of Masbate City, but of the entire Province of Masbate in supporting the needs of the creative workers and in finding or creating stable markets for their products, and the tribal mentality among creative groups.

Actions of the Local Government. Table 3 presents the existing programs of LGU Masbate City and LGU Masbate Province related to the creative economy in Masbate City. It shows that the Rodeo Masbateño Festival and the Lapay Bantigue Dance Festival were the only platforms for local creative expression with institutional support for a long time. It was only recent since new interventions for the showcase of the local creative economy have been enforced, such as the Obra Masbateño Arts Festival.

Table 3. Local Government Programs for the Development of the Creative Economy

Local Government Programs	Description	Creative Economy-Related Activities
<i>Institutionalized by LGU Masbate Province</i>		
Obra Masbateño Arts Festival	A province-wide celebration of the National Arts Month held since 2021 every February in Masbate City; mandated by virtue of Presidential Proclamation No. 683 s. 1991	Grant art jam, workshops (for theater arts, tattooing, photography, and videography), tattoo show, poetry reading, dance show, music show, live exhibit (for paintings, literary pieces, bonsai), culinary show, fashion show
Rodeo Masbateño Festival	A non-government-led province-wide celebration showcasing the local cattle industry initiated by local ranch owners and businessmen and held since 1993 every April in Masbate City institutionally and financially supported by the Provincial	Local crafts trade, barn dance contest, rodeo-inspired building decoration contest

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Local Government Programs	Description	Creative Economy-Related Activities
	Government of Masbate by virtue of Provincial Ordinance No. 009-2016 (Masbate Tourism Code)	
<i>Institutionalized by LGU Masbate City</i>		
Creation of the Local Tourism Council	Mandated by virtue of Executive Order No. 06 Series of 2022, requires representatives from the Local Culture and Arts Council	Formulation of the local tourism development plans with attention to the preservation of local culture and arts
Creation of the Local Culture and Arts Council	Mandated by virtue of Executive Order No. 07 Series of 2022, composed of the Mayor, the Vice Mayor, the Committee on Education Chairperson of the Legislative Council, the President of the League of Barangays, a local historian, local artists (representing dance, music, and visual arts), and the Superintendent of the Schools Division	Coordination of efforts for the enrichment of local culture, heritage, and arts
Lapay Bantigue Dance Festival	Institutionalized by virtue of Ordinance No. 191-17 (Masbate City Tourism Code) as the City Festival showcasing the Lapay Bantigue folk dance and being held since 2002 every September during the anniversary of Masbate City's conversion from municipality to city	Street dancing competition, festival costume show
Celebration of the National Arts Month	A city-wide celebration of the National Arts Month held since 2020 every February; mandated by virtue of Presidential Proclamation No. 683 s. 1991	Art jam, poetry writing contest, variety show, visual arts exhibit

Aside from the programs of LGU Masbate City and LGU Masbate Province, there are existing national programs promoting arts among the youth that also paved the way for the participants to access the local creative economy and to encourage more individuals to be part of it. Referring to the Department of Education (DepEd)'s Special Program in the Arts (SPA) for high schools, SMAG6 shared,

Since elementary, mahilig talaga ako magdrawing-drawing pero...parang hobby ko lang po siya. Pero n'ong naghig school po ako...nagkaigwa ako san opportunity na makakadto sa special section. Naging visual arts po ako...Pero nadissolve po ang section namon. [I like drawing since elementary school but...I used to do it only as a hobby. But when I was in high school...I had the opportunity to be in a special section. I was under the visual arts (specialization)...But our class got dissolved.]

Unfortunately, the existing aforementioned government programs are not enough to sustain the local creative economy. The participants raised that the local governments are still not proactive in actualizing the potential contributions of creative workers to local development. For example, MTAG1 argued,

Dili masyado maback-upan san space...wara masyado activities, wara masyado exposure kaya dili din siya continuous...Kadalasan pano, pag may event lang eh, or pag may naisip kami na event, adto man sinda nagasupport. Pero kapag may event, ayon nagahatag san space or konting budget. [We are usually not given space...there are very few activities, there is less exposure, thus, our income (from creative activities) is not continuous...We usually gain their support only when they organize an event, or when we organize our own event. Nevertheless, when there is an event, they give us space and some budget.]

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In addition, in the existing platforms provided by the local governments for their constituents' creative expression, there were instances that showed their incapacity to effectively coordinate the needs and welfare of the creative workers. SMAG8 shared,

Nagkaroon ng salisihan ng chain of command [There was a disagreement in the chain of command]....We were all following their prerogatives and their commands so I entrusted everything to them, not knowing that a lot of artists got that feeling of total disappointment.

Nevertheless, local governments remain as the primary market for creative workers in periphery local economies like Masbate City, which reasserts their crucial role in ensuring the development of the local creative industries. Supporting this for instance, MTAG1 argued,

Kapag nagacommission, an usual na source kay an simbahan, an school, kag government. [The usual sources of commission projects are the churches, the schools, and the government.]

Culture and Norms. The participants of this study discussed that the positive existing local culture and norms motivate them to partake in creative activities. SMAG6 and SMAG5, respectively, said,

Very supportive sugad si Mama kay nakita niya na an passion niya adi sa akon. [My mother is very supportive because she saw that her passion is passed on to me.]

An nagencourage lang po sa akon kay...pinsan ko...Guinaencourage niya ako na mag-arts man po. [The one who encouraged me was...my cousin...He encouraged me to do art.]

However, despite the positive regard of the participants' families about creative activities as highlighted above, given that the study only

considered their insights as creative workers, it is still not conclusive to claim that the local culture and norms of Masbate City generally favor creative activities as a long-term livelihood strategy.

Social Relations. The participants of this study expressed that the social relations within creative groups are integral in helping them address their needs as creative workers and their personal needs. For instance, MTAG3 explained,

Idton mga guinamural namon... 'yon nga, ikaw an magastos san pamasaha. Inan bagan sa akon...suporta na sa mga bata. Tapos inan sa income ninda, machat ina sa imo na "Ma'am, salamat" kay may pambakal...na sinda san bugas, pambulig sa guinikanan. [During our mural sessions...someone should really shoulder the transport expenses. For me, I see it as...support for the young (artists). When they earn (from mural painting), they will chat me, "Ma'am, thank you" because they could buy...their food, and help their parents.]

However, the participants of this study also argued that there is a tribal relationship among the local creative groups in Masbate City, which hinders the local creative economy from becoming a sustainable contributor to local development. SMAG6 and SMAG8, respectively, described this tribal relationship:

The moment na nameet ko sinda at naobserve ko an attitude, an behavior ninda, parang it gives me disappointment na rin po. 'Yong parang sila 'yong ahead sa amin tapos nakikita namin 'yong ginagawa nila. [The moment I met them and observed their attitude, their behavior, I got disappointed. I thought that they were good because they are older than us.]

There's this culture in Masbate na kasi nga kayo 'yong nauna, you really have to...revere or give them respect...Nashock 'yong kabataan na "Ay kala natin pantay-pantay tayong lahat dito"

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[There's this culture in Masbate wherein if someone got first, you really have to...revere or respect them...The young (artists) were shocked (because) "We thought we are all equals here."]

MTAG2 claimed that such tribal relationship among creative groups is not new. He explained,

San college ako, amo pa idton naranasan namon, sa mga artists, na medyo nagaararaway kag nagapasluan sa mga aram ninda.
[When I was in college, we witnessed how the artists were being competitive against and resentful toward each other.]

SMAG8 recommended a solution to address the tribal relationship among Masbate City's creative groups, which is supported by a similar suggestion by MTAG1. Respectively, they said,

There should be this community...*organization talaga na maghahandle ng lahat ng artist group dito para walang separation* [an organization that handles all the artist groups so there would be no separation]...There is competition, *hindi maiwasan* [it is inevitable]...but we have to learn to really collaborate, whether we like it or not, whether we hate this person or not...*para mas maganda ang resulta* [so the results would be good].

Why not na magcreate kita san community na pwede mo masharean san aton experience, san aton technique, san aton mga hinaing as an artist? Tapos 'yon kumalat siya, idton idea, sa Masbate? [Why not create a community where we can share our experiences, our techniques, our grievance as artists? So that our ideas would spread all over Masbate?]

History, Trends, and Shocks

The major historical events and shocks that arose during the FGDs are the COVID-19 pandemic and unstable political situation of Masbate City. In general, while the participants were negatively affected by these events, they were able to pursue alternative actions to sustain their individual creative activities.

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. During the onslaught of the pandemic, the livelihoods of some participants were negatively affected and settled for other sources of income instead. MTA3 shared:

Siyempre an iba, nawaraan income. An mga dati na client, bihira na sinda magpatattoo...Nagkawaraan an iba san trabaho...Nag-asa na lang ako sa pagaportrait, pagadrawing. [Of course, some lost their income. (Suddenly) my regular clients did not avail my services as frequent as before...Others lost their jobs...I depended on making portraits, sketching instead.]

Meanwhile, for some participants, the pandemic was the period that provided them the opportunities to organize a creative group (such as the case of SMAG8 on her initiative of establishing SMAG) and to showcase their creative works (such as the case of MTAG3):

Bakit ko 'to ginagawa? Actually the only answer is it's because of my happiness, and for my daughter's social well-being na rin...kasi di ba nabago ang buhay namin because of the pandemic. [Why do I do this? Actually the only answer is it's because of my happiness, and for my daughter's social well-being too...since our lives were changed because of the pandemic.] (SMAG8)

An pandemic mas natagaan sinda san chance na mashowcase lugod an inda mga ano...Sani lugod na pandemic...Inan sa Adopt-An-Artwork, bagan ipupost ko an inda artwork, tapos kun sino an gusto mag-adopt sana na artwork, mahatag sinda san food

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package...Gusto ko makabulig through arts kay amo lang an aram ko...Damo-damon nag-ano baya. [The pandemic paved for their chance to showcase their skills...During this pandemic...I launched the Adopt-An-Artwork, wherein I post a (young artist's) work, and if someone wants to adopt it, they should provide its creator a food package...I wanted to help through arts because it is the only thing I know...Fortunately, there were many (people) who participated.] (MTAG3)

Impacts of Political Instability. Majority of the participants declared that they were not affected by the unstable local political situation. However, some of them raised their resistance to being used as tools by politicians for their personal interests. MTAG1 shared,

Dili kami nagatanggap-tanggap yana sanan sa government, kasi nagagamit kami sa propaganda...Sa una, sige lang iadopt naton kasi kailangan naton san exposure, san activities. Pero lately, dili na kami...inan sinda an nagademand kun nano an hihimuon...Yana dapat kami an mapropose sa iyo. [We do not accept any projects from the government (politicians), because we are being used for propaganda...We used to think that we just had to accept them for our exposure, for our activities. But lately, we decided not to accept...any project solely considering their demands...Nowadays we are the ones who should propose a project to them.]

Livelihood Strategies

The existing policies, institutions, and processes surrounding the creative economy of Masbate City in the context of major historical events, trends, and shocks resulted in the creative activities that are presently practiced by the participants. The major creative activities discussed were commissioned sketching, mural painting, painting on canvas, sculpture, festival crafts making, and tattooing. The participants described how they started their individual creative activities:

Hali po ako sa pagacommission...Kay wala po ako dati san gamit, an guinatory ko lang kay inan mga color-color lang...Nagtry man ako san uring, pero nagaexplore pa ako san mas grabe pa. Nagtry man ako san graphite. [I started by doing commission works...Since I do not have any materials, I just drew using the regular crayons...I also tried charcoal, but I explored more. I also tried using graphite.] (SMAG2)

Salamat sa fellow Sining Masbate members, nagastart na kami magexplore, nakaano na kami sa pagmural. Naenhance na an pagapaint ko. [Thanks to my fellow Sining Masbate members, we started exploring, such as mural painting. I (also) enhanced my painting skills.] (SMAG6)

Usad sa pinakapurpose nano kay nagbirilog gayod kami kay gusto namon iuplift an pangaran san artist didi sa Masbate...So nagcreate kami san mga activities, tapos maliban sa activities, naghimo din kami san part na maifinance ang grupo while doing art. Amo idton nanghimo kamin mga projects sa City, sa Province. Tapos amo nag-urusputan didi an mga sculptures, an mga exhibits din. [The very purpose why we organized ourselves was we wanted to uplift the image of the artists in Masbate...We launched activities, and aside from activities, we also raised funds for our group while doing art, by doing projects commissioned by LGU Masbate City and LGU Masbate Province. That's how the sculptures and exhibits became a norm here.] (MTAG1)

Kapag Lapay...sa props...mga bado...Kanya-kanyang school...Mga Tudlo sana an nagahimo. [During the Lapay (Bantigue Dance Festival)...for the props...for the costumes...for each (participating) school...It's Tudlo that makes them.] (MTAG3)

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Nakatry ako magcharcoal, magpainting tapos nainspire ako...Nakita ko sinda na guinahimo ninda an art ninda sa panit. Para sa akon, an pinakamahal na canvas is human canvas. [I tried (sketching) using charcoal, painting, then I got inspired...I saw how do their art on skin. For me, the most expensive canvas is the human canvas.] (MTA2)

Mas guinpili ko pano an pagatattoo kay san tambay pa ako tapos umudong pa ako pagklase. Mas mahirap na tambay ka na, wara ka pan kwarta. [I chose tattoing instead of lazing around, especially since I stopped going to school. It's difficult when you're already lazing around, and you also have no money.] (MTA4)

Livelihood Outcomes

The creative activities in contributed in improving the participants' wealth and poverty situation, their well-being, their capabilities, and their options for employment. Findings from the FGDs also showcase that the enhancement of their capabilities allowed the participants to increase their earnings from creative activities, which eventually contributed to their wealth and to diversifying their sources of income.

Wealth and poverty. Table 4 presents the amount the participants earn from the major creative activities that they are engaged in which supports them in alleviating their poverty and building their wealth. It is shown that painting on canvas, sculpture, and tattoing are the most profitable activities for individual livelihoods.

Table 4. Participants' Earnings from the Major Creative Activities

Creative Activities	Estimated Earnings
Commissioned sketches	PhP 50.00 to PhP 1,000.00 per commission
Mural painting	PhP 5,000.00 to PhP 8,500.00 per mural
Painting on canvas	At least PhP 10,000.00 per painting

Creative Activities	Estimated Earnings
Sculpture	Around PhP 10,000.00 per sculpture
Festival crafts	Around PhP 20,000.00 per set of festival crafts
Tattooing	Around PhP 20,000.00 per month during off season and PhP 40,000.00 to PhP 50,000.00 per month during peak season for established tattoo artists

Note: 1 USD = PhP 56.10 (December 1, 2022)

The participants shared that their earnings from such creative activities allowed them to address their basic needs and improve their standard of living. For example, SMAG1 and MTAG2, respectively, said,

Gamay pa man lang an naincome ko...dili ko pa man masyado nabubulig sa akon pamilya, pero nakabakal na ako san akon mga kailangan...Amo na an nakasustain sa akon. [I earn very little...My earning does not help my family that much yet, but I am able to buy for my needs...It is what sustains me.]

May mga bata kami na naging successful...usad na na lawyer. Dati nagabulig lang idto siya sa mga murals man. Nakatapos siya sa pagaklase niya. [We have former young artists who are now successful...one became a lawyer. Before he was with us in our mural projects. He was able to finish his studies.]

Well-being. The participants shared that engaging in creative activities particularly improves their mental well-being. For example, SMAG4 and SMAG6, respectively, shared,

Nakabulig gad siya sa emotions, pagaexpress san thoughts, san feelings. [It really helps with processing our emotions, expressing our thoughts, our feelings.]

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Guinahimo ko po siya na stress reliever. So every time nahihirapan, guinadrawing ko lang siya. [I use it as my stress reliever. So every time I encounter difficulties, I just sketch.]

Capabilities. The participants emphasized that becoming more active in practicing their creative activities allowed them to improve not only their creative but also professional capabilities. They explained,

Inan pamural ninda, aside sa nagakita sinda, napapractice...Inan learning ninda, bagan way na mas nakakaaram na sinda. [Aside from earning from their mural projects, they are also able to enhance (their skills)...It is a way for them to learn more.] (MTAG3)

Mas naimprove pa an akon iba na kuan. Kay dili porket tattoo ka lang, ada ka lang gad sa tattoo mafocus. Mapipiritan magimprove lalo na sa coloring sa iba na bagay. [I also improved my other skills. Just because you tattoo doesn't mean that you should only focus on it. You are forced to improve, especially in coloring.] (MTA2)

Pinapolish namin ang [We polish our] professional approach of handling projects like murals and handling their clients. (SMAG8)

In addition, they argued that as they enhance their skills, they also increase the value of their outputs. For example, SMAG2 said,

An guinakita ko po san dati...100 lang sa mga commission ko hasta nag-improve na nag-improve...Depende po kasi ina sa client kasi nagstart po kasi ako sadto...mga low quality pa lang an akon nahihimo, so less pa lang talaga an bayad. [I used to earn...only 100 for my commissions and then (the price) has gotten higher...It really depends on the client because when I

started...my works were of low quality, so of course, my earning was rather low.]

Diversification. The participants stressed that engaging in creative activities allowed them to diversify their sources of income, e.g., by financing their small businesses, by supplementing the incomes they earn from their primary occupations, among others. They shared,

'Yong current ko pong ano, inano ko siya sa negosyo namin kasi nagstop for awhile si Mama...kasi n'ong pandemic, tumaas 'yong mga ano...'yong nakuha ko pala ngayon, inano ko po pangcapital po sa sisiw. [I used my current earnings to finance our small business that my Mom temporarily stopped...because during the pandemic, the prices inflated...so what I currently earn, I use it for capital for poultry.] (SMAG6)

Sa akon, dako-dako na bulig an akon income sa tattoo pero pwersa sa tattoo, may mga sideline ako. Igwa ako san store...nagagraphic artist ako. [For me, the income that I earn from tattooing has helped me a lot, but aside from tattooing, I also have other sources of income. I have a small convenience store...I am also a graphic artist.] (MTA1)

Kulang talaga as a teacher pero nakabawi dahil sa arts. [My income as a teacher is really insufficient, but I was able to earn more because of doing art.] (MTAG2)

Access to Livelihood Capital Assets

Despite the drawbacks in the policies, institutions, and processes surrounding the local creative economy, as well as those caused by historical and political shocks, the results of the FGDs indicate that it nevertheless enabled or improved the participants' access to financial capital, which became their platform to also enable or improve their access to other livelihood capitals, particularly human capital, physical capital, social capital, cultural capital, and political capital. While the participants did not explicitly mention

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any example on how the local creative economy influenced their access to natural capital, there was a consensus in the FGDs, as mentioned in the livelihood outcomes, that it supports them in addressing all of their basic needs.

Financial Capital. Creative activities serve as a source of income and enabled the participants to access financial assets. They asserted that such activities allowed them to have savings and to pay for their loans, which improved their access to financial capital:

Guinsulod ko ini na larangan kay source of income, sideline, kag sa skills sa tawo. [I entered this field as a source income, as a sideline job, and for my skills development.] (MTA4)

Nagatipon ako. An tattoo artist lang talaga, lalo na pag stable ka na ba na paratattoo...okay talaga an incomean. [I have savings. The income is really good as a tattoo artist, if you already have a stable market.] (MTA1)

Nakabulig gayod sa syempre, lalo na an teacher, puno na san loan. Nakasurusideline kami. Dili lang para sa amon kag sa mga bata na guinaupod namon. [It really helps, especially for a teacher who has a lot of loans. It is our sideline job. It is not only for ourselves, but also for the young artists that we join.] (MTAG2)

Human Capital. The participants shared that their earnings from creative activities allowed them to continue their schooling or to support the health needs of their families which improved their access to human capital. For example, SMAG2 explained,

Mas napapriority ko po an akon pagbayad san tuition kay mas dako na an akon nakikita. Bisan ada lang ako sa balay, since pandemic po, mas productive po an akon nahihimo...Minsan guinatunga ko po kasi sa tuition ko po, kag sa akon mga

pangangailangan man sa personal. [I am able to prioritize paying for my tuition fee as I earn more. Despite being at home because of the pandemic, I have become more productive...Sometimes, I allocate for my tuition, as well as for my personal needs.]

Referring to a fellow creative worker, MTAG1 also mentioned,

Nagkasakit an inda Mama. Tapos below average gad an income. An Mama niya lang an nagatrabaho, tapos paralaba lang...Kailangan operahan. An hinimo niya, tumanggap siya san tumanggap san commission for three months. Napabulong niya Mama niya. [His mother got sick. Their income is below average. Their mother is the only who is working, as a laundress...She needed operation. What he did was he accepted commission work for three months. He was able to have her mother treated.]

Physical Capital. The participants argued that their earnings from creative activities improved their access to physical assets. They use their income to independently acquire the materials they use to sustain their creative works and the materials for schooling instead of relying on their parents. For example, SMAG3 and MTA3, respectively, shared,

Nakakabulig man sa pagkaroon ng kahit maliit na income...like sa gamit, sa mga pagkaon, mga ibang materyales naman para sa utro na gagamiton. [While my earning is still low, it has helped me...such as for my personal needs, for my food, for my materials for my next projects.]

Minsan ang benta ko sa tattoo, guinapambakal ko sa mga gamit ko pangdrawing... Kay minsan kaibahan sa pamatyang na puros lang sampot san baba mo, "Mama, Mama, Mama." [Sometimes I use my earning from tattooing to buy my drawing materials...I feel bad if I always ask my mother for help.]

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They also use their income to acquire or maintain their household conveniences, such as appliances. For example, MTA1 emphasized,

Halos an akon mga gusto bakalon, nababakal ko na. Pero dili man an grabehan...Nakabakal ako san cellphone...Sa pagkaon okay, nakasurvive talaga. Sa appliance, nakabakal talaga. [I was able to buy almost all the things that I wanted to buy. But not extravagantly...I bought a phone...We can survive with the food we have. We can even buy appliances.]

Social Capital. The participants highlighted that their involvement in the local creative economy improved their social capital by allowing them to form groups of individuals with similar interests and to share their expertise and resources not only with fellow creative workers in Masbate City, but also in other provinces of the Philippines. For example, MTA5 explained,

Nagacharat lang kami...Hanggang kaya san grupo na buligan ini, why not? Halimbawa, di pa nagaabot an supply san usad...pahururam-huram kami. Kaya dako-dako na bagay na igwa kamin organization kasi didto, magkakilalahan tanan...brotherhood tanan na artist. [We just chat online...As long as our group is able to help each other, why not? For example, if our supplies are not enough...we just borrow from each other. This is why our organization means a lot to us, we know each other...there is brotherhood among us.]

This is supported by SMAG1 and SMAG8, respectively, saying that,

Nakacommunicate namon idton iba na artists sa iba-iba na lugar...Nueva Ecija...Bataan. [We were able to communicate with other artists from different places...(such as) Nueva Ecija...Bataan.]

Sila-sila, nagshishare-share ng mga gamit nila. Sila mismo, nagrereferan ng clients. [They share their resources among themselves. They also refer clients among themselves.]

However, while involvement in the local creative economy provides creative workers access to social assets, MTA1 argued that the level of social assets a creative worker has still depends on the popularity they gained from years of experience and level of skill. He said,

Mas kilala na kami sa Masbate so syempre, mas damo an clients, mas dako an income. Dili parehos sa inda na kaurupod namon, syempre mga baguhan. [Of course, because we are more known in Masbate, we have more clients, (thus) we have more income. Unlike our other members, since they are still newbies.]

Cultural Capital. Being involved in the local creative economy enabled the participants to access Masbate City's cultural capital by becoming a direct contributor to its development. For example, MTA5 said,

Pag Rodeo, arada ururupod man kami...Cataingan, Bagat-dagat ada man kami tanan. Tanan na may event sa Masbate, ada kami. [We are together during Rodeo...(In) Cataingan, (during) Bagat Dagat (Festival), we are also present. We are present in all events in Masbate.]

MTAG1 also shared how MTAG began promoting the role of artists in the creation of Masbateño culture:

An first namon na exhibit sa Gaisano, nagattend sadto an President san NCCA...2016. Tapos...Kasi nabalitaan dayon na may grupo na...Sinabi namon, di namon aram an amon kultura. An sinabi niya, "So nagacreate kamo san bag-o yana? Nano kay dili niyo hanapon kun nano an kultura niyo?" [Our first exhibit in Gaisano was attended by the President of NCCA

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(National Commission for Culture and Arts)...in 2016. Then...when they learned about our group...we told them that we know nothing about our own culture. He said, “So you are creating a new one now? Why don’t you look for your culture?”]

Political Capital. The local creative economy enabled the participants to be directly involved in the planning and implementation of the local development programs of LGU Masbate City. However, only MTAG is engaged in the process. MTAG3 explained,

Inan sa Tourism, Culture and Arts san Masbate, adto an DTI, an mga hotel owners, tapos an adto lang didto sa listahan san mga organizations ninda sa arts, Tudlo...Dili pwede na mawara siya sa mga meetings...Dapat nababati permi. [In the Tourism, Culture and Arts (Council) of Masbate, the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) is a member, as well as the hotel owners, and the only member organization related to arts (is) Tudlo...Our group should not be absent during meetings...Our opinions always have to be heard.]

Nevertheless, the local creative economy also enabled them to utilize the resources of the government to advance their creative endeavors. For example, MTA5 stressed,

Nakiconnect gad kami sa inda, kay pag may mga event, sa inda gad kami makuha san kusog...Kami an malapit, kami an mahimo san proposal namon. [We connect with them, because we ask for resources from them during our events...We approach them ourselves, we also formulate our proposal (for them) ourselves.]

DISCUSSION

The major creative activities that the participants of this research are engaged in are commissioned sketching, mural painting, painting on canvas, sculpture, festival crafts making, and tattooing. This study found that engaging in these activities as livelihood strategies either enabled or improved their access to financial capital, which became their avenue to also enable or improve their access to other livelihood capital assets, particularly human capital, physical capital, social capital, cultural capital, and political capital (Wang et al., 2021). Ultimately, these contributed in improving their wealth and poverty situation, their well-being, their capabilities, and their options for employment, which are essential factors towards social progress (Dtreimikienė & Kaèerauskas, 2020). The findings of this study also showcase that the enhancement of their capabilities inspired innovation and allowed the participants to earn more from creative activities (Concilio et al., 2018), which eventually contributed to their wealth and to diversifying their sources of income. These foundations supported them to adapt to the impacts of external shocks, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, and pursue alternative livelihood strategies that are still related to their primary creative occupations, a common phenomenon when creative workers face financial struggles (Alper & Wassall, 2006).

Meanwhile, the existing institutional arrangements in Masbate City that enabled the participants of this study to engage in creative activities as livelihood strategies include its major cultural events, namely, the Lapay Bantigue Dance Festival and the Rodeo Masbateño Festival, the old national educational programs for the promotion of arts among Filipino students, the positive regard of families about arts as a hobby of the youth, and the harmonious member relationships within creative groups. Similar trends were observed in established creative cities in the Philippines, such as Baguio (de Guzman, 2020) and Cebu (Montera & Lin, 2018). However, the sustainability and progress of Masbate City's creative economy is hampered by the weak capacity not only of its local government, but of the entire Province of Masbate in supporting the needs of the creative workers and in finding or creating stable markets for their products, which is in line with the findings of Roy

and Mohapatra (2023), and Mahon, McGrath, Laoire, and Collins (2018). In particular, these are crucial in ensuring a well-balanced system of cultural production and consumption that is necessary for the sustainable development of a creative economy (Sasaki, 2010; Cohendet et al., 2011). The persistence of the tribal relationship among creative groups in Masbate City also hinders the promotion of collaboration, which may allow for opposing development goals that usually result in unsustainable outcomes, e.g., the case of the municipality of Angono in the Province of Rizal (Hartley, 2018). This further supports the need for institutionalizing a system that could resolve divisive behaviors (Sasaki, 2010).

Thus, while the local creative economy already exists as a platform for improving the quality of life of the creative workers, the aforementioned weaknesses need to be addressed to make it a sustainable platform for Masbate City's economic development (Hartley, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the potential of creativity as a sustainable development platform of Masbate City, a periphery city in the Philippines. Applying the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and using qualitative data from focus group discussions participated by local creative groups, this study found that creative activities enabled or enhanced the participants' access to financial capital, which became their platform to also enable or enhance their access to other capitals that are crucial to sustain their livelihoods. These creative activities flourished from various established cultural festivals in Masbate City, as well as the institutionalized national programs for the promotion of arts in schools. However, while creative activities have the potential to be a development platform in Masbate City, their sustainability is hindered by a number of challenges, and at the center of which is the weak institutional support of its local government for the local creative economy. Thus, in making creativity a platform for the sustainable development of Masbate City, this study recommends the following:

1. **Building the institutional capacity of LGU Masbate City and of LGU Masbate Province on the sustainable, inclusive and ethical management of the local creative economy** by a) establishing a creative community council that will be in-charge of coordinating with different creative workers and groups to collaborate on and to plan for collective activities toward the development of the local creative economy in coordination with relevant agencies, e.g., local tourism, culture and arts office and local economic enterprise office, among others, b) ensuring that the Local Tourism Council and the Local Culture and Arts Council serve as avenues where the creative workers can freely raise their suggestions and concerns and have representatives reflecting the major local creative activities, and c) training the personnel of the local tourism, culture and arts office and other relevant agencies on the respectful and ethical way of handling the creative workers' needs.

2. **Developing the local creative economy infrastructure, labor force and markets** by a) establishing free and open spaces for creativity in or near existing locations for socialization, b) enforcing the existing national educational programs on creative skills appreciation and development, c) conducting regular public workshops and courses on the development of creative skills for livelihoods especially for disadvantaged groups, and d) partnering with commercial institutions and local governments within and outside the Province of Masbate to establish stable markets for the creative workers' outputs.

3. **Enhancing the local creative workers' entrepreneurship** by a) initiating collaborative efforts among creative workers to innovate existing local crafts toward commercial production, b) conducting workshops on their

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entrepreneurial skills' development, and c) providing financial incentives for creative start-ups especially on the acquisition of materials for the production of creative works.

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