Role of Cultural Development and Public Space Usage for the Poor: Impact to Government Policy and Community Relations (A Philippine Case Study)

Mark Anthony M. Morales [1]
mmmorales2@up.edu.ph

Abstract

This research focuses on social exclusion due to poverty as observed in urban areas; a phenomenon seen to limit engagement opportunities, lower self-esteem and weaken social access of poor individuals; particularly those based in high human concentration areas typical in cities. Since most people-to-people interactions demand a spatial component to host such activities, the role of public spaces are likewise highlighted due to its accessibility among city residents and visitors. To address the abovementioned social dilemma, cultural development - celebrating binding beliefs and values among people through expression of their culture – was found to create opportunities wherein public space usage is able to bridge social divisions and accommodate opportunities of communal interaction and city development.

This study looks at cultural development and its impact to policy, people, and public space through a medium (art) that highlights unique features embedded in cities and communities. After establishing the theoretical base of this study, case study areas were identified and policy documents were examined to see how governments – amidst limited resources - expand cultural development alongside partner stakeholders. Key-informant interviews were also done to fill data gaps. Research shows that government engages with volunteer groups to strengthen its cultural development agenda; at the same time, poor individuals are found to join volunteer art-groups to learn new skills and expand network opportunities. The collaboration between government and volunteer groups led to events and activities that better utilize socio-spatial potentials of urban areas; using citizen engagement via cultural development to promote social access especially for the poor, while opening public space development and management opportunities for the city. Together, a participative development strategy among poor individuals, volunteer groups and government is promoted; a culture-driven governance policy hinged on improving community relations, social acceptance, and spatial growth opportunities in the city.

Keywords: Local governance, volunteer groups, cultural development, public space, social access

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[1] Dr. Mark Anthony Morales is an Assistant Professor and former Director of Training and Extension Services of the University of the Philippines School of Urban and Regional Planning (UP-SURP). He is currently serving as the Director of UP Diliman Office of the Campus Architect. His research interest is on impact of Cultural Development on socio-spatial relationships in built environments.

I. Introduction

Poverty is a longstanding pattern of inequality that, as Amartya Sen (1999) has described, is a lack of capabilities that disallow people to achieve things they want to do and experience (Hulme, Moore, & Shepherd, 2001); supported by figures that as recent as 2005, 1.38 billion people worldwide live below the international poverty line of US$ 1.25 per day (Sumner, 2012). It is also a problem observed to be more prevalent among developing societies (Tsai & Huang, 2007; United Nations, 2014), with cities as urban locations where major population movement gravitates towards hosting the main burden of poverty (United Nations, 1990). Originally viewed as 'a lack of income, expenditure or consumption' and analyzed via 'money-metric approaches that measure these deficiencies' through related quantitative forms of analysis (Hulme, et.al., 2001), efforts to understand poverty has broadened to consider quality of life issues in terms of exclusion that is social as well as cultural in nature (UNESCO, 2011; 2017). If we are to look at poverty from this social perspective (Figure 1), the following factors are considered: (1) loss of pride, (2) lack of social support, (3) pervasive feelings of loneliness, (4) lack of dignity, and (5) lack of openness amongst communities (Howe & McKay, 2007; UNESCO, 2011; 2017).

In search of answers, it was found that 'access to support and knowledge' (Figure 1) is a key area to consider in identifying means to rise above this aspect of being poor (Howe & McKay, 2007). In this regard, if a key to understand poverty is through its cultural ramifications, in what way can culture be then used in developing government policy to promote 'access to support and knowledge' so that the poor may rise above social exclusion and a deteriorative quality of living? Moreover, is there a spatial dimension that we need to be aware of for this culture-led development to succeed?
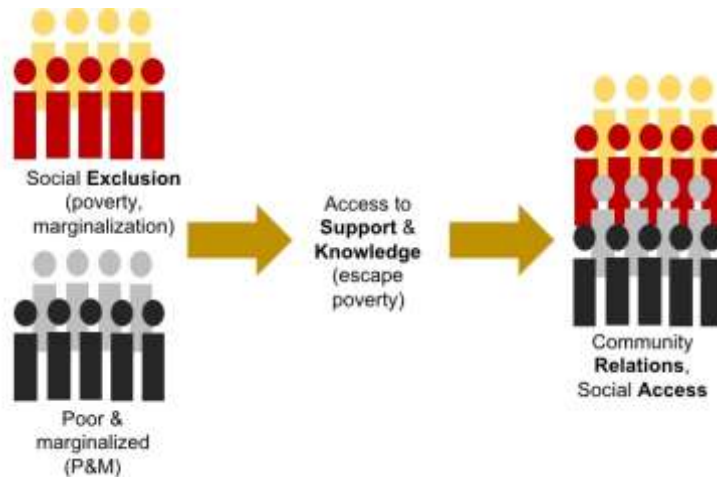
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Figure 1. Access to support and knowledge: Means to rise above poverty, improve social relationships for the poor.
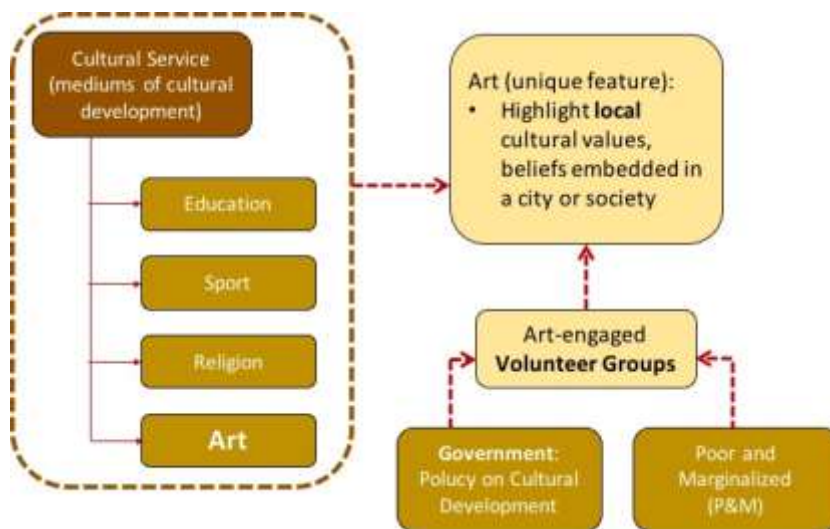

Figure 2. Culture expressed through Art as a unique Development Catalyst for cities and its citizens.

Figure 3. Cultural development through art: Activities/events where art groups (recruits poor members to help them rise above poverty) participate; using public space and gov't policy to promote community relations and social access for the poor.

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Culture as Development Catalyst

In 2010, ten years after the Millennium Declaration was adopted by its General Assembly, the UN moved towards recognizing the importance of cultural development in realizing its Millennium Development Goals (UN-MDGs); affirming the role of culture as 'a driver for development, with community-wide social, economic, and environmental impacts; with particular relevance for its contribution to poverty alleviation' (UNESCO, 2012). Culture is defined as a 'stock of tangible and intangible expressions' (Cochrane, 2006; Throsby, 1999) that people use to manifest their respective communal identities; qualities that define common values and beliefs binding them together. It is a cornerstone of human development and social relationships, with its contribution exemplified in its use as a development medium by government to promote understanding and opportunities among the people they represent (Kim, 2011). In this regard, governments were found to facilitate skills development among their constituents through various 'cultural service' mediums; knowledge platforms wherein skills acquired enable people to express the cultural values and beliefs that are of value to the society it represents. Obtained through 'cognitive development, recreation, spiritual enrichment, and aesthetic experiences' (Church, A., Burgess, J., Ravenscroft, N., 2011), these values and beliefs are developed and expressed through education, sports, religion, and art (Cochrane, 2006; United Nations, 2005).

Among these platforms of cultural expression, it is observed that education, sports, and religion have taken a more uniform or international set of cultural features or themes; similar regardless of place or society in which it is being applied or propagated. On the other hand, we may notice that the skills developed towards expressing various art forms (e.g. dance, painting, music, theater, among others) has a capacity to express or highlight local cultural identity traits embedded in a city or society; unique features that local governments may integrate into their policy agenda - to highlight their city's inherent competitive advantages - more so from the social and spatial realms as this research is focusing on. It is in this context that the cultural service of art is focused on in this study (Figure 2).

Cultural Development Policy and Public Space

A key component in this study is how government policy in cultural development leads to skills development opportunities that promote improved community relations and social access benefitting the poor. Beyond social discussions, the spatial dimension wherein culture (through art) allows its practitioners (i.e., the artist) to interact with his/her audience (i.e. the community) and be bonded by their common cultural values is also recognized for its importance; especially as poverty cases concentrated in our urban centers are growing (United Nations, 1990). Recognizing this socio-spatial relationship between tangible and intangible expressions of culture (Cochrane, 2006; Throsby, 1999), it is of interest to know how art-engaged poor individuals are using cultural development policy to impact personal growth, community relations and overall quality of living; as well as how governments are positioning unique cultural features embedded in cities as a development catalyst (Kim, 2011). In this regard, the lead role of government in mobilizing partners and resources to promote development opportunities for the people it serves (especially the poor) is emphasized.

Most of the literature pertaining to cultural development policy focuses on construction and expansion of cultural facilities for urban regeneration, cultural diplomacy or exchange, as well as funding for cultural activities and events (Attanasi, Casoria, Centorrino, & Urso, 2013; Ogoura, 2009; Strom, 2003); while information concerning art-engaged policies and programs that facilitate skills development opportunities for the poor so as to improve community relations and social access (Boykoff, 2012; Nakagawa, 2010) is comparatively few and far between. It is for this reason that this paper is focusing on cultural development as it impacts the poor, with emphasis to policy and community relations.

Regarding public space, we are aware of the role of place making on people's perception of their environment and the communities interacting in it; from the social, functional, sensorial, and temporal dimensions. Places are also deemed to have a sense of purpose, of meaning, to the people developing, managing, and inhabiting it (Harun, Mansor, & Said, 2013). Spaces in the public realm have a profound impact among people and communities: communal interaction among squares, parks, and a variety of open spaces in our cities where everyone is free to access them as they please; offering multiple opportunities for people to interact, bond, and foster relationships inside these publicly accessible spatial hosts to a myriad of social, economic, as well as cultural activities. Authors such as Tveit (2006), Jacobs (1961), Tibbalds (1992), and Talen (2008) talk of diversity in public space usage; allowing passive and active social activities where the richness of our urban tapestry is woven closer because of such spaces that facilitate – rather than restrict – the strengthening of communal relations as well as development opportunities both for its proponents (e.g. government, private sector owners of publicly accessible spaces) and its beneficiaries (e.g. citizenry who patronize the activities and events in these spaces). Moreover, promotion of usage diversity in these public space likewise promotes assimilation as well (Harun et al., 2013); wherein public space becomes a catalyst for socio-cultural, economic, and physical synergy of opportunities among people. Where else can a poor or marginalized person gain the most opportunities to engage with a person from "ruling" elites? Surely not in the privacy of one's meager home or palatial estate; it is in the public realm that makes the greatest case for interaction – hopefully leading to greater understanding and acceptance – possible for the varying sectors or communities representing our societies (Figure 3).

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II. Methodology

This study takes a qualitative research path that begun with collected library and internet-based data sources. Data gaps from secondary information were reconciled with collected policy documents from the National Commission for Culture and Arts (NCCA) in Manila, as well as concerned culture and arts office in the three study areas (Angono, Makati, and Baguio). Key-informant interviews from national (NCCA) and local (cultural development offices) government were also made. Acquired secondary data brought forth the need to focus efforts of identifying local study areas where art is used as a skills development platform by art-engaged, volunteer groups (that partner with government); in this regard, it was surmised that there is a need to first find cities/municipalities that prioritize culture as uniquely expressed through art as a development catalyst.

Earlier found in secondary data sources (as discussed earlier), interviews of local government officers in charge of cultural development (in chosen study areas) validated the role of art-engaged, volunteer groups as development partners of government. It is at this point that requests for referrals and introductions from the LGU officer/s interviewed were made, so that the researcher will gain access to volunteer group leaders that actively engage with the local government that they are connected with (as residents of a city/municipality); a form of "snowball technique" in accessing groups or individuals in aid of a non-probability based sampling method. "Snowball sampling is where research participants recruit other participants for a test or study" and "is used where potential participants are hard to find. It is called snowball sampling because (in theory) once the ball is rolling, it picks up more 'snow' along the way and becomes larger and larger" (Statistics How To, 2018).

Formal letters were made informing the leaders as well as members of the referred art-engaged, volunteer groups about this research and the type of information that this researcher hoped to get from the referred volunteer groups. Interview dates were scheduled at a mutually convenient time.

In terms of ethical considerations, the author was careful of the sensitive nature of getting information pertaining to 'poor and marginalized (P&M) members' of these groups. In this regard, the discussion points in this paper are based from Key-Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted/limited only to leaders of community-based groups; meaning the identities of P&M members were not asked themselves, but rather their leaders who are very much aware of the plight of these members.

However, there naturally is a need to validate these interviews. In the overall research framework (of which this paper is a part of), qualitative results of these KIIs were later validated through a conducted survey (200 respondents); a survey that did not include asking for the names and other information (e.g., full address, contact info) of the groups' members (esp. poor members of these accessed groups). These were purposely not asked so as to protect their identities (and for ethical considerations). The result of this survey, where statistical correlations were tested using Path Analysis (to test hypothesized causalities in terms of acquired cognitive and non-cognitive skills by members of these community-based groups, and how these skills improved community relations and social access), are discussed in greater detail in a separate journal paper submission.

Study Area Search and Data Collection

Mentioned in earlier parts of this paper are instances of poverty concentration that is prevalent among developing societies (Tsai & Huang, 2007; United Nations, 2014), as with cities being urban locations where major population movement gravitates towards hosting the main burden of poverty (United Nations, 1990). It is in this regard that the Philippines was chosen as the country to identify case study areas for this study; an archipelagic nation of 92.34 million Filipinos; with about 57 percent solely based in the main island of Luzon, the country's largest and most populated land mass (NSCB, 2012). Search for case areas was further limited to the Luzon island proper – excluding the provinces of Marinduque, Occidental and Oriental Mindoro, Palawan, and Romblon, as well as the Batanes group of islands – so as to confine field-work travel to that of being land-based (amidst limited field work resources). The fact that the Luzon Island proper still hosts a majority of the Philippine population of 48.49 million or 53 percent of the total number of Filipinos in the country, further justifies validity in using the Luzon Island proper as base area for the search of study areas.

Within the Luzon island proper lie 51 potential local government case study areas; potential cases that are based in cities or municipalities within the Luzon Island proper. Aware that each of these possible cases are represented in a government website, an internet-based search was first made; checking each of these websites' mission-vision policy statements for their respective jurisdictions. The reason is that mission-vision statements that allude to highlighting the role of culture as a major policy thrust in overall development guided this author in arriving at local governments that actively use culture (through art) as catalyst for development. Results of the abovementioned search show that most of the local governments investigated had development policy thrusts focusing on disaster-risk reduction, agriculture, commercial and/or industrial development, as well as environment and climate change adaptation.

However, four distinctive study areas emerged - based from the original 51 cases - that used 'culture and art' as a major catalyst in their respective development strategies. Of the four study areas mentioned, three shall be discussed in this paper: Angono municipality, Makati City, and Baguio City.

Angono municipality in Rizal Province, with numerous art galleries and artist's studios lining up its streets, is situated 30 kilometers east of the capital city of Manila; a small town with origins as a fishing village, and with a land area of 23.0 square kilometers along Laguna Lake (Angono MPDC, 2012). Angono is a 'municipality' under the Philippine's Local Government Code of 1991. 'Municipalities' (or towns) do not have the minimum population or income requirements that can enable it to

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achieve a level autonomy that is awarded to many other Philippine cities; hence are deemed part (or administratively dependent) with the province in which they are geographically located. On the other hand, Makati, noted for its Central Business District, is a city located in the middle of the National Capital Region (NCR) or Metro Manila; with a land area of 27.35 square kilometers; roughly 4.3 percent of the NCR's total land area. (Makati-ICRD, 2013). Makati City is classified as a 'highly urbanized city' under the Philippine's Local Government Code of 1991. Highly Urbanized Cities are local government units that are autonomous from provinces. Lastly, Baguio City (same classification as Makati City), with majority of its developed areas located on a mountain plateau on the northern part of the city is located in the province of Benguet; two hundred and fifty (250) kilometers north of Manila, on an elevation of 1,400 meters, and with a total land area of 57.5 square kilometers (Baguio CPDO, 2010). Each study area utilizes unique aspects related to 'culture' and 'art' as a development catalyst for their city or municipality. Two of the case study areas – Angono and Makati – highlight the cultural service of art itself as either a primary or secondary/supplemental catalyst to achieve the aspired development for the city or municipality. On the other hand, the city of Baguio chose to focus on the indigenous culture of its people; intangible cultural attributes that so happen to be best expressed through art.

III. Gathered Data

Art-engaged Volunteer Groups: Impact to the Poor and Public Space Usage

Interviews with leaders of accessed art-engaged volunteer groups allowed this research to determine the factors involved on how these groups were created or formed. It turns-out that most of these volunteer groups were created by art-engaged individuals who have achieved success through their mastery of a particular art-form. Many of these individuals (who later on became leaders of their respective volunteer groups) originating from a relative state of poverty themselves; armed with a recurring motivation or urge to give back to society, or at least allow people who – like them at one point in life - are poor and seeking a better chance of improving their status in society. Interviews of these volunteer group leaders share that along with members who are of relative socio-economic affluence; they also have members who are poor. Interestingly, members who are poor initially lacked self-confidence and were hesitant to engage with members of more affluent status. In time, and as these poor members started to acquire admirable skills in the expression of their chosen art-form, these disadvantaged individuals started to gain more confidence, increased their feeling of self-worth, and begun to be more engaging with the rest of their group. Even from the inside of the volunteer group dynamics, it seems that cultural development has an impact in promoting improved social access and community relations.

Outside of the group, the same increased feeling of self-worth, alongside the opportunities involved in the

acquisition of art-skills has enabled poor members to improve their chances of continuing their formal education through art-scholarships or attain employment in related fields. These are believed to collectively allow these poor members to also improve community relations and social access beyond volunteer group dynamics, towards engagement with society at the city level and beyond (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Volunteer-Group Benefits.

Social / Cultural	Serves as an escape from a life of gang violence, drug addiction, other negative peer pressures with the youth
	Gain self-confidence through opportunities of interaction with other members of the group; also applied during engagement with society
Financial / Economic	Members, especially those who are poor, get financial allowances to support their academic studies; usually given by local government, or non-profit groups/patrons
	Group membership open employment opportunities for its members
Organizational / Institutional	Using acquired art-based cognitive skills to continue formal education (through scholarships with colleges, universities)

With regard to how cultural development policy by government benefits the poor, the three local case study areas are found to be in-line with program thrusts as pronounced by the Philippine national government's National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA); where the focus is on cultural development itself. However, though the NCCA has implied policy pronouncements on 'poverty alleviation' - inspired cultural development policy thrusts, local governments tend to focus more on the promotion, preservation, and expression of culture as seen in their local cultural policies. At the same time, interviews of local government officials show an awareness of how local cultural policies – through local government programs and projects that people and stakeholder groups participate in – benefit the poor; by emphasizing engagement with art-engaged, volunteer groups who interestingly, are actively recruiting individuals who are mired in poverty. Apparently, these volunteer groups use the art-form they specialize in (e.g. painting, dance, music, etc.) to train young recruits to become skilled performers and artists; a skills-development platform that - alongside participation in local government's cultural programs and events – becomes a mutually-beneficial partnership between government and groups who use culture and art to help the poor.

To be specific, interviewed local government officials stress that local government actively engages with various civil society (i.e., volunteer groups) in advancing its cultural development thrusts. The local government also market its cultural development programs and projects as

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a means of attracting visitors to stay and spend money inside their city or municipality via a culture (through art)-based tourism platform. Scholarships are likewise mentioned in interviews and offered to deserving individuals and groups; in whom outputs of said people will be integrated into the government's overall cultural development agenda (as participants in its activities, events). However, there were no official lists that were made available to prove institutionalization of the release of such scholarship funds as implied in the conducted interviews; leading the researcher to believe that scholarship grants tend to be released arbitrarily according to the judgment of custodians of such scholarship grants. A possible drawback of this assumed policy scenario is shared by one of the leaders of art-engaged volunteer groups interviewed for this study; wherein it was shared that there was a time when support for their volunteer group was caught in the middle of local politics. Particularly, there was a time when the group did not receive support because they were the brainchild of the previous leader (which was a political opponent of the current administration). This group became inactive for two years because of this lack of government support.

In terms of public space usage, a common answer by the volunteer group interviewees points toward the value of public spaces as commonly accessible areas where their members – especially those who find themselves in the lower economic rungs of the society they are a part of – can practice as well as showcase their craft (e.g., improving skill-sets, expertise in a chosen art-form). The fact that these public spaces are accessible to all allow these art-engaged groups to freely interact with different communities in the society they are a part of; increasing the possibility of engagement and appreciation of the group members' expertise in expressing cultural values celebrated through art; values that are oftentimes deemed laudable by other members of society. These socio-cultural interactions - hosted in public spaces – hasten interactions appreciation and understanding among societal members; where issues attached to socio-economic considerations (e.g., poverty) is put at the rear, and culture (i.e., artistic excellence expressed in public space) is put at the forefront of local development opportunities of people and urban areas.

With regard to how local government consider public space as a catalyst of local development, it was found that local governments are able to maximize key public space locations such as squares, parks, and other open spaces within their city/municipality; taking advantage of historically identified and traditionally recognized places of public congregation where everyone is free to access it as they please. These spaces, usually integrated into the study areas' cultural development agenda (as venue of cultural activities and events) offer multiple opportunities for people to interact, bond, and foster relationships amidst a variety art-based cultural activities and engagements among its constituents.
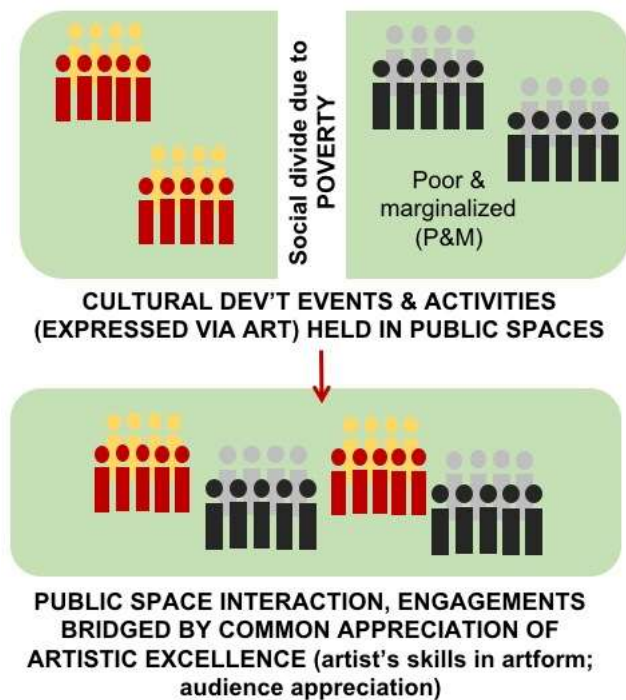

Figure 4. Public space usage (host of events allowing artists to showcase their craft to public) as conduit of socio-cultural interactions regardless of socio-economic status (notions of being rich or poor is overshadowed by a common passion to an artform).

IV. Results and Analysis

A recurring theme among the interviews conducted point to the role of cultural activities and events as catalyst for collaboration between the government and art-engaged volunteer groups; using these events to advance their respective agenda: the government as a means to promote local culture as a development catalyst (generate culture-based jobs and industries to improve the lives of its citizens), and art-engaged volunteer groups using these events as a stage for their members to perform or showcase their skills and crafts with the communities they hope to engage further. This is all the more important to volunteer group members who are poor; since they are the individuals that are most vulnerable to social exclusion due to their state of poverty. By tapping into the value of excellently (and admiringly) expressing the exalted cultural values and beliefs in events attended by many local (and visiting) groups, these volunteer groups are able to impart skills training, support, and opportunities by positioning their members (especially poor members) with greater chances to showcase their newly acquired skills, and be admired, celebrated, and accepted by the society of which they are a part of.

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Local government takes a lead role – with the complementary assistance of art-engaged volunteer groups - in the development of culture in their respective cities or municipalities; consistent with policy discussions from previous paragraphs stating usage of culture as a platform in opening development opportunities. Also, in recognizing the value of developing culture through acquisition of cognitive skills, local governments provide elementary and/or high-school scholarships/allowances to individuals and groups (e.g. art-engaged volunteer groups) that would further promote the cultural development strategy embraced by government. To be more specific, a recurring issue with poverty is many of its victims are forced-out of school so they can already work and help the family with their daily needs. Acquired and developed artistic skills were found as being used by its practitioners (especially poor and marginalized volunteer group members) as a means to acquire skills that were used to broaden one's livelihood-generation opportunities. Some of these young artists used their art-skills to get accepted into colleges and universities through art-related scholarship grants (allowing them a chance to get a degree from a course that, prior to art-skills acquisition, was a highly difficult prospect to achieve); some choose to use art as an immediate way of earning a living; from getting commissioned works for art installations, to joining dance and musical competitions, the winnings of which are used in augmenting the family income of the said member/s. From the local government side, the improved skill levels of these young individuals – members of art-engaged groups residing in said LGU's jurisdiction – broaden the pool of talent that these local governments actively engage in at their respective cultural tourism agenda; having highly skilled performers competing and showcasing local culture and identity cues, which bode well in attracting tourists and potential investors attending the LGU's cultural events embedded in its tourism offerings (e.g., art festivals, town fiestas). From generating valuable skill-sets among the youth (especially poor and marginalized), to broadening the event offerings in an LGUs cultural tourism agenda, a win-win scenario between local government and these volunteer groups is seen.

Regarding social issues benefitting people (especially with the poor), it is observed that local governments highlight the contribution of art-engaged volunteer groups participating with government as partners and participants in its cultural development agenda. Discussions realizing social benefits such as improved community relations and social access (i.e. greater acceptance, admiration in society especially for poor members of these groups) through cultural development are also mentioned as a contributory role of said volunteer groups.

In terms of public space usage and how it relates to local development opportunities, it was found that public spaces become the staging area in which members of art-engaged volunteer groups, whose members (especially poor ones) are participating in the public space located, cultural events by government, are able to partake in a community impact of art in terms of 'providing inspiration to others'. Quoting one volunteer group leader, *'When we have free shows or other performances as well as during outreach programs, some of our audience show their interest to become part of our organization because we inspire them and they get to feel the positivity in us and by looking at their faces, you would see that they want to become like us and join us in the group'* (Morales, 2013; 2014). This input coincides with observations by this author wherein practitioners of a particular cultural service (e.g. art) – wherein excellence leads to admiration from the performers' (or artist's) audience – lead to heightened social value among the community of which he or she is from, as well as the communities that this same person feels excluded from due to being poor. A quote from another key-informant in this research shared that, *'art involves interaction with the audience; through facial expressions and actions, you know if the audience appreciates your work of art'* (Morales, 2013; 2014). To be more specific, artistic performances being made by art-engaged volunteer groups get inspiration from the level of appreciation its audience reciprocates to the performance being made by the artist. Positive 'facial expressions and actions (e.g., clapping, dancing along a performance, among other cues) is viewed as admiration and validation of the work made by the artist to hone his/her craft; leading to an increase in confidence and inspiration that inspires the artist to further develop his/her artistic skills. Moreover, this improved confidence and develop skills in a particular art-form enable an artist/performer to be appreciated more by the community he/she grew-up in, and in a larger context, the society/ies that he/she interacts with as part of a group that performs especially in public spaces where different social groups are present (i.e., commonly accessible areas in a city/municipality); especially in cultural (art) events hosted by government, and attended by local and foreign visitors and tourists, to name a few (Morales, 2013).

Based from the shared life experience by members of art-engaged volunteer groups, it may be surmised that this appreciation generated by the audience for the performer or artist leads to improved community relations and social access. Of course, the role of public space, where these opportunities of cultural interactions take place, is duly recognized; proof that an awareness of the socio-spatial relationship embedded in cultural development (Paddison & Miles, 2007) may benefit not only people and communities, but also to the proper usage – as well as development and maintenance of public space – which government proponents use in hosting related culture-based artistic activities and events.

V. Policy Implications and Future Research Opportunities

Causal relationships in cultural development benefitting the poor may strengthen policy implications where government may more actively use culture in promoting improved quality of living for its citizens (especially for the poor). Based from information compiled in this research, possible policy implications on alleviating poverty and marginalization may be based on employment generation and industry creation; based from

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the themes highlighted in previous sections of this research, namely:

▪ Promotion of local culture policy as a development catalyst (to generate culture-based jobs and industries and improve lives of citizenry)

- To be more specific, a policy wherein LGUs may strengthen their local tourism agenda with a cultural dimension (as expressed through art) could be adopted; paving the way for events to be created that will demand groups or individuals who specialize in particular art-forms (e.g., musical competitions, art contests, dance-offs, etc.). This will create opportunities for community-based organizations to thrive, and more importantly, give exposure to its members (particularly those who are poor and marginalized, gaining recognition through these local events).

▪ Recognize value of developing culture through acquired artistic skills (especially for poor and marginalized individuals) as means to continue formal education (refer to earlier section of this paper and Table 1 for more detailed discussion on how formal education opportunities are enhanced by members of these art-engaged volunteer groups) and/or improve confidence to interact with and be accepted in society

- LGUs may also choose to financially support top performing groups/individuals to join higher level competitions (e.g., provincial, national level)

- The skills learned as well as exposure garnered by these artists will bode well for them in getting employment opportunities in other parts of the country, or maybe even abroad (e.g., musical performers at Hong Kong Disneyland, musical artists at the Manila Philharmonic Orchestra) as some possible employment opportunities that can take root if a strong community-based (grassroots) program for discovering and developing talent can be promoted.

▪ Role of public spaces being used by art-engaged volunteer groups in staging activities and events for their members to perform or showcase their skills and crafts

- LGUs may engage the assistance of these community-based groups in maintaining or developing spaces in the city/municipality, in exchange for giving exposure to these groups in the LGU's tourism (culture and art based) development agenda. This way, it will be a win-win scenario for both sides; the LGU will have a partner with the logistic and expertise to develop or manage public spaces in need of care. At the same time, the community-based group will have a place to practice, perform and a space they can call their own; a place of refuge especially vulnerable members of these groups who are in need of a place to belong, or call their own (Poor and Marginalized or P&M members).

- LGUs may choose to identify under-performing (relatively unused) public areas or spaces (e.g., a park or community playground). After finding out these under-utilized public spaces, LGUs may opt to offer project grant program to interested individuals; wherein their project proposals (in need of funding, like a dance or art competition, or maybe an performance art and exhibit) will be considered for the grant award, if the location of such proposed projects will be in one of the under-used spaces in the city/municipality in need of revitalization. In this case, "culture and art" (as embedded in a dynamic, community-based tourism agendum) can be used as a tool to reinvigorate under-utilized public spaces.

As detailed above, these policy proposals all are in an effort to recognize unique cultural features of cities to be identified and supported further by government, and efforts to reconcile how government can better harmonize art-skills development to opportunities of continuing formal education (e.g. more art-skill based academic scholarship grants) or get employment (e.g. support culture-based tourism) in local areas may likewise be explored or strengthened.

Moreover, initiatives meant to promote and support the activities of art-engaged volunteer groups (i.e., art-skills development) may also be considered; a policy direction wherein local governments may promote (a) competition, (b) support, and (c) public space development and management initiatives may be recommended. These policy measures are meant to create instances wherein these volunteer groups are able to test their art-skills excellence by competing with similar groups in a fun and friendly atmosphere; and from these competitions, it will be easier for local government to identify which groups are in need or are worthy of further support; and lastly, by generating more activity for these groups (thus making their existence more vibrant and dynamic), it will be easier for these groups to mobilize its members (as well as potential patrons) in identifying and managing under-utilized spaces in the city as a place where these groups may practice as well as perform; to be seen and appreciated more by people (since these are in public spaces, art becomes more accessible to the masses also).

As alluded in the last paragraph, the value of developing culture through acquired artistic skills, cities (i.e., especially those with a strong cultural identity that can be used as a catalyst of tourism) may be considered by creating short, medium, and long-term cultural development (through art) masterplans that not only seek to create tourism-based industries and development opportunities that will be beneficial to the city as a whole, but would also specify citizen and group beneficiaries (with an emphasis to those who are poor), as well as local government collaboration opportunities with both the private sector and civil society to create opportunities to maximize showcasing of acquired artistic skills of volunteer group members; creating livelihood opportunities and increased chances of social interactions that may lead to other opportunities beneficial to the artist

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as well as the audience/communities watching or appreciating the artists' skills, work, or craft.

Lastly, with regard to public space usage, reviewed literature has told us of culture's social, as well as spatial, properties (Paddison & Miles, 2007). Beyond social relations as espoused in this research, it is believed that there is also merit in studying policy implications with regard to physical or spatial aspects of creation of cultural identity. This is exemplified by the findings of this research, where it was found that the value of public spaces as commonly accessible areas where their members – especially those who find themselves in the lower economic rungs of the society they are a part of – can practice as well as showcase their craft (e.g., improving skill-sets, expertise in a chosen art-form).

In relation to this, interviews with National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) staff reveal that NCCA becomes aware about the specific location of the projects that they financially sponsor annually (through their "National Endowment Fund for Culture and the Arts" or NEFCA) only *after* the project has been finished and the project proponent has submitted a report about the finished project (Morales, 2013). It is believed that there is merit in focusing not only what the cultural development project is about (e.g., is it aligned with agency thrusts), but also *where* it is to be done (or located) *prior* to release of financial support (e.g., is it in a public space, or a private exclusive area). National government may require local counterparts to provide lists of public spaces in their city, which they recognize as catalysts of cultural development. Secondly, national government may request a list of *actual public spaces being used* in their annual cultural projects (activities, events). Once the national government knows which of the public spaces initially recognized as catalysts of cultural development are not maximized, it is in a better position to request project proponents asking for financial support to find ways of using the said unused public spaces by collaborating with the concerned local government where they plan to hold the event. This way, a national government is in a better position to assist local governments maximize their unique cultural (social and spatial) features; alongside promoting their own national development thrusts and priorities as they see fit for application in the local level. Of course, the role of volunteer groups (e.g. art-based volunteer groups) as units that can help government in the development or management of these spaces should also be considered; not only in widening governance capacity and usage of under-utilized spaces, but also in enhancing the cultural development agenda of the city through events and activities to be borne out of this heightened development and usage of public space for cultural activities.

VI. Conclusions

The representation of government policies in cultural development as manifested in the study areas cited in this study – especially in relation with poverty – suggests of potentials in broadening the manner by which concerned government agencies can widen their mandate of 'culture and art' beyond their primary reasons of institutional responsibility. Amidst broadening policy, programs and projects that explicitly detail poverty alleviation via cultural development, government engagement with volunteer groups is seen as another way in which engagement with partners allows government to further realize its cultural development vision for the poor. As established in this study, cultural policy directions may be enhanced in a way wherein national government could take steps in identifying and supporting local governments that choose to use 'culture through art' as a development catalyst, and to better mesh with local policy; taking advantage of the strengths of each other for their mutual benefit. Likewise, the role of art-engaged volunteer groups should also be recognized as a partner in not only the successful implementation of cultural policy, but in making sure that these policies are made to benefit the poor.

Likewise, the emergence of art as a viable factor that makes cultural development a useful resource for governments and cities is of value to consider; especially with regard to its social – and its spatial – attributes. It is believed that a better understanding of these socio-spatial features can be used to benefit government as it seeks to improve its capacity to serve the citizens it is sworn to serve, as well as the people (e.g., the poor) who need more attention or assistance from government. The role of public space in government initiatives to open development opportunities as well as improved social relations among the people who use these spaces would be a topic worth investigating further; with the manner by which the celebration or expression of culture is harnessed in utilizing these spaces representing a foundation of sorts that future research endeavors may choose to elaborate on.

In closing, this research sought to establish the impact of culture in benefitting the poor as influenced by government efforts in cultural development; highlighting the role of volunteer groups engaged in a cultural service that uniquely highlights local cultural features, and in the process enhancing community relations, government policy, and public space usage. This author recognizes that this research endeavor is only a small facet in the vastness of potential applications related to cultural development. Should there be shortcomings to be discovered, this author humbly extends his apologies. It is hoped that this work may be used to engage other researchers on finding better applications of culture and its engagement in cities and societies, particularly in favor for those who are most vulnerable and have the least in life.

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