

ASLAG PARUL AS A SIGNATURE COLLEGE FESTIVAL OF THE CITY COLLEGE OF ANGELES: PROMOTING LOCAL CULTURE AND EXCELLENCE IN EVENTS MANAGEMENT

Dr. Richard G. Daenos¹ and Marvin C. Punsalan²

¹ College President, City College of Angeles, Angeles City, 2009, Philippines

² Head, Institute for Cultural Heritage Education, City College of Angeles City, 2009, Philippines

E-mail: rgdaenos@yahoo.com

marvincpunsalan@gmail.com

One of the global trends is putting emphasis and importance to cultural heritage as an essential element of society. In the City of Angeles in the Philippines, a century-old tradition of lantern making has made a mark in the community's cultural image. The industry of lantern making in the city is highly associated with the Christmas season and the annual *Lubenas ning Pasku*, a nine-night religious procession of the Catholic in reverence for the birth of Jesus. As a community college, City College of Angeles (CCA) conceptualized a school-based festival to promote and preserve the lantern making tradition of the city. *Aslag Parul Festival* primarily aims to make students aware and knowledgeable on the lantern making tradition of the community and later make them guardians and transmitters of the culture. This paper aims to present the process of conceptualization, preparations, activities, outputs, challenges, and lessons learned during the premiere of the *Aslag Parul Festival*. It also aims to present the individual and collective contributions of the stakeholders in producing the said event. This qualitative research utilized several data collection strategies such as interviews, literature and document reviews, observation, and photo and video documentations of the festival. After the pertinent data have been collected, the research shows that 1) all people in-charge of all aspects of the event played significant roles and worked efficiently in teams, 2) the festival was composed of two parts – a) workshops on lantern making and festival dance and b) the festival competition, 3) financial constraints can be addressed by looking and partnering with benefactors, and 4) through collective works, the school community can produce a rich and festive event. It also revealed that the festival as a cultural and extra-curricular event reflects a number of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In conclusion, this research affirms that education is one of the most influential social institutions for cultural promotion and transmission. Hence, cultural activities can be innovatively promoted and transmitted through events management.

Keywords: *local culture, school-based event management, cultural promotion*

1. Introduction

In the Philippines, Pampanga is well-known to be as the 1) culinary capital and 2) Christmas capital of the country. The pre-colonial era of the place has been recorded to be a civilized and cultured community. During the Spanish colonization, the Kapampangan people (people of Pampanga) were given a sort of favor by exempting them in paying taxes and were entitled for

encomienda. This paved way to more favorable circumstances for the Kapampangan people. That is why, it is not surprising that many Kapampangan cultural practices are of Spanish-influenced.

Generally, Kapampangan culture is diverse as it has been influenced by so many factors such as its geographical complexity, colonial influences, media, cultural and language policies, and other socio-cultural variables.

Angeles City, a chartered city in the province of Pampanga, takes pride of its cultural traditions that have been preserved amidst its cultural vulnerability because of migration and urbanization. One of its century-old traditions is *parul* making. *Parul* is the Kapampangan term for lantern. The use of *parul* in the city, in particular, is highly associated with the Christmas season. Typically used as decors that symbolize Christmas, (the star of Bethlehem in particular), *Parul Angeles* are also utilized during *Lubenas ning Pasku*. This socio-cultural and socio-religious annual community activity is inspired by the nine-day prayer called novena before the birth of Jesus Christ. The term is derived from the Spanish word “luz” which means light and “novena”, the nine-day prayer. The practice is observed through a night procession of the patron saint of each barangay. The procession is led and adorned by lanterns.

Angeles traditional *parul* has been essential in the projection of the city as a cultural hub. The preservation, promotion, and community awareness would play as key undertakings to sustain the leverage of the city taking an equilibrium in terms of being urbanized and being culturally-rooted.

Culture and Heritage

Culture, as a shared element of a particular community, is integrated in the day-to-day living of the people. As a major social influencer in one’s personal development, culture is reflected through attitudinal, behavioral, and/or traditional manifestations. Similar to other social phenomena, culture is dynamic. It changes as a result of different factors such as advancement of technology, globalization, and socio-political activities.

Kottak (2009) mentioned that culture provides a sense of identity. Although individual identity exists on a personal sense, a group of people belonging to a cultural community is collectively described based on their cultural background. Cultural identity can be in a form of attitudes, values, beliefs, or behavior or a combination of all (Matsumoto, 1996). These shared characteristics are explicit cultural image of the people that are normally observed in their daily and traditional activities.

Learning a certain culture can be made through various means. It can be through education, legislation, or tradition. In the lens of practicing community traditions, it shows that culture can be transmitted not only in a lateral direction but also through an intergenerational way. In this context, culture can be interrelated to the concept of heritage. Heritage is defined as anything that has been inherited or transmitted from one generation to another. According to Zerrudo (2020), heritage can be categorized into two, 1) natural heritage and 2) cultural heritage. Natural heritage pertains to the environment and the ecological features of a cultural community. Cultural heritage, on the other hand, is the totality of cultural property preserved and developed through time and passed to posterity (RA 10066 – National Cultural Heritage Act of 2006). United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines cultural heritage as the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributed of a group of society that are inherited from past generation, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generation.

Cultural heritage is further divided into tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible cultural heritage basically pertains to cultural property that can be touched such as kitchen tools, gadgets, clothes, appliances, jewelry, furniture, and even structures such as churches, houses, bridges, building, and the like. These are categorized into two – 1. Movable and 2. Immovable. Movable are those which can be transferred from one place to another, while immovable are those which have fixed location. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills, as well as the instruments, objects and artifacts associated therewith, that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage (RA 10066 – National Cultural Heritage Act of 2006).

UNESCO provided five domains of ICH which are the following:

1. Oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle for ICH;
2. Performing arts;
3. Social practices, rituals and festive events;

4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and
5. Traditional craftsmanship.

Oral traditions and expressions function as transmitter of knowledge, beliefs, and values of a particular cultural group. Spoken in nature, oral traditions and expressions are in the forms of myth, folklore, songs, chants, riddles, legends and the like. The second domain, performing arts, can be categorized into three: music, dance and theatre. Music can be either vocal or instrumental which is used in various events such as spiritual activities, or entertainment purposes. Dance is composed of body movements, usually accompanied by music, and portrays meanings significant to the group and event. Lastly, theatre is a combination of dance, acting, music and dialogues. Like dance, theatrical activities portray meaning relevant to the event. The third domain deals with habitual or seasonal activities of a cultural community. Social practices, rituals, and festive events vividly manifest one's identity. Typically, social practices are observed in the daily lives of the people while rituals and festive events occurred during special occasions. Intangible Cultural Heritage of most cultural communities also gives reverence to nature and the universe. This includes their characteristic of being spiritual. Their cultural beliefs and practices are shaped by their natural environment. Although the result or product is clearly tangible, traditional craftsmanship is under ICH. The underlying cultural processes and procedures to produce crafts are intangible cultural heritage. Over the finished products that are usually celebrated, preserved, and exhibited in museums and galleries, the emphasis on traditional craftsmanship is the art, skills and culture of the processes and procedures in the production phase followed by the people.

Cultural Legislation

The Philippines has also initiated a legal premise relative to the protection, preservation, and promotion of cultural heritage. Republic Act 10066 (RA10066) or also known as the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 provides the a) protection, preservation, conservation and promotion of

the nation's cultural heritage, its property and histories, and the ethnicity of local communities, b) establishment and strengthening cultural institutions, and c) protection of cultural workers and of their professional development and well-being. The state is also mandated to provide a balanced atmosphere of the past and present society.

Consequently, local government units have also taken initiatives that aim the same in the context of local cultural heritage.

Ordinance No. 417, Series of 2017 by the *Sangguniang Panlungsod* (City Council) of Angeles City or the Ordinance Declaring “*Angeles Traditional Parul*” and “*Lubenang Pasku*” as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Angeles City and Establishing Systems and Policies in Safeguarding, providing for Mechanism of Implementation and for Other Related Purposes has been legislated. Section 7 specifically indicates the safeguarding measure and promotion activities that have to be observed. The city government has to adopt a general mechanism aimed at promoting and safeguarding such intangible cultural heritage of the community and establish a multi-sectoral and inter-agency body that would be in-charge in the realization of the content of the ordinance. The body shall be composed of but not limited to Angeles City Tourism Office (ACTO), the Holy Rosary Parish Pastoral Council, Culture and Arts Council of Angeles (CACA), the Kuliati Foundation, and the various barangays. It is also a mandate of the city government to foster practical, scientific, technical, and artistic studies to document and keep cultural information, to secure technical, administrative, and financial measures are also deemed to be essential as reflected in the city ordinance. To ensure recognition, respect, and continuous enhancement of the craft, educational and awareness campaigns shall also be set in place such as integration of lantern-making in the curriculum of public and private schools in Angeles City and annual lantern-making training in the barangays.

Angeles Traditional Parul

Henson (1948) mentioned in his book, “The Town of Angeles,” that the use of *parul* has started since 1830 during the first celebration of La Naval fiesta in Pampanga.

Also, an assumption was made that origin on the use of *parul* was from the town of Bacolor, Pampanga, where the first La Naval fiesta in Pampanga was conducted. The practice then was passed on to San Fernando which was a barrio of Bacolor during that time and later on passed on to Angeles or Kuliat, a barrio of San Fernando during that era.

The *Angeles traditional parul* is described to be dominantly white. The prominent symbol is a star in the middle part. The star varies depending on the number of points. There is a five-point star, seven-point star or an eight-point star. Typically, the traditional *parul* is accented with a circular *yantok* covered with Japanese paper around the star. Traced and cut *palara* is pasted on the surface of the star to add more aesthetics. When the *parul* is used for *Lubenas* or other religious activities, the color of the *palara* follows the attributed color of the patron saint of the barrio or barangay. Basically, the Angeles traditional lantern has three varieties. The first one is the embossed *parul* with *patoto*. The *patoto* are two *semioval* shape that hang under the circular *yantok* of the *parul*. The second is the flat *parul* without the *patoto*. Another variety is the *parul* called sputnik or jackstone. Sputnik or jackstone has no circular design around the star which is a jackstone shape star. Also, there is no *patoto* in a sputnik type of *parul*. Innovations have also been integrated such as the use of LED lights and more durable materials.

To date, various groups, institutions, and organizations have initiated undertaking to preserve and promote such cultural tradition.

City College of Angeles, a community college, conceptualized a school-based annual activity termed as "*Aslag Parul Festival*". This endeavor, which translates to lantern's ray festival, primarily aims to give awareness, transmit, and promote Angeles traditional *parul* in an innovative, festive, and student-centered approach.

This paper aims at presenting the procedure in the conduct of the first *Aslag Parul Festival*. It specifically targets to answer the following questions:

1. Who were involved in all the processes?
2. What were the conceptualization and preparations conducted?

3. What were the major phases of the event?
4. What were the outcomes of the festival?
5. What were the challenges encountered?
6. What were the lessons learned in the festival?
7. How can United Nation's Sustainable Goals be reflected in event?

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper utilized a qualitative-descriptive research design. The researchers, as highly involved in the entirety of the festival, looked at the procedures undertaken from conceptualization to post activity dealings among the people involved. Also, interviews, participant-observation, and document analysis were applied to gather pertinent data. Subsequently, the data were organized and presented in the form of themes. Conclusions were afterward drawn and recommendations were presented.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organizers and Participants

The *Aslag Parul Festival* was made possible through the Institute for Cultural Heritage Education (formerly Institute for Kapampangan Cultural Heritage Studies) with the collaboration of the Office of the President, Institute for the Arts (formerly Center for Culture and the Arts), Physical Education Department, Institute of Education, Arts and Sciences (IEAS), Institute of Business Management (IBM), Institute of Computing Studies and Library Information Science (ICSLIS), Budget Office, Central Student Council, Institute Student Councils, and the 2nd year Bachelor of Science Tourism Management (BSTM) students enrolled in Events Management.

Two groups of 30 members per institute participated in the *Aslag Parul Festival*. There were a total of 6 groups who partook in the street dance and interpretative dance competitions of the festival. The groups were composed of students who are taking Physical Education (PE) subjects coming from 1st year and 2nd year students. The respective institutes, whether the institute council or the dean's office, were given the

freedom to choose the students that comprised the participating groups.

The Office of the President provided consultative functions and networks to other school stakeholders.

The participating groups also underwent dance workshops in preparation for the street dance and interpretative dance competitions. The dance workshops were the primary assignment of the Institute of the Arts.

The Physical Education department served as auxiliary coordinator in keeping in touch with the student-participants who were P.E. students too.

The Institutes, the institute student councils, and the central student council served as coordinators in the dissemination of announcements and details of the event.

The budget office provided the processing of the needed budget which was coordinated to the city budget office.

This event was one of the authentic activities of the 2nd year BSTM students in their Heritage Tourism and Events Management classes consisting of 60 students. They performed as the major members of the organizing committee and were directly involved during the pre, during, and post activities.

Conceptualization and Preparations

The *Aslag Parul Festival* was conceptualized after a meeting conducted by the Office of the President, together with the Institute for Cultural Heritage Education, and the Institute for the Arts. It primarily aimed in promoting the Angeles traditional parul (lantern), which is a community tradition, to the students of the City College of Angeles (CCA) in order for them to become richer in their cultural horizon and highlight the knowledge, skills, and values learned in different allied courses including Physical Education (movements and choreography), Humanities (parul craftsmanship and designing), Local History (history of Lubenas ning Angeles), Events Management (pre – production, implementation, post production) via real events. The event also highlighted the actualization of one of the four core values of the College, which is patrimony. The College believes that its students are culture bearers. Hence, it is essential that they become emerged in various and rich community traditions.

After the conceptualization that transpired almost three months before the festival proper, meetings and laborious preparations took place. A meeting was called on the 11th of October 2019. The meeting was attended by the college president, the vice president for academic affairs, the institute deans, the dean of student affairs, the academic coordinator of the P.E. department, the head of the Institute for Cultural Heritage Education, the head of the Institute for the Arts, the budget officer, and the central student council president. The main agendum of the meeting was to discuss the proposed event. All attendees were amenable to the plan. It was agreed upon to conduct pre-activities that would equip the participants with the necessary knowledge and skills relative to the objectives and conduct of the festival. Thus, a lantern workshop and a dance workshop were decided to be conducted on November 19, 2019 and November 22, 2019, respectively. Then tasking was done. It was the Institute for Cultural Heritage Education that was tasked to lead the event with the help BS Tourism Management - Events Management class.

On the 14th of October 2019, a meeting was conducted which was intended for the 2nd year BS Tourism Management students. It was presided by the head of the Institute for Cultural Education. Delegation of committees and tasks transpired. Committees on logistics, program, finance, documentation, and secretariat were created. The head of the Institute for Cultural Heritage Education functioned as the overall event manager, while the college president provided consultative function.

Lantern, which was the highlight of the event, was also conceived as a symbolism of every CCA student's dream of pursuing higher education, becoming successful and asset of the community.

Phases

There were two major phases in the *Aslag Parul Festival*. The first phase, which is two of series workshops, was subdivided into two, the 1) lantern making workshop and the 2) dance workshop. The second was the actual festival where the 6 participating groups competed in tow (2) categories and 2 special awards.

The lantern making workshop was conducted on the 19th of November 2019 in the admin hall and the quadrangle. It was attended by all P.E. and Arts subject students. It was facilitated by known local artist and cultural worker that has a long experience and knowledge about the Angeles traditional parul (lantern). One whole day was consumed. At the end of the session, students, who were divided into groups, produced their prototype Angeles traditional parul (lantern).

On the 22nd of November 2019, intended particularly to the participating groups, the dance workshop was staged. It was also participated by the P.E. instructors who were assigned to guide the participating groups during practices. This was facilitated by the head of the Institute for the Arts. What followed thereafter were the rehearsals that allowed the participants to showcase a choreographed dance festival where the *parul* serves as a highlight of the said lantern festival. The rehearsals usually were held during vacant times as well during the Physical Education class periods.

The details of the event planning, conceptualization, implementation, were discussed during the period classes in Events Management with proper coordination from the over-all organizing team.

The actual festival transpired at exactly 5:00 p.m. on December 17, 2019 at the school quadrangle. It started with the street dance competition. Participating groups performed their street dance around the campus for 2 rounds. During this part, the 5 judges were strategically located in different parts of the school to judge the performance. Afterwards, they convened at the quadrangle. It was followed by the opening program. By the time the college president formally opened the event through his remarks, the interpretative dance competition commenced. The judges were placed where they can observe appropriately each group's performances.

After announcing the winners, the program ended at 7:30 p.m.

Outcomes

Each phase of the event required a specific outcome. The lantern making workshop particularly produced Angeles traditional lanterns. The outputs of the workshop were used as Christmas

decorations in the school. The dance workshop resulted to a complete street dance and an interpretative dance performance which later on were showcased during the actual festival. The events mechanism highlighted an on-the-spot running of the event with consideration on pre-events activities, during event activities, and post event activities..

On the day itself of the festival, each participating group had to comply with the requirement of having at least 6 large lanterns, costumes, lantern hand props, and a festival queen. Their performances were accompanied by local Christmas songs.

The set of awards were 1st place, 2nd place, and 3rd place for the street dance competition; 1st place, 2nd place, and 3rd place in the interpretative dance competition; 1st place, 2nd place, and 3rd place for the best lantern ensemble, and the festival queen award.

Challenges

Having less than 3 months of preparation especially for the participants seemed to be short. Nevertheless, the entire event went generally smooth. The first and primary challenge that was encountered was the request for the budget that would be used for the logistics, food and honorarium of the guests, and prizes. As a protocol, the budget request has to go through a strict review by several key officials. Although the budget was released, it was after the festival that it was actually received by the winners. Because of this, the activities conducted before and during the festival that had financial requirements were faced with challenges. To address such concerns, the organizers resorted to augment possible solutions by looking for sponsors. It was through sponsorships that the entire program was made possible. Later, it was realized that this was the best strategy done because the budget requested was trimmed down later in some of its particulars. This also allowed the organizing team to be more creative amidst challenges that were encountered.

Another challenge encountered was the anticipation for a good weather. A few days before the festival, a rainy weather was experienced. Although another venue may be used, some parts of the program, especially the street dance, would be compromised.

Fortunately, the 17th of December 2019 had a good weather.

Lessons Learned

With the challenges encountered, lessons were learned. In regard to budget concerns, it is advisable that it shall be requested before the opening of the academic year so that it may be approved and released prior to the event proper. Modifications can also be made upon receiving remarks from key officials. Starting academic year 2020-2021, the *Aslag Parul Festival* will have to be included in the yearly school calendar and the budget requirement has been marked by the budget officer as an annual school activity.

Weather conditions are uncontrollable, on the other hand, plans are. Based on the experiences on the 1st *Aslag Parul Festival* relative to weather issues, it is essential to design alternative plans that include venues and other environmental and natural factors.

Generally, it can also be drawn that a longer preparation be done to see possible concerns and address them at an earlier part. Being proactive is important in minimizing possible issues. All these are made possible as one may explore on adding alterations to planning including risk management, and alternative management.

Aslag Parul Festival and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Among the seventeen sustainable development goals, five of which are reflected in the *Aslag Parul Festival*. As an extra- and co-curricular activity that aimed to integrate cultural awareness and provide an avenue for knowledge, skills, and values application for events management students, *Aslag Parul Festival* addressed the fourth sustainable development goal of providing quality education. United Nations' (UN) goal on quality education pertains to inclusive and lifelong learning. In connection, cultural integration is one way of inclusive education by incorporating learners' cultural background. The application of knowledge, skills, and values in events management is a reinforcement and enhancement of learning resulting to more lasting acquisition of relevant qualities of events practitioners. And producing competent and competitive graduates are enabling contribution of an

educational institution to uplifting of the socioeconomic status of the community.

Through innovative ways of promoting cultural tradition, the event underscored the aim of UN of increasing industry, innovation, and infrastructure. As a community college, CCA has been performing its mandate to contribute in the development of the city in any form it may be. Aside from producing quality graduates who are to become part of the community workforce, the college also partakes in the cultural undertakings of the city to sustain its rich culture and tradition. As an educational institution, where creativity and innovativeness are expected to be practiced, CCA holds to its culture of providing excellent, relevant, and novel programs.

As stated, all the undertakings of the college are part and parcel of the actions towards the achievement of the community's goals and aspirations. Ranging from health, education, infrastructure, economic, cultural, and other social concerns, the city has been organizing and implementing programs that benefit its citizens. The college functions as an arm to address community concerns particularly in the education and cultural aspects that are foreseen to be essential variables in the city's sustainable development. In this regard, mobilizing sustainable cities and communities of UN has been targeted.

As elaborated, the *Aslag Parul Festival* was conceptualized primarily for cultural tradition. To associate UN's sustainable development goal of responsible consumption and production, the program promoted the use of traditional materials producing creative and artistic outputs. Because Angeles traditional lantern does not use electricity, aside from some variant, it could lessen the consumption of energy while maintaining its aesthetic and cultural value.

Lastly, through collaboration among stakeholders in the realization of the event, building partnership was observed. Partnerships make any endeavor more feasible. Working with other people, organizations, or institutions for the matter put more ideas to the project.

Discussion

This event shows that the education sector is truly a strong institution that can

promote cultural traditions. This supports Zerrudo's (2020) claim that legislation, education, and tradition are the strong forces that contribute to cultural promotion and preservation. The *1st Aslag Parul Festival* also provided a bond that made the entire City College of Angeles community to work together to reflect patrimony in action as one of the pillars of the college.

Innovation as a key element of the event also significantly contributed to the promotion of the city's tradition of lantern making. Festivals are significant socio-cultural activities in the Philippines. UNESCO describe festivals as relevant events that provide identity to the members of the community. The City of Angeles has been well known for its *sisig*, a culinary identity of the community. It has not been known to many that the city has another gem in the form of lanterns. To reintroduce it in a festive and creative way, *Aslag Parul Festival*, although a school-based event, was conceptualized. In the introduction of this festival, not only a festive event was developed, but also it reintroduces a traditional craftsmanship of the community. These intangible cultural heritage domains are foreseen to last through innovative strategies such as this school-based event, wherein the effects are hoped to transcend beyond the corners of the school. The students, as culture bearers, are expected to transmit the knowledge and skills on *Angeles traditional lantern* making to their community or even to the next generation.

As far as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are concerned, these can be achieved in many ways, contexts, and scope. There are no big or little steps in the realization of the goals. Any undertakings are contributory to the achievement of the goals either in the community level, national, or international scale. Contributions of initiating activities can be through giving inspiration to the people, community, and other communities, and through opening the minds of stakeholders on their roles in the sustainable development of the community.

4. Conclusion

After formulating the themes of this paper, it is therefore concluded that culture can be repackaged in an innovative and creative way. The *Aslag Parul Festival* also

supports the idea that culture is a community-based activity. It also affirms that academic institutions play vital roles in cultural promotions. Intangible cultural heritage domains can also be integrated to one another as evident on what was applied in the *Aslag Parul Festival*, a combination of traditional craftsmanship, festive event, and performing arts. Also, it can be claimed that through utilizing events management standards, cultural promotion undertakings can be realized in a structured, innovative, and controlled means. The intersection of local culture and events managements provides fresh and innovative ideas in cultural promotion and transmission. Because of its logical, structured, and standard protocols, events management is an effective and efficient strategy to showcase culture in the 21st century. Aside from stated nature of events management, it also adds to its pros its flexibility and adaptability to the target audience.

Another point that is worth of recognizing is the applicability of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in academic communities. Academic communities cannot be separated from the profile of a general community. Educational institutions play pivotal roles in achieving the community's goals. As providers of training to students that are expected of taking part in the aspirations of the community, educational institutions have to perform anchored on such goals. Alignment between schools' vision, mission, objectives, and practices and the community's goals is essential for a communal responsibility.

Generally, it is affirmed that events management is an essential element of any program undertakings, be it a community-based, organizational, or school-based program. Its nature makes all concerns effective and efficient.

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