The Intersection Between Cultural NGOs and Sustainable Development in the Andean Region

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Introduction

Academics and practitioners have debated the role of arts and cultural activities in the construction of society. For example, Boal (1979), in his groundbreaking work, The Theatre of the Oppressed, asks “Should art educate, inform, organize, influence, incite to action, or should it simply be an object of pleasure?” (xv). Indeed, the role of the arts and culture has not been fully determined.

In the Andean region, we observe the critical role that cultural NGOs in particular play in providing cultural services and programming (Appe 2007; 2010). There are organizations that work with people with disabilities to promote their active participation in the production and consumption of culture (Cero Limitaciones 2009). Other organizations have had significant success with arts workshops for children and youth and theater groups of all kinds have traveled to communities and schools (Appe 2007). Additionally, there are hip-hop organizations which create spaces for vulnerable young people who, for example, “... [t]hrough concerts, radio-broadcasts and other forms of media and performance ... [aim] to reclaim an reconfigure what it means to be citizens in contemporary Latin America” (Thomas 2014, 2). We contend that these cultural services and programming have further advanced political and social change in the region.

For example, cultural NGOs have entered into formal politics. A cultural NGO leader in Colombia, Venus Albeiro Silva, became a candidate for the House of Representatives between 2002 and 2010 (Congreso Visible 2014). In this role, he defended community artistic and cultural work as a vehicle for development (Appe 2007). On a more macro level, it is observed that cultural NGOs are used as instruments in constructing cultural democratic citizenship (Appe, 2010) and establishing a national identity (Stanziola 2002; see also Canclini 2000; Kurin 2000; Perez de Cuellar 1995; Varela 2001; Wallach 2000). Cultural NGOs have made these contributions while they face challenges to their survival as cultural programming has been a low priority of funding by the state, and private funders are scarce (Appe 2007; Perez de Cuellar 1995).

We consider cultural NGOs as important actors in development. Cultural NGOs are nonprofit organizations that are working in the production, dissemination, training, research and knowledge creation related to culture. We are interested in exploring if and how cultural NGOs in Colombia and Ecuador have contributed to sustainable development through cultural services and programming. We argue that systematically examining the experiences of these NGOs can illuminate important insights to managing cultural services and programming within the sustainable development paradigm. We empirically examine the following question related to
cultural NGOs in the contexts of Colombia and Ecuador: How are the different components of sustainable development—environmental, economic, and social—included in their goals and their management practices?

Sustainable Development and Its Three Pillars

The concept of sustainable development was presented at the Bruntland Commission in 1987: “Sustainable development is the kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” While this concept has its roots in the environment and development, it is increasingly understood that sustainable development cannot only focus on the environment (see Victor 2006). In 2002, in recognition of this, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development presented the idea that sustainability needs to be conceptualized as three pillars (environmental, economic, and social equity) that are interdependent and work together to ensure that today’s actions support the future (Kates, Parris and Leiserowitz 2005). Therefore sustainable development includes how communities achieve environmental protection, economic viability and social equity. Adopting a sustainable development perspective can lead to more feasible and long-term solutions to complex problems related to the environment, the economy and the equitable distribution of resources.

Despite the Brundtland Commission’s well-cited definition and the expansion of sustainable development, still debates ensue about its definition and how to identify clear practices to achieving it (Lipschutz 2009; Seghezzo 2009). Over the last several decades, some note that despite the three pillars and their supposed equal weight conceptually, still the economic growth dimension takes priority in international discussions and conferences (Steiner 2003). And some have argued that an equal weight of the pillars might not be appropriate, proposing for example grouping the economic and social together and considering them as equal to the environmental dimension as it is the environment where the other two dimensions are situated (Adam 2006). Others focus not on the weight of the pillars, but argue that the three pillars are problematic. Seghezzo (2009) sees the three pillars of sustainability as reinforcing the separation of society (the social) and the environment. Seghezzo (2009) explains that the three pillars—environment, economic and social—are “rooted in the belief that nature and culture are a dichotomy that can only be reconciled by the economy” (542).

Despite these discussions and debates about the definition and application of sustainable development, the environment, economic and social pillars remain as the prevailing understanding of the concept.

Culture in Sustainable Development

While we accept sustainable development by its three pillars: environmental, economic, and equity (social); there is more recognition for a fourth pillar: culture. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a body established by the United Nations in 2000 and active 2001-2005 is perhaps one of the first set of policy documents to recognize cultural services within the framework of sustainable development. It published reports that synthesized relevant information regarding the findings of scientific research from private industry and local indigenous communities about the relationship between nature and human welfare.

For The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment program, cultural services can be understood as non-material benefits obtained through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation and aesthetic experiences existing within ecosystems. It is important to understand
how development actions can preserve these invaluable cultural services, which are often tied to environmental contexts. However, this framework still positions culture within sustainability relative to the environment, not culture as a separate pillar of sustainability in its own right.

After the publications of Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, there has continued to be a need for more robust understanding of sustainable development. Culture as the forth pillar has received growing attention from multinational organizations and other international actors. The United Cities and Local Governments group published a report entitled "Culture is the fourth pillar of sustainable development," arguing that the original three dimensions do not correspond to contemporary society. UNESCO has positioned 'culture' as a facilitator in its 2012 report on the post-2015 agenda development. Culture has always been part of the Millennium Development Goals, however UNESCO has argued that the relationship between culture and development must continue to be examined. UNESCO supports that the role of culture in sustainable development is included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals which replace UN Millennium Development Goals. Culture contributes not only as an economic and productive sector but also provides a range of non-monetary benefits, such as inclusion. UNESCO observes that: "The integration of culture into sustainable development strategies and policies advances a human-centred and inclusive approach to development, in addition to serving as a powerful socio-economic resource" (UNESCO 2012, 5-6).

In the academic literature, arguments contend that culture informs social transformation in development. Sustainability policies implemented often think more in the short term but changes in the long run require shifts in norms and changes in cultural and social practices. Such a recognition of culture in sustainable development expands sustainable development beyond only technical issues (Seghezzo 2009; Tweed and Sutherland 2007, 62). It supports a ‘cultural turn’ in development which is a contrast to development models that has seen culture as a deterrent (Daskon and Binns, 2010). Culture and traditions can be situated as resources within the sustainability development paradigm, not to only be ‘considered’ but to be thought of as ‘fundamental’ (Daskon and Binns 2010, 495-496). Daskon and Binns (2010) define culture as both intangible (e.g., values, beliefs) and tangible (e.g. heritage sites, crafts, arts) and that achieving livelihoods is not only about providing for basic needs, but also maintaining cultural traditions for future generations. Daskon and Binns (2010) argue for the consideration of ‘cultural assets’ given their connectedness to other livelihood assets like human and physical assets.

**NGOs and Sustainability in Development**

Another element that informs our inquiry is the role of NGOs in the defining and implementing programming related to sustainable development. In the last three decades, scholars have noted that NGOs exert substantially more impact on social, political and economic spheres in the world than previously. NGOs represent diverse efforts of collective action, political intervention, social service delivery, and/or watchdog activity over government and business sectors. NGOs represent the associational space of civil society and are self-governing entities that do not distribute the excess of their revenues over expenditures among stakeholders and are assumed to have a purpose for the public benefit that is agreed upon by associates of the organization (Boris 2006; Vakil 1997). We use the term nongovernmental organization (NGO) as this term is most common within the context of international development. For an explanation
The trend of NGOs engaging in the sustainable development paradigm is considered “a sign that they are serious about breaking out of a charity or welfarist cocoon to embrace a more effective and professional approach to development” (Devine 2003, 228). With NGOs working with and for the sustainability development objectives, there has been a greater pressure for NGOs themselves to be sustainable. This has mostly focused on financial sustainability. As such, NGOs have become more competitive and this has resulted in greater risks of mission drift (Devine 2003). The prioritized pillar of economic growth that we see in the sustainable development paradigm is also demonstrated in NGO programmatic activities. For example, Devine’s (2003) research of NGOs in Bangladesh shows shifting programmatic activities by NGOs due to sustainability pressures. He writes that “economic programs (micro finance) have been prioritized over and above other traditional NGO activities such as social programs” (233). This has produced, he argues, complications in development. These programs help NGOs garner resources and allow them to move away from reliance on donor support but the revenue streams these programs are through fees and service charges and puts the burden onto the beneficiaries, often the poor.

NGOs of many kinds have engaged in policy debates about sustainable development as a main development objective and have integrated sustainability into their organizational practices as a value. However, there are clear gaps in policy spheres and in the academic literature on the role of cultural NGOs in sustainable development. In fact, there is very little literature that empirically addresses how cultural services and programming provided by NGOs are embedded and practiced within the sustainable development paradigm.

**Methodology**

We seek to examine how the different components of sustainable development, environmental, economic, and social, are included in the management of cultural NGOs. Given the little research conducted on cultural NGOs and sustainability, this is an exploratory study. We comparatively examine the topic within two qualitative case studies of cultural NGOs in Ecuador and Colombia.

We focus on NGOs who self-identify as working in issues related to social development and we sample organizations through their membership in national NGO confederations. In the case of Ecuador, this is its national confederation, the Ecuadorian Confederation of Civil Society Organizations (Confederación Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil). In Colombia, we used the Colombian Association of NGOs (Confederación Colombiana de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales).

We use membership in these national confederations as a proxy for NGOs which contribute to social development through the provision of goods and services in Colombia and Ecuador. We created databases from the lists of NGO members in the national confederations and coded organizations that mention the word “culture” or “cultural” in their name, mission and/or vision.

We identified four NGOs using this coding scheme. In the case of Ecuador, the Cinema-mania

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1 See Frumkin’s (2002) chapter 1 for a thorough explanation of many of these terms.
Foundation (Fundación Cultural Cinema-mania) was the only organization that fits the parameters. This cultural NGO provides training workshops in art, theatre and music. For Colombia, we have selected Popular Cultural Action Foundation (Fundación Acción Cultural Popular – ACPO), which promotes rural literacy through radio, television, digital media taking advantage of shared spaces community provide such as schools, libraries and church’s facilities.

Given the broad definition of “culture” and “cultural”, the organizations in our sample are very different and engage in diverse programming. Cinema-mania provides programs related to fine arts, including visual and theatre arts. Meanwhile, ACPO’s is more popular, geared towards providing education to farmers in Colombia. Its programming includes both its formal literacy content in radio broadcasts and booklets, and the informal such as content developed in the newspaper. Cinema-mania is a much younger organization and in a more fragile period, while ACPO is an older organization that has recently gotten out of a declining stage. Cinema-mania is a membership organization, funded by members’ dues and ACPO is funded by real-estate resources and has a more hierarchical structure though with representation of key stakeholders such as the Catholic Church and academe. The organizations’ services and programming are further described below.

**Cinema-mania Cultural Foundation.** The Cinema-mania Cultural Foundation is an independent non-profit organization located in Ambato, Ecuador started by artists and cultural workers in 2006. Its mission is: “To provide technical training and acting training, encouraging film appreciation, create spaces for reflection and dialogue on the visual arts, produce and participate competitively in audiovisual markets, and combine efforts for the growth of all the arts.” The main activity is to provide support to the creators of the visual and performing arts. The organization has the objective to execute and implement arts and cultural programming, through cooperative and supportive work of a member-base with similar interests. Its services and programming includes: participating in cinema festivals, theatre productions, acting classes and children’s art classes.

In addition to its services and programming, the Cinema-Mania Cultural Foundation aims to generate long-term solutions, particularly related to the defense of cultural rights. The vision of the foundation is focused on the proposed Organic Law of Culture, where the group supports the implementation of a national system n Ecuador that would allow the country to actively develop the cultural rights of citizens and strengthen the sector.

**Fundación Acción Cultural Popular.** The Popular Cultural Action Foundation (hereafter referred to as its Spanish acronym: ACPO), was established in 1947 as a catholic organization which focuses on rural education. It seeks to provide Basic Integral Education to adult farmers in rural Colombia. Its mission is: “promoting cultural, social and economic development of the Colombian people.” From its beginning, the educational content offered by ACPO went beyond basic training, rather it also covered into aspects of cultural, social and economic development, seeking to intervene in the educational and socio-economic aspects of life through information

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2 In addition, to Fundación Acción Cultural Popular – ACPO in Colombia, two further organizations were sampled and will be included in future research: Corporación Internacional Ambrosía – Corinam, and Fundación Mario Santo Domingo.
and communication technologies. Its first and largest projects was the Radio Sutatenza project, which generated nearly a million and a half hours of broadcasting of cultural and educational programs, reaching more than 1000 municipalities in the country (Bernal 2005). The Radio Sutatenza project came to an end around 1989, as the stations stopped broadcasting and its newspaper then closed in 1990. ACPO assets were sold and the organization was dormant until about 2008 and then picking up programming in 2012 the organization was re-launched with a new staff, board and strategic plan. Projects since 2012 have included libraries, capacity building, digital schools for farmers with radio, press, TV and internet outlets, and cultural programming.

For example, they financed an Arts and Humanities Schools project in a Colombian region, which targeted rural youth and sought to contribute to their personal development by artistic restoration and recognition of colonial heritage. The programming sought to also provide youth with skills for future employment opportunities.

To examine the two cultural NGOs, our methods included semi-structured interviews and archival research. We analyzed the information collected using a mix of qualitative methods that draw from grounded theory and textual analysis (semiotic and narrative). The following sections are an in-depth examination of the objectives and management of these two cultural NGOs in the Andean Region as they relate to sustainable development.

**Cultural NGOs and Sustainability in the Andean Region: Perspectives from Two Organizations**

Cultural NGOs are nonprofit organizations that work in the production, dissemination, training, research and knowledge creation related to culture. We ask: are the different components of sustainable development—environmental, economic, and social—including in their goals and their management practices? First we examine how cultural NGOs work within sustainable development, then we present important institutions to the work of cultural NGOs and follow with a discussion about organizational sustainability of cultural NGOs.

**Cultural NGOs and Sustainable Development**

How might cultural NGOs contribute to sustainable development? As organizations working in social development, both organizations are familiar with the construct of sustainable development. As observed, sustainable development includes the three dimensions of environmental protection, economic viability and social equity.

*Environmental Dimension*

The environmental dimension of sustainability is often the most associated with the sustainable development paradigm. The environmental dimension addresses the rapid deterioration of the environment across local, national and global scopes. Of the three dimensions, the environmental dimension of sustainable development was the least likely to be discussed by the leaders of cultural NGOs. Cinema-mania did not dedicate time to this dimension, rather as will be explained below focused on the economic and social dimensions within development. ACPO did indeed acknowledge the ‘environmental’ in development by explaining environmental issues as part of ACPO’s “daily management” that not only seeps into projects but emerges from them. ACPO’s manager noted that the organization integrates environmental themes through its “knowing the environment” components such as climate change, tourism impacts and water rights in its courses at the digital schools in rural areas.
Economic Dimension
While the environmental dimension was not prevalent in the work of both organizations, Cinema-mania and ACPO both were critical of the pervasive economic goals in development. The economic dimension considers the standard of living and economic health based on economic indicators in a geographical region. The organizational leaders proposed that this dimension often outweighed the other pillars of sustainability development.

The founder of Cinema-mania suggested that development is a theory akin to modernization theory and one in which contradicts the model of sustainability development. He explained what he understood as sustainable development: “sustainable development is the opposite of developmentalism, which only seeks … material things but [not the] emotional, psychological, individual needs as a person.” He understands sustainable development as beyond people’s material needs.

ACPO also recognizes the limitations to the economic dimension within development. The manager explains: “We refuse to think that development only has a socioeconomic component.” In fact, he continues to question the single indicator of economic growth. He explains, “We have been very critical of the issue of economic development. We always talk about economic growth, about how many points are we going to grow this year... As it happens, economic growth has a limit.” Under a model of economic growth, the ACPO manager suggested that it was the same people who benefited and that the system created vulnerabilities for the rest of the population.

Social Dimension
The social dimension of sustainable development considers poverty and inequity together to address issues of access and the lack of inclusion within societies. The organizations focused their discussions on sustainable development on this dimension. Through the lens of the social dimension, they observed the role of their organizations in promoting rights, having inclusive paths of governance within the organizations, stimulating the importance of networks in the work of their organizations and furthering sustainability by attaching sustainable development to the broader idea of human development.

Rights are norms and principles that include what we consider negative rights, or rights that provide freedom from and also positive rights, which are vehicles to freedom to. Rights are at the centerpiece for the services and programming of both organizations. Under the framework of rights, Cinema-mania explained that cultural rights (a component of positive rights) in particular were set out in the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008. The founder of Cinema-mania explains that as artists, working to promote cultural rights in Ecuador, “We are supported in the right to identity, to healthy recreational and leisure activities, thus, culture is useful for that.” Likewise, ACPO recognized its role in promoting rights, which is a transversal component for all of ACPO’s programming. The manager explained the vision of rights for ACPO: “one of our main lines are rights, our projects always should have them. [Rights] have to be embedded in a proposal, ... women rights, the rights of rural women, environmental sustainability, human rights and values.”

Governance systems and processes allow an organization to perform its duties and achieve its mission and vision. In addition to emphasizing rights, the governance structures of the organizations help to support the social pillar of sustainability. Cinema-mania is a member organization. Members have both a voice and a vote in organizational decisions. While ACPO is not a membership organization, it does have inclusive strategies to include the perspectives of
important stakeholders of the organization. For example, as the organizations started up programming again in 2012, the organization conducted focus groups across Colombia to better understand the needs and expectations of its rural beneficiaries. As a result, the rural digital schools began to address gaps in key areas: digital literacy, knowing the environment, sociability and leadership and (business) organizations. In addition, its board of directors is comprised of key stakeholders which include the members of the Church and universities. The board has recently included a representative of the Colombian Confederation of Nongovernmental Organizations signaling its importance as a stakeholder of ACPO.

Networks in civil society have gotten more attention in the literature and policy spheres as spaces to advance civil society’s vision of societies and promote the right to associate and engage in public policy debates. Both organizations have the intention to form and lead networks among their participants and beneficiaries. Cinema-mania discussed its desire to form a network of arts and cultural workers to demand the guarantee of cultural rights and the passing and implementation of a cultural law in Ecuador. He explains, “Let’s all group but, lets create a unique force so the State understands that we need cultural public policy for the country, but [networks do] not last, precisely because of individual interests.”

ACPO aims to build a network between students and rural teachers. The organization lists as one of its recent accomplishments as being able to summon older leaders and teachers who were disappointed about ACPO’s decline in the late 1980s. The decline of ACPO during this period took them by surprise, as they did not know of the delicate situation the organization was experiencing. After the dormant period between early 1990s and 2000s, ACPO is looking to former participants in order to capitalize on their experience with the organization. As for the current participants, the manager explains ACPO’s vision for networking and relationship building with the organization, he explains that ACPO has “the idea and the intention and the strategies to build … types of networks. First, the network of the students that are learning, that is, that of the farmers that participate in Digital Schools for Farmers. We [seek] that they get together, that they talk among them, and even, we have promoted, it has not been much, digital meetings among different municipalities, different provinces. The second network is that of the teachers who are learning. We identified that there are many problems with rural teachers. The teachers have poor training, and it is not their fault, because they are dumb: this country has given them poor opportunities.”

The final element present related to the social dimension for the cultural NGOs is situating sustainable development as human development. The founder of Cinema-mania simply stated that “sustainable development is human development” when he explained some of Cinema-mania programming. For example, he explained a theatre workshop that Cinema-mania conducted as fitting under human development. It was a workshop for prisoners at the local prisons, he explains "I consider [this] is sustainable development ... [to] use your spare time with arts and culture... see the world with other eyes... When we arrived to deliver the workshop it was joy for people." According to Cinema-mania, participation in arts and culture brings something to development that is otherwise missed: “… culture contributes to sustainable development and we are leaving a legacy because we are giving people the opportunity to find their identity, to find the meaning of their life, to grow emotionally... That is better than anything material, thus, we believe in sustainable development.”

ACPO highlights an expanded definition of development, which translates into the importance of a well-rounded approach to literacy and education overall. The manager describes ACPOs understanding of personal development, which he ties to sustainable development as: “sustainable development is an authentically human development in which people discover,
promote and uphold their personal values and their collective values and work on them in a solidarity context, and in a context of thinking of the greater good.” Regarding the economic dimension in the context of human development he posits: “It is true that development goes through a socio-economic component but mainly development is human development and is more sustainable when it is more human.”

**Enabling Institutions for Culture in Sustainable Development**

Enabling institutions are relevant to cultural NGOs and cultural services and programming. Institutions of varying kinds can provide frameworks for the work of cultural NGOs. In the case of Cinema-mania, the founder cited Ecuador’s Constitution of 2008 as guaranteeing cultural rights, but criticizes the government for not implementing these rights within a national cultural law. According to the manager, government intervention through a cultural law would bring about needed legitimacy to the sector and as a result, funding to the sector. Since 2008, the government has been drafting a cultural law but it still has not passed. The founder explains: “Citizenry itself loses when there is not a law, because it is not only us as service providers but the people that do not have where to turn to, they do not have the opportunity that a cultural public policy would give them, where they can exercise [their rights]."

In the case of ACPO, actors such as the Catholic Church and several universities, both confessional and non-confessional, have been relevant institutions for carrying its mission. The Catholic Church as a partner which provides a myriad of resources: facilities where literacy activities are conducted, it provides neutrality and respect in areas with heightened armed conflict, and has the skill to summon people. Meanwhile, universities have provided ACPO, technical support for its radio and TV broadcasting, and knowledge in rural matters.

In addition, the national NGO confederations are institutions important to the cultural NGOs. As mentioned, the national confederations are umbrella associations that serve the social development sector in Colombia and Ecuador. Cinema-mania joined the Ecuadorian Confederation of Civil Society Organizations in 2013 when the confederation was founded. Cinema-mania expects the confederation to help the organization. The manager explains: “We thought that it could help us to search for what we are lacking which is financing, for fundraising, to be able to have more stable activities. We thought that it would [bring] that, and also the political aspect, to rely on each other to fund raise for all organizations. That was the idea.” However, the founder admitted that while Cinema-mania supports the Confederation, it has not seen much benefit from being part of it. In particular, Cinema-mania noted the inequity within organizations that are working in social development, which challenges inclusion within the development NGO community. Comparing Cinema-mania to other NGOs in the Confederation, the founder explains that the reality (read: funding possibilities) for Cinema-mania was very different than the other organizations working in social development.

For ACPO, participation in the Colombian Confederation was not about funding opportunities but more about keeping ACPO up to date with international forums and trends, such as the discussion about the post-2015 development goals. The manager explained that “the Colombian Confederation of NGOs is very included in the millennium objectives and …in those post-millennium. We are now with the 17 development objectives for 2030. We are very up to date in this subject.” The Confederation helps to launch ACPO into these discussions, provides capacity building opportunities related to these themes and inserts the organizations into important transnational networks.

**Organizational Sustainability of Cultural NGOs**
Sustainable development requires sustainable management for organizations and this includes dealing with internal and external change. The ACPO case shows a organization with a long history of adapting its programming. ACPO experienced a long period of inaction between the early the 1990s through 2012 due to many factors. The manager explained that the organization did not respond to the changing realities of rural Colombia in mid-1980s and early 1990s which influenced the sustainability of its programming. First, the organization did not engage in new, emergent media such as TV and Internet. Second, it failed to adapt to new actors in its sector as the government started to fulfill better its mission, providing formal education in many municipalities, whereas before the only option in some of them was the informal offer of ACPO. Formal education was what farmers were looking for. Third, there was a strong climate of violence in Colombia, intensified in the rural side, due to the confluence of many armed actors. This decimated the population of farmers that was its constituency as many were internally displaced to urban areas and made it dangerous for the NGO staff to reach those left in the country side.

Since 2012, ACPO is building on a renewed portfolio of programming. Its economic sustainability is anchored in management of its real-estate assets, which roughly provides 90% of its budget (alongside with small funding campaigns). These assets where left after the quasi liquidation procedures that ACPO endured. The organization had to lay-off close to 1,600 workers, sell its broadcasting facilities, its associated press and settle its debts. After a twenty-year hiatus it started being active again, funding its activities with this stable stream of revenue. Only 10% of its income comes from third-party contracts (government, municipal administrations, and private companies), which its manager is working to change.

Cinema-mania has a shorter history as it was started within the last 10 years. Like ACPO during the 1990s and 2000s, Cinema-mania is currently in an inactive stage of the organization as it seeks further funding. Funding for Cinema-mania has been sporadic, not sustainable. The founder of Cinema-mania explained it as culture being at the bottom of priorities for government and society at large. He attached funding to societal significance. That is, broad funding options positions culture as important, whereas no funding options situates culture as not important. Cinema-mania’s main challenge with sustainability is thus, its limited funding sources. As mentioned, its main revenue source is a result of its membership governance structure. All members pay a member fee. It has had specific projects with government institutions and on some occasions has had sponsors of specific projects, for example, an individual sponsored the production of a movie produced by Cinema-mania members. None of these sources, besides the money generated from membership fees, provide the organization with sustained, long term funding.

Concluding Thoughts and Next Steps

Cultural NGOs have an especially complex relationship with sustainability. Cinema-mania and ACPO consider sustainable development within their services and programming but also understand its challenges at the organizational level. While policy debates at international and transnational spaces have argued for the inclusion of culture within the dimensions of sustainable development, in practice and on the ground, cultural services and programming do not necessarily benefit from these debates.

Despite the challenges, based on the sampled cultural NGOs and their cultural services and programming, these organizations are well positioned to foment the social dimension of sustainability development. They provide spaces for the pursuit of rights (rights related to
culture, education, identity, recreation, among others), they provide spaces for collective governance and participation and generate networks among their among their stakeholders, and they frame their work around human development. Human development is proposed in contrast to what might be considered development’s economic priority.

At the organizational level, both cases show the fragility of organizational sustainability for cultural NGOs. Organizational sustainability has been challenged in both cases: ACPO in the past, and Cinema-mania currently. This is, of course, something NGOs of all kinds working in social development face. However, through these challenges, cultural NGOs in the region show a heightened "social inventiveness" which, as Pearce, Howard and Bronstein (2010) argue, is at the center of social action in the region (272). As such, we argue that the debate about the role of culture and subsequently the role of cultural NGOs in sustainable development needs to be seriously considered in the academic literature as well as further debated at the international and transnational policy spheres.

While this exploratory study presents only preliminary findings, given the richness of cultural services and programming in promoting the social dimension of sustainable development, we call for more research about cultural NGOs and in order to explore culture as a fourth pillar of sustainable development. We contend the organizational sustainability of cultural NGOs might better be supported through more robust discussions on what is missing from the current sustainable development paradigm.

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