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Karl Emmanuel V. Ruiz

University of the Philippines Diliman - NCPAG

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# **The Political Economy of Public Libraries: The Alaminos City Public Library in Pangasinan**

Karl Emmanuel V. Ruiz

University of the Philippines Diliman - NCPAG

[kvruiz@up.edu.ph](mailto:kvruiz@up.edu.ph)

## **Abstract**

**Statement of the Problem.** This paper aims to determine how the political economy (i.e., the interaction of political, economic, and social structures in a polity) of public libraries affects the development and operations of a public library in a society. In this study, the Alaminos City Public Library (ACPL) in Pangasinan was used as a case study due to its performance in providing literacy services to the Alaminian community over the years. The ACPL's ability to garner several accolades due to its services proves its success as a public information hub and local community center. It used the proposed theory of political economy for public libraries based on the social totality aspect from the theory of political economy of communication by Mosco (2009), where the political, economic, and social aspects of a public library's development were examined.

**Methods.** The study was conducted with a literature review, which also became the basis for selecting the ACPL, as it has won accolades in serving its user community. Online, semi-structured key-informant interviews were also conducted with the Library Director, Library staff, and a Former Vice Mayor, as the Office of the Vice Mayor had the Library under its supervision. Thematic analysis was used to organize the information gleaned from the literature review and the responses of the key informants.

**Results.** The study results revealed that the political economy of public libraries significantly impacts the development of a public library. It has shown that national and local policies (e.g., Republic Acts, ordinances), institutions, the economy, partnerships between the local government unit, businesses, the library, and social support are crucial ingredients to ensure that any public library's operations will be good. It has also been found that library programs may win accolades and inspire the LGU to support them more as they bring honor to the city/ municipality.

**Originality.** The paper is a contribution to the dearth of literature on how national and local policies may impact public libraries, especially in a Philippine setting.

**Keywords:** Libraries and state; Public libraries; Government policy; Political economy

## **Introduction**

When nations are born after a war of independence or secession from another country, education is deemed an indispensable public good for citizens. An informed and educated citizenry ultimately begets economic development and ensures the state's survival. According to Helling (2012), various countries have thereafter realized the public libraries' cultural and educational importance for nation-building.

However, when it comes to conducting state affairs, the study of politics and economy is inescapable. The choice of how and what kind of politics and economy will be practiced is usually decided at the crossroads of a nation's founding. For Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), politics is a process in which a polity chooses a system that will govern it while economy, undoubtedly influenced by political institutions, is about the social distribution of all things valuable. Control of politics enables a group to direct economic appropriation to various institutions, stakeholders, and citizens.

In this context, government institutions like public libraries will always be affected and shaped by policies. Jaeger et al. (2013), these decisions largely influence budgets, activities, and functions of libraries in the larger nation-state are instrumental to the impressive rise of information policy options in the past two decades as they considerably increase the tasks of libraries, and at the same time increase a number of restrictions on their activities due to budgetary concerns. With the developments in the field of information and communications technology, the development of public libraries cannot be completely detached from political and economic affairs that likewise interact with these rapid technological advances (Birdsall, 2000). Surprisingly, the library and information science scholarship has paid little consideration to the challenges related to the political economy of libraries (Jaeger et al., 2013). All these elements have a lot to do with the success and failure of public institutions – in the case of this study, public libraries.

## **Statement of the Research Problem**

This study examines the political economy of the Alaminos City Public Library, how the different aspects of political economy shape the public library's operations, services and programs, and its community of users. In line with the aforementioned general question, the following specific questions crafted the directions of this research.

1. What is the nature of the political economy of the Alaminos City Public Library?
2. Given its existing political economy, how does the Alaminos City Public Library fulfill its role and responsibilities to its service community?

## ***Scope and Limitations of the Study***

This research was conducted to provide a rich description of the Alaminos City Public Library's political economy in relation to its service community's programs, projects, and services. While this study is rather specific and geographically limited to Alaminos City to come up with a big picture that examines the impact of a public library's political economy, this study gives a slice of a bigger reality of how public libraries, like

Alaminos City Public Library (ACPL), navigate their political and economic environment. This specific case shows the importance of informed decision making when it comes to rendering library services, and maintaining good relations with relevant local government units (LGUs) (i.e., the city government, barangays) and with the wider community.

### ***Significance of the Study***

Why is this matter worth investigating? While there are studies available on public libraries and policies in the Philippines (see Rasmussen, 1982; Alaya-ay, 2013; Macapagal, 2018), there is a dearth of studies on political economy of libraries in the Philippine setting, like what has already been done in the Western and the US contexts. In the same vein, Jaeger et al. (2013) argued that works about the impact of policy decisions on public libraries are even more uncommon in larger research studies. Library and Information Science (LIS) publications concentrate on information policies, specifically guidelines that influence libraries' contents and roles. There seems to be a considerable hesitancy to address political and economic issues relating to libraries.

Within this context, the political economy of public libraries needs to be conceptualized. According to Jaeger et al. (2014), public libraries are among the basic government services that seek to make information resources available to the citizenry. They also receive an allocation of taxpayers' money and support from local communities to develop well. In this way, political economy must be understood. DFID (2009) defined political economy as the system of interactions of a society's economic and political systems, such as the power to allot resources among different groups and the mechanisms that establish, sustain, and modify these relations across generations.

Based on the studies mentioned, the political economy of public libraries is the interplay of how policy decisions may economically affect the operations and development of public libraries. It explains how government institutions act within a larger polity and how economic conditions and policy processes influence them.

### ***The Case Study***

The Alaminos City Public Library (ACPL) has received several accolades over the years which are: Most Outstanding Library (1999), Most Outstanding Public Library in Region I (2000), Ranked No.5 for Best City Library in Luzon, Ranked No. 6 in the Search for Outstanding City Libraries in the Philippines (2009), Fourth (4th) place in the Nationwide Search for the Most Outstanding Public Libraries with Special Program on Local History (2015), Second (2nd) place for Outstanding Public Libraries with Special Programs and Outreach Services on MALASAKIT to the Different Sectors in the Community (2018), and First (1st) place Gawad Parangal sa Natatanging Tagapaglingkod sa Pamublikong Aklatan given to Mrs. Zenaida C. Romero, Librarian V, back in 2020 (Alaminos City Government, 2021). All these accolades show that the Alaminos City Public Library is a well-endowed library that is beneficial for the Alaminos community and even its neighboring cities and municipalities.

Also, the Alaminos City government supported the initiative of the National Library to narrow the digital divide among communities and provide the print materials desired by users. In line with the Republic Act No. 7743, which aims to construct Barangay Reading Centers to root out illiteracy, the Alaminos LGU and the Alaminos City Public Library launched the Aklatang Pambarangay<sup>1</sup>: Book Donation Project back in March 2018. Eventually, the National Library of the Philippines (NLP) acknowledged the campaign's accomplishment by donating 50 cartons comprising around 3,000 books. This campaign has definitely assisted in the fulfillment of the Alaminos City Public Library's objective of being a key actor in developing a well-educated populace. The city library assisted students and youngsters in meeting their developmental needs in order for them to become effective members of society and contribute to building a better nation for everyone (National Library of the Philippines, 2020).

With its considerable achievements, this public library is significant because its political economy is correlated to the operations and success (or even failure) of the library. Thus, the case of this public library will be used to illustrate the significance of studying the political economy of public libraries.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Evolution of the Concept of Political Economy***

There are several types of political economies that have emerged over the years. First, the institutional political economy analyzes how large and powerful organizations shape institutional and technological factors of markets to benefit them (Galbraith, 2004). The institutional paradigm supplanted neoclassical economics' emphasis on markets as a measure of social value and a solution to public issues with an understanding of the limitations imposed on all behavior by social customs, status, and institutions (Campbell, 2007; Mosco, 2009). Institutionalists regard the maximization of power within bureaucratic structures as a more potent factor for development (Hodgson, 2004) because the state is the arbiter of relationships between different institutions like firms and markets (Chang, 2002).

The second type is the feminist political economy. Mosco (2009) stated that the feminist political economy tackles challenges through an analytic approach to quantify the labor of the majority of the world's females. The feminist viewpoint of political economy arose because of activism and specific issues such as the neglect of domestic work and home upkeep and the compelling need to expand the discipline of economics to include feminist philosophy.

The third type is the environmental political economy. It highlights the flaws inherent in a paradigm that attributes economic development to ecological misconduct (Kütting, 2010, cited in Katz-Rosene, Kelly-Bisson & Paterson, 2021). Despite this, it advocates for man to live within the purview of responsible stewardship of the environment which also gives people the means to secure their needs (Buttel, 2003, cited in Rudel, Roberts, & Carmin, 2011). For instance, a huge oil spill, owing to the increased spending on personnel and equipment associated with the clean-up. The notion that ecological issues are critical to economic analysis is not new (Mosco, 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Means village library.

The fourth type is Neoconservatism. It is a political movement that originated in America during the 1960s among liberal politicians dissatisfied with the Democratic Party's increasingly peaceful foreign policy and the growing New Left and counterculture of the 1960s, particularly the Vietnam War protests (Kolozi, 2013; Tzogopoulos, 2009). Adherents of neoconservatism believe that markets can efficiently distribute goods and services, but free-market capitalism disturbs society and causes problems. They think capitalism encourages virtues like saving and investing but also bad habits like overconsumption and a lifestyle that relies on credit. A large wealth inequality can cause social and political instability. They also support income and inheritance taxes and social programs to reduce disparities and help low-income people (Dagger & Ball, 2025).

The fifth type of political economy is Marxist Political Economy. Marxist Political Economy (MPE) is a type of political economy linked to and in the spirit of Karl Marx's writings (particularly *The Communist Manifesto*, *Grundrisse*, and *Capital*) and insights (Das, 2014). It is a theoretical framework where political, economic, and social structures are examined from the viewpoint of class struggle and historical materialism, a principle where a society's material conditions influence its institutions (Chandhoke, 1994).

In the context of the political economy of public libraries, the institutional political economy analyzes how local governance systems, funding mechanisms, and government policies influence public libraries' development. The feminist political economy may highlight public libraries' role in pushing for gender equity and advocating for equitable access to information for women and marginalized groups. Also, the environmental political economy examines how public libraries can improve environmental literacy in various communities. From the Marxist viewpoint, public libraries can be viewed as a tool for social change, providing working-class communities with access to resources. Neoconservatism promotes privatization and limited government roles in various activities, which can influence discourses about library funding. It may challenge the role of libraries as public goods in a market-driven environment. Each of these perspectives offers distinct insights into the function of public libraries within the larger economic, social, and political frameworks.

### ***The Political Economy of Libraries in the Philippines***

In a nutshell, for Botlhale (2018), political economy concentrates on three (3) factors: (i) actors, (ii) institutions, and (iii) ideas. Actors refer to internal players such as elected leaders, public servants, and others. External actors include political groups, business organizations, trade unions, civil society organizations, foreign governments, regional bodies, sponsors, and other actors with global reach (DFID, 2009). Second, institutions pertain to structures that might be formal (constitution and codified laws) or informal (political, social, and cultural norms). Traditions often explain how tasks are accomplished in areas where formal institutions (such as the legal system, voting, and division of powers) are poorly established and enforced (North, 1991). Third, ideas are ideologies, faith, politics, political behavior, and policymaking (DFID, 2009). Ideas are crucial because knowledge, understanding, and ambiguity are frequently the deciding factors in policy success or failure. Ideas eventually become theories, which are rooted in groups and institutions. They are the most important factor in

communication and influence their creation, retention, and effect on society. Ideas help to shape policy throughout time and how power is understood (Rueschemeyer, 2006).

In the context of political economy of libraries, stakeholders are equally important in a public library's operations, whether external or internal. As Velasquez (2013) stated, internal stakeholders (local government officials, employees, and library staff) influence how the library management is run because they are concerned about compensation, working conditions, and employment. They can either simplify or complicate the operations of a public library, depending on how management treats them. Also, there are external stakeholders such as businesses, religious groups, peoples' associations, and the wider community. They can all support the library through donations of information resources, money, and positive stories about the library.

Within this context with not much studies being done regarding the political economy of public libraries in the Philippines, there are in fact several public policies and guidelines in place that have direct effects on the status and operations of public libraries locally and globally. The value of reading and learning has been fully recognized in our country. There is no doubt that the country's future prosperity depends on a highly capable citizenry. This state of affairs can only be attained by having different sources of information readily available. According to former Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, "there has never been an information-rich country that became poor. Also, there was no information-poor country that became rich" (Hatzimchail, 2003, p.6). Similarly, Alaya-ay (2013) stated that libraries can contribute to socioeconomic advancement by meeting people's informational needs quickly. Reading can help enhance learning skills, typically limited to schools. The library is regarded as the hub of education in a community, serving various groups of people. It also provides academic resources and services to ensure easy access to knowledge. Public libraries, known as the local gateway to an enlightened world, attempt to provide equitable opportunities for residents to pursue intellectual and cultural interests, the continuous development of analytical capability, and skills for lifelong learning.

Fortunately, the young Philippine state had realized this early on. Over the years, it has enacted various laws that facilitate public libraries' existence and operations even before its independence. Chandler (1981) chronologically narrated the laws that influence public libraries in the archipelago. The story goes: The Royal Decree of August 12, 1887, was the basis for creating the Museo-Bibliotheca de Filipinas, the first de facto National Library of the Philippines. Four years later, the National Library was built (1891). Then, the American Circulating Library was formed in Manila in 1901. A collection of 10,000 books was presented to the Philippine government. Act No. 96 provided the first law for the public library roles of the National Library. It began the public library movement in the Philippines (Hernandez, 1999).

The 1987 Constitution also recognizes the importance of information and education in which libraries are in a good position to supply this need. It states that:

The state acknowledges the important function of communication and information in nation-building (1987 Philippine Const., art.II,§ 24).

The state shall prioritize education, scientific and technological development, arts and culture, and sports to cultivate patriotism and nationalism, speed up socio-economic progress, and encourage human freedom and development (1987 Philippine Const., art.II,§ 17).

Turner (1990) stated that provisions laid down in the law, especially constitutions, are highly prized and respected in the Philippine political culture. This development occurred because the ruling class exerted efforts to convince the people about the sacredness of charters and the lawfulness they granted, which may have contributed to their social acceptability. Aside from constitutional guarantees and previous legislative acts, Alaya-ay (2013) stated that other laws facilitate public libraries' operations in the Philippines. First, the Republic Act 7160, known as the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, espoused the principle of decentralization, which helped enhance the autonomy of local government units (LGUs) in the country (Rosenfield, 2016).

The Republic Act No. 7743, a law that mandates the establishment of Congressional, City and Municipal Libraries, and Barangay Reading Centers Throughout the Philippines. Through this law, congressional, city, municipal libraries, and barangay reading centers have been created nationwide, but its implementation has some shortcomings (Macapagal, 2018).

At the local level in Alaminos City, Pangasinan, a supportive law for the public library is the Local Ordinance No. 2021-29 (Alaminos City Government, 2021), which converted the Library from a section to a department, and gave it more autonomy and guaranteed budget. The local ordinance has ensured the institutionalization of the library's programs and libraries regardless of who leads the local government unit.

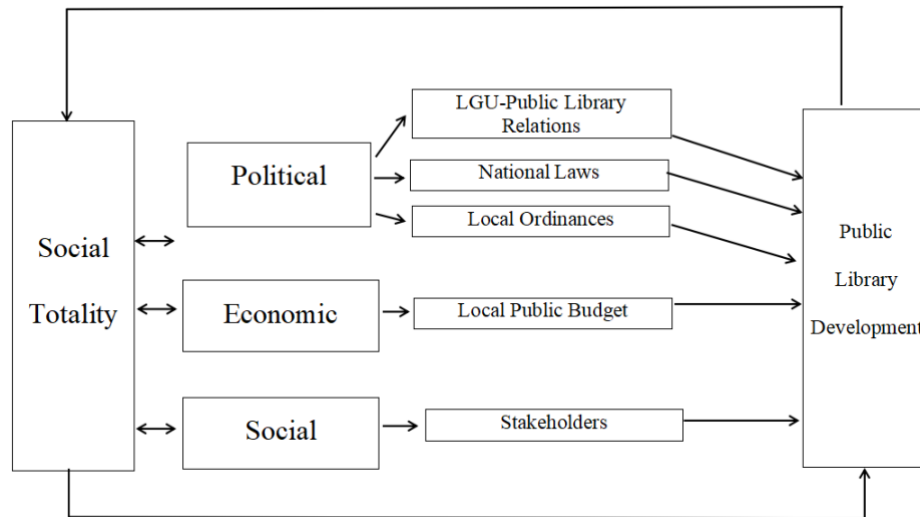
Overall, these legislative and policy documents serve as guideposts that mandate the central and local governments to continuously develop public libraries, as the services and information that they provide are considered to be a public good.

Based on the explanations above, political economy impinges on all human activities, including public libraries. As Trosow (2015) stated, it is a must for librarians and their colleagues to spend more time researching the political and economic processes that have shaped the public library's past and present policy environment. Libraries result from political institutions and are used to implement policy decisions. Comprehending these dynamics necessitates understanding the relationship between the nation and the economy. Moreover, Jaeger et al. (2014) pointed out that public libraries have to pay more attention to long-term planning of how policies have affected them to have a clearer view of their functions in a country. Understanding political economy helps us theorize about our world and possible future scenarios, which ultimately helps us decide which path to take for the most desirable future (Ellenwood, 2019). Honing their ability to skillfully convey their roles and contributions to the betterment of society will depend on how they communicate the effects of public policies and how they want those decisions to influence them. Hence, there is an imperative for a political economy of public libraries.



## Theoretical Framework

*Figure 1. Theoretical / Conceptual Framework of the Study:  
A Proposed Framework for the Political Economy of Public Libraries*



The theoretical framework of this study (Figure 1) is based on the political economy of communication by Mosco (2009), specifically social totality, in analyzing the ACPL's (Alaminos City Public Library) political economy concerning its role in providing information and knowledge for its service community. Aside from Mosco (2009), it also draws from the works of Jaeger et al. (2013) for the political (laws) and economic aspects (resource allocation for public libraries, i.e. local public budget) and Velasquez (2013) on the social component, engaging stakeholders in the development of the public library. The result of these combinations is a theoretical framework which identifies the politics, economics, and social dimensions as the primary factors that influence and shape the status and operations of public libraries. Understanding public libraries' political economy is important so that these organizations can develop well and serve their user communities (local governments, peoples' associations, schools, and others).

Why social totality? From the work of Mosco (2009), social totality is the most applicable aspect of public libraries. First of all, this attribute aims to inform the viewer of the big picture. It is imperative to analyze a situation from various angles and perspectives, including political, economic, social, or even cultural, to determine which elements of society are lacking and then devise a plan to overcome shortcomings. Moreover, it attempts to comprehend the tangible expressions of shared interests and power structure (Mosco, 2009). As Birdsall (2000) remarked, no profession responsible for managing a public agency, such as the library, can simply ignore the importance of conducting a thorough study into the politico-economic domain of public policy. Recognizing the enduring relationship between economics and politics is critical to comprehending the library's current political landscape.

For the political aspect, the theoretical framework is based from the work of Jaeger et al. (2013) regarding the impacts of political discourses and the positions emphasized

(i.e., resource distribution) in political processes on public libraries. This statement is not a means to promote or endorse politicians, political parties, or electoral candidates by libraries. A major aspect of politics is policymaking, the process of issuing government orders to address social problems through decisions and actions that will be implemented by people, institutions, and the government. Policies can be produced by legislation (i.e., ordinances, resolutions, and others), executive orders, memos, signed policy statements, and other measures available to public authorities.

In the economic dimension, access to goods and services is a concern. As a result, some people or groups can be excluded from income and livelihood and the fulfillment of necessities such as shelter, healthcare, and education. Thus, the concept of recognition (the status that is accorded to a person in employment as a valuable part of society) is important for many people (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997). Moreover, the public library is important because it functions as a *de facto* career center to help persons struggling economically. Gronowska (2009) and Yates (2009) stated that low-income clients are more inclined to use library computers for career-related activities like job searching and resume preparation; economic crises have brought this role of the public library to the forefront.

In the social aspect, public libraries have typically exhibited their public worth by concentrating on the public library's significant role in providing information access, education, access to information and communications technology (ICT), and encouraging self-improvement through services such as assistance for job searching through the internet or learning English as a second language (Barclay, 2017). The Public Library Association, a division of the American Library Association, in its advocacy's website provides numerous initiatives that public libraries are conducting to prove their worth to pursue the common good (Public Library Association, 2020). Likewise, the National Library of the Philippines (NLP) offers services like support for the establishment and upkeep of public libraries, assigning International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs), International Standard Monograph Numbers (ISMNs), and International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSNs). The NLP also manages the Intellectual Property Office (IPO), which secures Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in the country through the filing and keeping of copyright documents (NLP, 2020). When public libraries offer services in education, access, social inclusion, community engagement, and simply by existing, these public organizations are strengthening the societies where we live in (Scott, 2011a).

## **Methodology**

As explained in the case study above, the Alaminos City Public Library (ACPL) was chosen to be the case study in this research because its characteristics and achievements as an institution in supporting learning can be a good model in studying the political economy of public library.

This research is qualitative in nature to better understand the ACPL's development. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that one of the characteristics of qualitative research is reflexivity (i.e., past historical and social encounters, personal links to places, and others). Qualitative research seeks to determine and to narrate what certain people do in their daily lives and what their activities mean to them. It studies different ways of meaning-making in this world—types of people, actions, different

faiths, and interests—concentrating on variations in forms of things that create a difference for meaning (Tight, 2019). Thus, seeing what this public library has been doing up close in the past and reading how the state's extensive reach guides the development of society, including public libraries, motivated me to choose the qualitative research method.

This study used a type of qualitative research, specifically documentary research, which includes a content analysis of various print and online resources, which covers published and gray literature (i.e., unpublished references like theses), conference proceedings, journals, policy papers, legislative texts (i.e., national and local laws, resolutions, executive orders, and others), and other references (Tight, 2019). Like other research methods, documentary research examines data to understand a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, cited in Bowen, 2009). The author also gathered electronic data from the official websites dealing with managing libraries, the Alaminos City Library, the American Library Association, and the National Library of the Philippines.

This qualitative study employs documentary research, key informant interviews, and thematic analysis as its main methods to gather and analyze data on nature and characteristics of the Alaminos City Public Library's (ACPL) political economy. The overarching elements of data collection are based on the principles of management: the planning, directing, organizing, and controlling of policies, resources, and programs that deal with library programs, projects, and services. The above principles impact public library development through funding, careful use of public resources, and the roles of public libraries as expected by the local community.

### ***Research Respondents***

The researcher asked permission from the city library authorities to conduct the study. He wrote a letter of permission addressed to the library director of Alaminos City Library. Once it was approved, two online interviews were purposively conducted. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling prioritizes depth over breadth by selecting a small, select set of participants most likely to provide relevant and important insights. It avoids random sampling and focuses on cases or individuals whose views are crucial to addressing research questions. Thus, this is why purposive semi-structured online and in-person interviews were conducted. The key informant interviews (KIIs)<sup>2</sup> followed a semi-structured format and were conducted in a mix of English and Filipino.

This study provides pertinent information on the political economy of public libraries. The first semi-structured online Zoom interview was between the Researcher, the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) of the Alaminos City Public Library, and a Librarian colleague<sup>3</sup>. An online, semi-structured interview was conducted with the City Vice Mayor<sup>4</sup>, where the OIC and the Librarian were also present.

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<sup>2</sup> All the Consent Forms from the key informants, interview questionnaires, ordinances, and other related documents are in the author's thesis where this paper was based.

<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup>

Before the Zoom interview, the researcher requested the respondents (the Officer-in-Charge of the City Library, a Librarian of the same institution, and the Vice Mayor, to fill out a consent form for their participation. They filled it out and sent it to the researcher.

Later, when movement restrictions were lifted after the pandemic, two (2) separate in-person informal interviews were conducted with a small eatery owner and a grade 10 student. These activities were done to acquire different viewpoints on how the ACPL is responsive to the needs of the local community, which would be helpful in maintaining their support for the public library.

## **Presentation and Analysis of Findings**

Using the lens of the *Framework for the Political Economy of Public Libraries* presented in the theoretical framework section; we can see that the political economy of public libraries comprises the political, economic, and social aspects that explain how government institutions and the policy process (political) can affect the distribution of resources (economic), and the community support (social) which are important in sustaining the ACPL's functions and development. Thus, it indicates that public libraries' political economy is inherent in understanding its operations and growth as a public institution. The information obtained from the literature review and key informant interviews for this study were distilled using the said Framework and thematic analysis. Here, the following findings are presented:

### ***Political Aspect***

The importance of the political aspect in a public library's development is reflected in several factors, namely local government unit (LGU)-public library interactions, national laws, and local ordinances, which highlight the political side of public library growth. First, Local Government Unit (LGU)-public library relations affect a public library's activities and development due to interactions, cooperation, and disagreements with the governing local body. Second, national and local legislation influence public libraries because they set the parameters within which public libraries operate.

The impetus for creating enabling policies for building up public libraries appears to emanate from the national government, which we can see from the promulgation of the Republic Acts 7160 (Local Government Code of 1991) and 7743 (An Act Providing For The Establishment Of Congressional, City And Municipal Libraries And Barangay Reading Centers Throughout The Philippines, Appropriating The Necessary Funds Therefor And For Other Purposes). Then, LGUs are enjoined to implement national laws in their jurisdictions, which can be institutionalized by passing a local ordinance. Then, local governments use their power to provide the direction and resources for various institutions under its general supervision, including public libraries.

In this light, the Library Director shared,

Before 2015, the Library was under the Local Executive Department (City Mayor's Office). But in 2016, it was transferred to the Legislative Department by virtue of *Alaminos City Ordinance 2015-11* (Alaminos City Government,

2015). As you know, under the Local Government Code of 1991, the local public library or museum, shall be under the Secretariat of the *Sangguniang Panlungsod* (City Council). Also, the Vice Mayor is the Chair of this lawmaking body. Hence, the Alaminos local government unit (LGU) has to comply. Fortunately, even when we were under the Mayor's Office, we were well-funded.

For the Vice Mayor, he wanted to institutionalize the library's status and services while he was still in office. And so, he decided to pass a local ordinance for it. He narrated,

In other cities that we visited; we saw that libraries are only sections. Because I have seen the achievements of the library, I encouraged the Sanggunian Panglungsod to pass a local ordinance (Ordinance No. 2021-29) (Alaminos City Government, 2021) that will convert the Library from a section to a department, which give it more autonomy and guaranteed budget. I already passed it to ensure that no matter who is in power, the library's programs and funding would be institutionalized.

### ***Economic Aspect***

Table 1<sup>5</sup> (below) shows an important facet of the economic aspect of the ACPL in relation to the other LGU offices. It helps illustrate the Alaminos City LGU's support for the ACPL. The provision of an annual budget for the library to continue the services serves as an indicator that the political side of LGU-Public Library relations are positive and that it is mandated by laws. Philippine law requires local governments to support public libraries and include them in their basic services. This is under Republic Act 7743, An Act Providing for the Establishment of Congressional, City, and Municipal Libraries and Barangay Reading Centers throughout the Philippines, and Republic Act 7160, the Local Government Code of 1991, Sec. 19, paragraph 2, line (v). Audunson (2005) stated that political leaders control the budget on which public libraries rely. So, their views on how to spend those are likely to be influenced by how they see the latter's political significance.

<p><b>Table 1. Budget Allocation in the Alaminos City LGU<sup>6</sup></b></p> <p>In million Philippine pesos</p> <p>Includes personnel services, maintenance and other operating expenses</p> <p>Source: Alaminos City LGU Full Disclosure Website and the Alaminos City LGU Archives Office</p>
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<sup>5</sup> Only the City budgets from 2010-2018 and 2020-2022 are available online. City budgets 2009 below and those from 2023 are not available.

The author was able to obtain the 2019-2023 budgets of the Offices of the City Library, City Agriculturist, City Social Welfare and Development, City Engineer, and City Health Office when he visited the City LGU.

For transparency, the full disclosure of revenues are practiced by LGUs by virtue of the DILG Memo Circulars 2010-83 and 2012-141. Also, the Alaminos City government enacted a full disclosure ordinance (Ord. 2012-02).

<sup>6</sup>Sources of the Budgets: Alaminos City Full Disclosure Portal, <https://www.alaminoscity.gov.ph/public-service/full-disclosure.html>.

YEAR	CITY LIBRARY SERVICES	CITY AGRICULTURIST OFFICE	CITY SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE (CSWDO)	CITY ENGINEER'S OFFICE	CITY HEALTH OFFICE
2010	2,057,879.00	6,212,134.00	5,392,831.00	8,045,318.00	10,550,791.00
2011	1,995,355.00	5,600,804.00	5,294,401.00	8,622,374.00	12,022,788.00
2012	2,229,088.00	6,342,898.00	5,807,567.00	10,528,589.00	12,843,245.00
2013	2,093,480.00	5,830,653.00	5,484,299.00	10,268,195.00	12,626,616.00
2014	2,143,083.00	6,002,297.00	5,690,062.00	12,824,432.00	14,369,827.00
2015	2,138,281.00	6,508,805.00	5,960,691.00	14,074,294.00	20,684,524.00
2016	3,068,645.00	8,617,245.00	7,204,293.00	15,492,215.00	15,574,101.00
2017	3,940,974.00	9,748,299.75	11,442,756.00	15,318,048.00	19,202,688.00
2018	3,824,844.00	12,226,087.40	12,499,000.00	15,433,540.25	31,690,879.00
2019	720,000.00	15,772,761.00	13,443,067.00	17,414,410.00	21,899,585.00
2020	720,000.00	11,102,803.22	11,574,270.00	17,747,825.00	20,970,159.00
2021	1,350,000.00	16,307,098.00	10,900,987.00	19,697,437.00	25,615,020.00
2022	5,461,918.00	22,297,483.00	12,871,187.00	22,623,906.00	30,845,186.00
2023	5,861,118.00	22,327,872.00	13,559,511.00	22,213,626.00	32,469,220.00

Regarding the local budget and the library's share, the Library Director explained,

This is not to say that the LGU is not prioritizing the City Library, but the other offices have more functions and services to deliver to the city's constituents, so they are granted more resources. For instance, LGU organizations like the City Social Welfare and Development Office have many programs for social protection like the 4Ps (Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program) and cash aid for senior citizens. Also, the City Health Office have many functions like free health care. Certainly, the City Library's role, as pointed out by the City Library Director, is on literacy (Library Director, personal communication, November 24, 2023.)<sup>7</sup>

### **Social Aspect**

In the social aspect, stakeholders, such as businesses, people's associations, and the broader community, play a pivotal role. Their support, manifested through donations

<sup>7</sup> "Literacy" was the word she mentioned.

of information resources, financial contributions, and positive narratives about the Library, contributes significantly to its vitality. Furthermore, it was found in this study that the participation of stakeholders, in this case, associations such as the Alaminos Pangasinan Association from the United States of America (APAUSA) and the Pangasinan Brotherhood from the United States of America (PABUSA), are important. Also, some non-governmental organizations (NGO) like the Agap Foundation<sup>8</sup>, which donated 2 classrooms to a barangay, had partnered with the City Library to help build a small library. Over the years, several private citizens also donated to the ACPL some materials that they have (Alaminos City Library, n.d.). Also, equally imperative is maintaining their support, including local businesses and fast food chains in the city, because they can all be regular benefactors. They donate materials, speak good things about the library to people, and even secure used books that can still be valuable to children in more distant places, especially during an Aklatang Pambarangay drive.

The Library Director narrated,

We have regular benefactors like the Alaminos Pangasinan Association from the United States of America (APAUSA) and the Pangasinan Brotherhood from the United States of America (PABUSA). So we maintain contacts with them so they will know what are being done with their donations (Library Director, personal communication, July 30, 2021).

In this line, the Vice Mayor added that an NGO assisted them in helping a public school to have its own infrastructure as the ACPL was also helping some public schools to have a small reading collection. He noted that,

About 2 years ago (2019), there was a non-governmental organization, *Agap Foundation*, which donated 2 classrooms to a barangay. After that, public schools became more interested in partnering with us (City Vice Mayor, personal communication, September 16, 2021).

Furthermore, in fulfilling the library's role as an information provider to different members of the local community, there are several respondents who gave their opinions about the ACPL. They are:

I used to go to the Library [ACPL] when I was an elementary and high school student. If I will ever go back there, I would probably look for magazines or cookbooks where I might see new recipes for my business. Now that I have a family, I would also like to bring my son with me to go there and do his homework (Small eatery owner, Personal communication, Aug 23, 2024).

Well, we use the public library as a space where we would meet up and do our school assignments and projects. Also, we have a library hour in our school where we usually stay there and browse the books that we might be interested (Grade 10 student, Personal communication, Aug 24, 2024).

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<sup>8</sup> During the Zoom interview, APAUSA, PABUSA, and Agap Foundation are the only associations and NGO mentioned by the ACPL personnel and the Vice Mayor that helps out the Library aside from local businesses.

Overall, this study reveals that national and local government policies influence libraries. Cultivating good relationships with different stakeholders secures funding and support. In this study, they also hoped for growth, aiming for inclusivity, equipment for the library, possible branch expansion, and meeting user's changing needs. This study found that it is imperative to emphasize public libraries' role as information hubs, fostering partnerships, adapting to challenges, and contributing to community development within governmental frameworks, showcasing resilience and growth potential.

## **Conclusion**

In the political aspect, the recognition of the ACPL's value by the Alaminos City Government is evident through the passage of enabling policies at the local and national levels. In the economic sphere, the library's services, including document assistance, livelihood programs, job search support, and computer literacy classes, has contributed to the local community's welfare and established a beneficial link between the library and the local community. In the social aspect, the active involvement of stakeholders, such as associations and local businesses, has fostered robust connections within the community, enhancing the library's outreach and impact.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the literature review, key informant interviews, and the presentation and analysis of findings, the author offers several options that may be explored as far as the political economy of public libraries is concerned. These are:

1. *Convince local officials to pass an enabling law (i.e., ordinance) that empowers the public libraries.*

Specifically, a public library should become a separate department and be given its own budget, not lumped with other larger offices. The steadfast support from the local government offices that manage the public library, in this case, the Office of the Vice Mayor, underscores the support of this institution. These developments underscored the constitutional and legislative mandates that underscore the vital role of public libraries in nation-building.

2. *It is much better to involve local officials in the programs of the library.*

If they have time to spare, they should be invited and encouraged to come with the library when it conducts its programs, such as outreach activities in various barangays and public schools. Sometimes, they become a strong ally for a public library and its goal for the community: access to knowledge that community members may need. Once policymakers, such as a Vice Mayor, realize that a policy response is warranted (like developing a public library further), a situation's momentum may convince them to exert strong political will that can mobilize the authority and resources of their office towards achieving a goal.

3. *A public library may request the National Library of the Philippines (NLP) to help convince LGUs to develop the libraries in their jurisdictions, especially after a turnover of political offices following an election.*



As a national agency, the NLP is uniquely positioned to help public libraries convince their LGUs about their importance. With the help of the local community's library supporters and the NLP, a public library must make its case by framing it in the context of fulfilling mutually beneficial interests. For example, if the library develops well, an LGU will likely secure awards that bring honor (including photo ops for social media pages) to the local community. It could also help local officials bolster their track record as staunch supporters of education through public libraries, which may also enhance their re-election prospects.

*4. Public libraries must continuously engage local higher education institutions (HEIs) to build up capacity for participating in the policy process at the local and national levels.*

Schools and institutes of public administration (PA), in a local private or state university, are uniquely positioned to help out public libraries because they have the intellectual capital for research and development about how governments operate. And so, they can help public libraries build up their political economy awareness and better navigate the local political-administrative institutions in their communities.

*5. ACPL and public libraries, in general, must have some mechanism for a community needs analysis.*

The approach should be something that the library staff can perform on a regular basis. So that a public library will know the niche information needs of the city's larger constituency, not just students and professionals, but also those that participate in the city's local industries like business owners, tourism personnel, and those from the grassroots including but not limited to fisher folk, farmers, public market vendors, transport operators, and others. The learning that can be acquired from this activity can help the ACPL come up with references and services that can be relevant to these groups.

## **Notes**

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