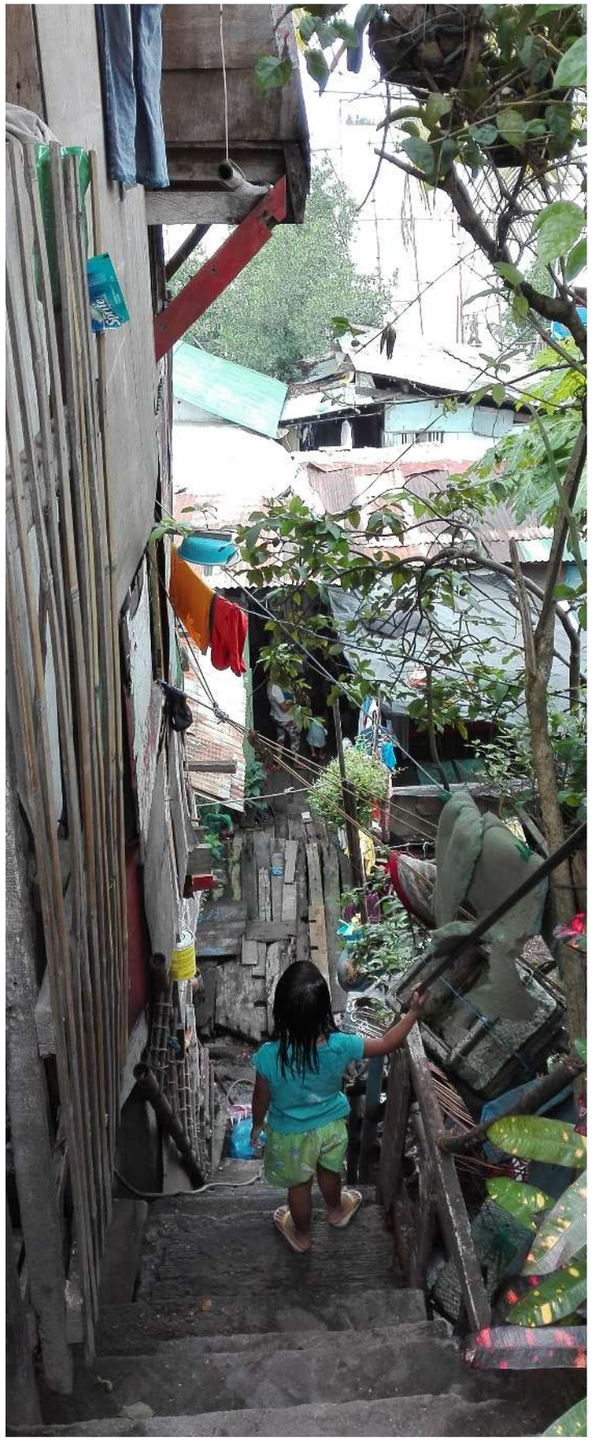

Maria demonstrates how to make the lanterns with local kids.

Elina helps to light the LED lanterns at sundown. It was a magical moment; the kids were especially in awe of the light.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project was completed during a field research trip as part of a course at Aalto University in Helsinki, Finland.

Growing light was the outcome of an effort to highlight and revitalize a neglected yet remarkable natural green feature of Tagbilaran City. Our efforts were focused on a large Balete tree that stands at the core of a community of informal settlers. The tree contains cultural and practical value: it is the subject of folklore in Filipino culture, and protects the community from sun, heat, wind, erosion, and fire. We aimed to promote stewardship of the tree area within the community by engaging in a collective removal of waste from around the tree, followed by the facilitation of a lantern-making workshop with the children (including a lantern-lighting event using LED candles). We supported the greening of the area by providing new flowers and plants for the residents to arrange into a small garden. The project empowered the community to continue caring for the area, as they light the lanterns on a regular basis, as well as make additions to the garden in the form of DIY-plant holders from recycled materials, and engage in independent efforts to keep the area clean, such as using signs requesting that nobody litters in the area. The community members expressed plans to add more plants in the future, and referred to the project as the start of something bigger.

THE INTERVENTION – GROWING LIGHT

Jin-Young Chun, Mary Olga Forsythia, Ryota Fujimatsu, Marina Matsupa, Maria Mercer, Elina Nikkanen, Vince Zamora.

Jin-Young and Marina entertained the children after the workshop.

Adults also took part in the project. They especially helped to clean the area around the tree.

A couple of days after our intervention, members of the community sent a photo of how they are continuing the improvement of the area by themselves

HASSELT PRINCIPLE #1 COLLABORATION WITH DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Our project activities were located in the heart of an informal settlement in Tagbilaran City, Philippines, where community members face socio-economic challenges on a daily basis. They are disadvantaged in several ways, ie. lacking safe housing, proper sanitation, economic resources, access to education and employment, and are subject to segregation from society. Our project activities, including ideation processes, the clean-up of the area, the lantern-making, and the garden design, involved the participation and collaboration with residents of the settlement. Many people took part: children, youth, adults, seniors, and a balance of both genders. The residents' participation allowed them to experience, and be reminded of, what is possible to achieve as a collaborative effort in making small, positive changes to their living environment on their own terms. We feel that this provided them with a sense of empowerment to maintain and develop the project results on their own.

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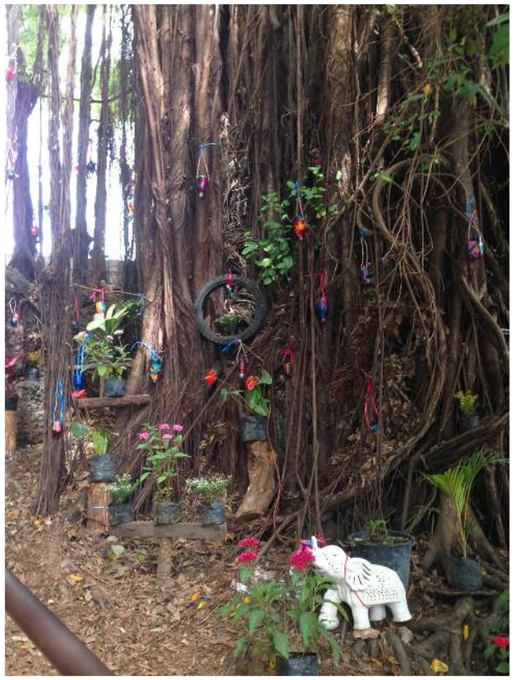
Recycled plastic bottles were used as a base for the lanterns.

Vince and Ryota collected some materials for the workshop around the community together with their former president .

Residents were inspired to proceed with landscaping and used salvaged materials, such as an elephant, tires...



HASSELT PRINCIPLE #5 VALUES, CULTURE AND NATURE

We based our activities on the local conditions and available resources. We started with a desire to improve the rubbish-strewn area around this particular Balete tree, and found that the tree was very much part of the community, so it felt appropriate to work with the residents to conduct the intervention. Foremost, one of the fundamental local values that we feel contributed to the success of the project was the communal spirit of the residents in the informal settlement: they were eager to be involved in the activities we were facilitating, and took initiative in continuing to improve the garden area after we had already left. In terms of materials, to construct the lanterns we used discarded plastic bottles, and a method that was easy for kids to do themselves (and potentially be able to do again on their own). When purchasing the flowers and plants for the garden, we consulted a member of the community who has gardening experience and who could identify plants which would survive in the area under the tree, taking into account factors such as shade. She also gave assurance that they would be happy and willing to care for and grow the plants.

THE INTERVENTION – GROWING LIGHT

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Many people showed up to take part in the day's activities.

There was a lot of excitement in the air as the activities unfolded. People gathered to take part, watch, chat, sing, and just spend time together.

The vibrant community spirit provided the foundation for lasting collaborations.

HASSELT PRINCIPLE #7 DIALOGUES AND LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS

This project promotes trans-national dialogues and long-term partnerships with the communities in Tagbilaran City, Philippines in several ways. The project was completed during a course offered at Aalto University in Finland which takes place every year: for the last three years, students have been returning to Tagbilaran City. By facilitating a project that has close ties with a smaller community with the city, we have begun to establish a positive relationship with citizens which is something that can be built upon in the future. For example, if students go to the city again next year, they can potentially continue to develop past student projects or initiatives. Also, as local students were involved in the project, there is potential for them to continue the project work or to maintain contact with the community members who took part in the project. In addition, we exchanged contact information with the residents in the informal settlement, and can contact them to ask, for example, how the garden is doing, and stay connected with them through social media.

THE INTERVENTION – GROWING LIGHT

Jin-Young Chun, Mary Olga Forsythia, Ryota Fujimatsu, Marina Matsupa, Maria Mercer, Elina Nikkanen, Vince Zamora.