

Dancing Through Time: Unveiling the Cultural Evolution of Cagayan de Oro's Oro Higalaay Festival

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Abstract. This study investigates the historical background and cultural significance of the Higalaay Street Dancing, a central feature of the Higalaay Festival in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines. Despite its importance as a cultural celebration, the festival, particularly the street dancing aspect, remains underexplored in existing scholarly literature. This research aims to fill that gap by focusing on the evolution of the Oro Higalaay Street Dance, tracing its transformation from its origins in the Kagayha-an Festival up to the 2023 Oro Higalaay Festival. The festival has grown to emphasize key historical, social, economic, and religious milestones, all honored through its vibrant street dancing tradition. Particularly, the festival pays tribute to St. Augustine, the patron saint of Cagayan de Oro, adding a significant religious dimension to the celebration. The research highlights how the festival has come to symbolize the city's rich cultural and historical values, making it an important avenue for cultural preservation. The study employs a phenomenological research design within a qualitative framework, relying on in-depth interviews, audio recordings, and the transcription of local experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the festival's impact. Through this approach, the study uncovers the role of street dancing not just as a form of entertainment but as a medium for preserving local traditions and fostering cultural pride among the people of Cagayan de Oro and its neighboring communities. The latest version of the street dance features a combination of religious and cultural elements in its choreography, music, attire, and thematic presentations. These elements allow audiences to connect more deeply with the city's heritage while the dance becomes a powerful storytelling vehicle. Ultimately, this research enhances the understanding of the festival's role in sustaining cultural identity and preserving traditions through the dynamic medium of dance.

Keywords: Street dancing; Tableau presentation; Higalaay, Cagayan de Oro.

1.0 Introduction

Culture plays a vital role in society. It is one of the things that make a society unique and special. Culture “refers to the way of life of members of society or groups within a society. It includes how they dress, marriage customs, language, family life, work patterns, religious ceremonies, and leisure pursuits (Giddens, 2001). In addition, it is a form of self-expression that is liberating and empowering. Whether through art, music, fashion, cuisine, or dance, culture allows one to show the world who the members of a society are (Carizal, 2023). How do people maintain their culture? One way is to pass on traditions from generation to generation. According to Carizal (2023), culture is preserved through storytelling, songs, dances, and other forms of traditional expression that form or

constitute a society's cultural heritage. People today go back to their cultural heritage to appreciate the past and know how the past has influenced the present (Merriman, 2016).

One way of preserving this is by holding festivals that can be religious, cultural, or both. These festivals play a crucial role in fostering a sense of community, making everyone feel connected and part of a larger whole. There are occasions when the community comes together to express gratitude for benefits received, particularly those related to good health, bountiful harvest, and other positive aspects of life. Festivals are only complete with dancing and other rituals. Dancing at festivals or participating in dance activities encourages social interaction and bonding among family members and the community. It fosters a sense of belonging and unity as people come together to celebrate and share their cultural heritage. According to Olokodana-James (2022), festival dances draw people's culture by portraying the people's way of life through movements, costumes, music, chants, and implements inherent to their place of origin. They may include competitions for individual dances or teams or serve as a cultural event focused on dance. They were anchored on phenomenology as a framework to capture the development of a festival as individuals experience it. The researcher aims to describe the phenomena as they appear to the subject and explore the meaning and significance of these experiences. Furthermore, the Multiculturalism and Salad Bowl Theory highlight how the festival has evolved and is shaped by the blend of cultures in the region. The street dances symbolize the diverse ethnic groups and foreign influences that have inhabited Cagayan de Oro, a city where different communities have coexisted peacefully. This harmony supports this study's application of multiculturalism and the salad bowl theory.

In Cagayan de Oro City, one such festival is the Higalaay Festival, held every last week of August, culminating on August 28, the city fiesta, in honor of the city's patron saint, St. Augustine or Señor San Augustine. The weeklong celebration attracts people from various sectors—businesses, tourists, students, and devotees of St. Augustine— from across Northern Mindanao and different parts of the Philippines. Participants gather to observe or partake in simultaneous events, such as the Garden Show and Agri-Fair, Kumbira Culinary Show, Higas Parade of Floats and Icons, and the Higalaay Festival Parade, highlighted by the city's street dancing competition, where local barangays compete. This cultural celebration mirrors similar religious festivals worldwide, such as those in India and Turkey, which promote national culture and heritage. As highlighted in the book 'The Importance of Religious Festivals to Promote Cultural Heritage in Turkey and India,' such festivals play a vital role in preserving cultural identity while fostering communal unity, underscoring their significance in local and global contexts.

The Oro Higalaay Festival's street dancing is the main highlight of the fiesta, and it brings the city of Cagayan de Oro to life with colorful performances, upbeat music, and vibrant costumes; these presentations showcase diverse narratives. Held on the eve of the fiesta, the street dancing is a grand spectacle that showcases the rich culture and history of the city. These performances are broadcast on local TV channels, allowing live and remote audiences to enjoy the event. In the past, street dancing was more open-ended. Schools and barangays were free to choose any dance style—whether traditional, modern, or cultural. There was not a specific theme that participants had to follow, so they had the freedom to express themselves in various ways. However, in 2023, the festival Committee decided to bring more structure and meaning to the event. The objective was to explore the city's history, focusing on its original ethnic groups and the foreign rulers who once controlled the region. They introduced a theme that focused on the history of Cagayan de Oro, aiming to teach people about the city's roots through dance. The dances now reflect the diverse groups that have shaped Cagayan de Oro, showing how different cultures have come together and lived in unity. This idea is similar to the "salad bowl" theory of multiculturalism, where various cultures coexist while maintaining their unique traditions, specifically Longley's "salad bowl theory." By doing this, the festival not only entertains but also educates the audience, helping them appreciate the cultural heritage of Cagayan de Oro through the dances that tell the story of its past.

As a native of Cagayan de Oro City, the researcher aims to explore the history and significance of the street dances in the Oro Higalaay Festival, a topic with limited existing literature, particularly on street dancing and tableau presentations. In addition to the points mentioned, there are not enough curated and documented resources. The researcher believes that through the street dance presentation, the people of Cagayan de Oro and its neighboring Municipalities and Cities will come to appreciate their past and cultural heritage, and that the dances of their history or origin will fill in the gap in the history and tradition of the city. In addition, the experiences of the

diverse participants – the organizers, the dancers themselves, the choreographers, and all those involved in the activity will also be captured. A study of these dances in terms of theme, expression, dance steps, music, costumes, cultural materials, and choreography will contribute to the upkeep of these dances for the future generation to appreciate and connect/relate these to some cultural change. Thus, this study sought to answer the following questions: “What is the historical background and significance of the Oro Higalaay Festival?” and “What are the cultural and religious elements integrated into the interpretation of the dances in terms of the following theme, expression, and dance steps, music, attire and cultural materials, and choreography (sequence, arrangement, execution, style)?”

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological design, a type of qualitative research, to gather information from participants about their lived experiences of the phenomenon. The researcher collected stories from participants to understand their emotions, thoughts, and interpretations of their experiences. The focus was on the street dancing competition of the Oro Higalaay Festival, as experienced by various stakeholders, including consultants, coordinators, musicians, judges, choreographers, and the dancers themselves. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals directly involved in the street dancing competition. Thematic analysis theory was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. The information gathered on the dances was categorized based on themes such as expression and dance steps, music, attire and cultural materials, and choreography (sequence, arrangement, execution, and storyline).

2.2 Research Locale

The research was conducted in Cagayan de Oro City, a highly urbanized, first-class city in the Northern Mindanao region of the Philippines. Although geographically situated in Misamis Oriental province, the city operates administratively independently of the provincial government. According to the 2020 census, the city had a population of 728,402, making it the 10th most populous city in the country. Ethnically, around 44% of Cagayan de Oro's household population is of mixed descent, with 22.15% Cebuano, 48% Boholano, and 28.07% from various other ethnic groups, including indigenous peoples from nearby towns and provinces. Additionally, ten selected barangays actively participate in the annual Higalaay Festival street dancing, contributing experiences deeply tied to the city's cultural identity.

The importance of such festivals, as explored by Villones (2020) in the case of the Negros Panaad Festival, reveals how cultural events often reflect the deep religiosity of a community. Much like the Panaad Festival, which is celebrated to give thanks to Divine Providence and prominently features images of saints, the Oro Higalaay Festival in Cagayan de Oro similarly incorporates religious elements, honoring St. Augustine through its street dancing competitions and performances. This interplay of religion and culture in festivals is further emphasized by studies like those of Picard and Robinson (2006) in "Festivals, Tourism and Social Change: Remaking Worlds," highlighting how festivals globally act as platforms for showcasing spiritual devotion and cultural heritage. Picard and Robinson's work provides a broader comparative framework to understand better how festivals like Higalaay celebrate local identity and align with global traditions that fuse religious practices with cultural expression.

In both cases, these festivals become a conduit for community cohesion, fostering unity among diverse ethnic groups while drawing from a shared religious foundation. This broader context highlights the significance of the Higalaay Festival not only as a local event but also as part of a global tradition of festivals that intertwine religious observance with cultural heritage, as supported by scholarly literature across different regions.

2.3 Research Participants

Cagayan de Oro City and some selected barangays were the location of the research. Ten (10) barangays joined the street festival dancing every year and had acquired experiences with the same phenomenon. Individuals selected to participate in the study were expected to have significant and meaningful experiences of the phenomenon being investigated (Cresswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher selected the participants who could provide the best information to achieve the answer to the study and actively participated in street dancing for at least one year. Three Consultants were the facilitators for the conceptualization of the Oro Higalaay Street Dancing; Three of the Coordinators were organizers committee of the street dancing; Four Choreographers who

conceptualized the art of dance movement; Two Musicians who played indigenous musical instruments; Costume designers also choreographers who created costumes for the dancers that are relevant to the theme. Two Performers are members of a certain barangay's contingent, and one qualified Judge is knowledgeable about cultural significance, theme interpretation, and consistent criteria application and can also provide constructive feedback.

2.4 Research Instrument

Using a semistructured questionnaire, this study encouraged participants to openly discuss their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. To ensure significant findings, the researcher collected relevant data. The researcher developed the interview guide questions, underwent pilot testing, and were reviewed and modified by the researcher. Additionally, an external validator, a member of the NCCA-speaker bureau in street dancing and assisted by a city tourism operation officer, verified the questions. Different open-ended questions were tailored for the various groups of participants. For example, consultants were asked, "Why does Fiesta matter so much to the culture, traditions, and community life of Cagayan de Oro?" as coordinators and event heads were asked, "How do organizers assess the success and impact of the street dancing and tableau presentation as the festival highlight?"

2.5 Data Analysis

To fully comprehend the data, the researcher followed the six phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke in 2006. I rigorously reviewed it multiple times, took comprehensive notes, and employed coding to highlight crucial features. They have proactively identified emerging patterns by grouping similar data points and organizing codes into a coherent framework. After thorough verification, the themes were clearly defined and labeled the themes, adding precision to the final report. The report seamlessly integrated the analysis narrative with concrete data examples for a robust discussion.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

For this study, the primary data collection method was through in-depth interviews with the three key informants and other twelve participants who played a role in the street dancing. Before data gathering, the researcher applied for research ethics at Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of the shared meaning that individuals attributed to the phenomenon. Participants selected for this study had significant experiences related to the phenomenon. The researcher arranged interviews with each participant. When the participant could not attend the scheduled interview, he/she had the option to reschedule them. Permission was granted to record the interviews and to take notes during the interview. Data were collected from in-depth interviews, audio recordings, and transcribing. Codes were assigned to participants to maintain confidentiality.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

There was no possibility of infringing on the participants' privacy, as measures were in place to guarantee and uphold confidentiality as mandated by the university's ethical regulations. There was no conflict of interest, and the ethical standards of the institutional committee ensured that ethics remained a priority throughout the study. Confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity were rigorously maintained throughout collecting, storing, and publishing research materials. The participants were kept anonymous, and their inclusion in this study was strictly voluntary. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Historical Background and Significance of Oro Higalaay Festival

Table 1 illustrates the development of the Oro Higalaay Festival. The festival and street dance are integral parts of the respective communities' cultural heritage. This dance is significant as it reflects the region's history and culture. The current Oro Higalaay Festival in Cagayan de Oro has evolved through the years in terms of theme: from Kagayha-an Festival: Cultural presentation (1995 and 1996); Kagay-an Festival: Cultural open competition (1997); KaroTawo Festival: Dancers with Hand props; Higalaay Kagay-an Festival: Carnival Street Parade (2014-2022); Oro Higalaay Festival: Showdown of the street Dance Competition (2023-present). Higalaay is the center of the Various Dance Themes, outlining the central message, concept, or narrative that dance performance seeks to convey. It often reflects the dance's cultural, historical, or artistic significance.

Table 1. Thematic analysis of the historical background and significance of the current Oro Higalaay Festival

Theme	Description	Quotations	Significance
Kagayha-an Festival: Cultural Presentation	This refers to the City Fiesta celebration in Honor of the Patron Saint, started in 1995	"The Indigenous people reacted on the meaning of the festival which means shame" CN003	Revealed that they were uncomfortable with Kagayha-an festival name
Kagay-an Festival: Cultural Open Competition	Kagay is a local term for the sound of the ripples of water in the river, which started in 1997.	"It does not give any identity of the locality of the city." CN002	The event honors the Cagayan de Oro River, underscoring its importance to the community and its enduring bond with nature.
Karo-Tawo Festival: Dancers with hand props	It entails forming a float with hand props, symbolizing the icons of Cagayan de Oro; started in 2008	"Instead of making a float, dancers act as a float in forming the different icons" CN001	Depicts Cagayan de Oro's legends, myths, and history.
Higalaay Festival: Carnival Street Parade	This refers to a festival of merrymaking that started in 2014 before Lent.	"not a copycat from Kaamulan, just to have merry-making in the streets of Divisoria." CN001	No specific theme; created a logo but no connection to the celebration of Cagayan de Oro Fiesta.
Oro Higalaay Festival: Showdown of the Street Dance Competition	This festival focuses on the city's rich history and current dynamics, including its social, economic, and religious achievements, expressing gratitude and appreciation for these milestones. This was started in 2023	"Oro Higalaay because of the golden friendship" CD005	Emphasizes the historical and cultural values of the city. A much more organized Festival.

Kagayha-an Festival: Cultural Presentation

The Kagayha-an Festival, originally held in honor of St. Augustine, featured cultural presentations reflecting the region's heritage, using tableau performances to express emotions and cultural motifs in street dancing. Over time, the event evolved to emphasize choreographed movements portraying cultural themes. However, in the mid1990s, members of the Indigenous people community expressed discomfort with the festival's name, as "Kagayhaan" was interpreted as meaning "shame," prompting calls for a name change. Here is some feedback

'Kagayha-an means shame or ashamed, Kagaya-an is the source of shame).' (CN001)

'A big shame on our part to continue a festival with that name.'(CN004)

Furthermore, the festival's name was changed to promote a more respectful and inclusive environment for everyone involved. This decision highlighted the value of community feedback in shaping the event. By embracing this input, the festival has remained a platform for celebrating and preserving the diverse cultural heritage of Cagayan de Oro and its neighboring areas. The festival's theme also changed in 1997.

Kagay-an Festival Cultural Open Competition

An open competition featured a variety of dance styles, allowing for free interpretation of the concept of merrymaking to honor and express gratitude to God through St. Augustine. The festival's new name and theme drew inspiration from Carnival, with the dancers' graceful arm movements and the harmonious sounds of the instruments compared to "*the sound of a river, much like fallen spoons and forks on the ground*" (CN002). However, this approach was short-lived, as many individuals and organizations raised concerns about using Carnival as an inspiration. Carnival, a festive period celebrated in many Roman Catholic countries just before Lent, did not align with the traditional purpose of the event, which honors St. Augustine on August 28th. Due to these objections, the festival faced criticism for being associated with Carnival. The following are some statements of the following pieces of information:

'It is important to change the name of the festivals; Our City fiesta falls in August.' (CN003)

'The celebration must be rooted with faith and religious connections integral to the community.' (CD006)

The revised festival continues to honor the patron saint while preserving its cultural significance. It includes a tribute to the Cagayan de Oro River, symbolizing the community's lasting bond with its environment. This time, the festival committee decided to develop a new theme. They asked the organizers to make the dancers/participants form a human float (Karo) as they dance in the streets.

Karo-Tawo Festival: Dancers with hand props

This street dance features groups of dancers who come together to form a float while performing. Using hand props, they create icons representing Cagayan de Oro's history, legends, and myths. Among these are symbols like the mythical Goldfish and formations depicting transportation methods, such as the motorela, invented by a Kagayanon and still used today. Other representations include the MacArthur cap in Macabalan, the American period, and the Nawasa Tank from the Spanish era. Additionally, props like fish traps highlight traditional livelihoods. More details on the City Dance Festival's performance can be found in the quotes below.

"Karo means float; instead of creating a float, dancers act as a float in forming the different icons of CDO, which is unique to this festival." CN003

"The performers were given specific counting to form variations of formations on the suggested city icons." (CN001)

The Karo Tawo festival was open to all without guidelines, creating a "free for all" atmosphere. One participant noted,

"As a freelance choreographer, I will be recreating their dance routine from a previous street dance competition I have attended." (CC0012)

This highlights how the lack of clear festival themes impacts the authenticity and diversity of performances. Over the years, administrative shifts have also changed the city's festival identity, with the Karo-Tawo being renamed the Higalaay Kagay-an Festival.

Higalaay Festival: Carnival Street Parade

The Cagayan de Oro Carnival Parade is a street dancing competition where city barangays compete for the Best Carnival Parade title, aiming to create a festive and joyful atmosphere. While there are no strict dance guidelines, performances must promote peace and economic growth. The organizing committee has shifted the theme to make it more vibrant and uplifting for everyone. Additionally, the Carnival of Cultures celebrates the creativity of artists, giving fresh meaning to folk arts. Participants expressed their excitement for the event and its cultural significance. Interviewees highlighted the city's branding as the "City of Golden Friendship," with "Higalaay" symbolizing friendship. Although some felt the performances lacked clear direction, they were enjoyed for their carefree spirit. The committee's goal was to use the festival to bring happiness to people from all walks of life. To develop a bigger, better, and more meaningful fiesta celebration, the 2023 Fiesta Committee dubbed the fiesta celebration Higalaay 2023.

Oro Higalaay Street Dance Festival and Competition

A key aspect of the event is to center the dance and festival concept around Cagayan de Oro's rich history, highlighting its social, economic, religious, and historical milestones, with a special focus on honoring Saint Augustine, the city's patron saint, for his continued protection of the Cagayanons and visitors. The proposed structure of the Higalaay Festival traces Cagayan de Oro's history across different eras, including the Higaonon, Maranao, Spanish, and American-Japanese periods. The feedback below reflects its historical significance, cultural representation, and important milestones.

"Non-negotiable is to venerate St. Augustine and the chanting for the patron Saint." CN002

"From what I had known and read in a history book when the Spaniards came, they found rich deposits in Sitio Munigi and Pigtao and also in the sand beds of the river. Because of this, the conquerors consequently named it Cagayan de Oro." CN003

Furthermore, performances follow a storyline from the city's origins to the establishment of the Oro Higalaay Street Dance, emphasizing the spread of Christianity and the shaping of the city's identity. The festival is evaluated on three key aspects, as seen in the following feedback.

"Cultural-first inhabitant community in Himologan were, the Higaonon then the milestone- now it is CDO in progress." CN003

"Unlike previous street dancing competitions, this one failed to showcase cultural identities. The Carnival theme did not represent the Cagayanons." CD004

Hence, these festivals are not just gatherings; they are celebrations deeply rooted in the city's rich heritage and history. They pay tribute to the patron saint, St. Augustine, and Our Lady of the Fortress, who defended the village from Moro raids in the 1600s. These events showcase the fundamental values of faith, unity, and friendship that bind the community together. This is supported by Eddy (2016), who mentions that dance can also be used to find a solution to conflict and enhance tolerance and connections, aiding in peace and harmony. The following feedback emphasizes friendship because of Higalaay:

"We included the Our Lady of the Fortress apparition as part of our dance routine." CC003

"There is a storyline you need to hit, specifically the nine steps that should be executed during the performances." PF0011

3.2 Cultural and Religious Elements Integrated in the Interpretation of the Dances

Table 2. Thematic analysis of the cultural and religious elements integrated into the interpretation of the dances

Elements	Cultural elements	Quotations	Religious elements	Quotations
Theme	First settlers, Himologan Golden Fish or the Mythical fish	"Higaunon inhabitants, headed by Datu Salangsang" CN001 "A Goldfish that stays at the bottom of the river near the Cathedral church. The mineral deposit on the scales turned out to be gold." CN002	Our Lady of the Fortress apparition Celebrating the feast day of St. Augustine, patron saint of the city	"Aid in the freedom from attack/raids ." PF0011 "The festival pays homage to the city's patron saint. CN003
Expression Dance steps	Facial, body language, and gestures physical gestures in the articulation of the nine(9) steps in the major streets of Cagayan de Oro.	" handshaking as a gesture of friendliness" CN002 "Riding a Motorela steps"CN004	Friend/Handshaking Veneration to the Patron	"it manifested the friendship gesture. CN002 "It truly captures the essence of praising St. Augustine"PF0010
Music	Cultural instruments use traditional instruments.	"Do not forget to listen to the music that serves as the festival's heartbeat."MC007	Still developing	"I haven't focused on the religious meaning of the dance, only focused on the music."MC008
Attire and cultural Materials	The dominant color of the costume and other materials should be gold	"Not allowed to follow the diamond design; the acceptable design is a triangle for attires."CC0014	The crucifix is used for adornment	"Headdress of the performers was inspired by the hat of St. Augustine."CD006
Choreography	The art of creating dance routine for a certain dance genre.	"The sequence of dances should have a historical basis for the performance."CC001 5	The historical context from Our Lady of the Fortress and Veneration of St. Augustine	"Non-negotiable requirement is the resemblance to St. Augustine, not a statue as a sign of adoration." CC003

Higalaay is the Center of the Various Dance Themes

Themes in street dancing often intertwine cultural and religious elements, enriching the interpretation of the dances. This fusion showcases the diversity of traditions and serves as a means of cultural expression and celebration. By incorporating cultural and religious symbols, street dances become powerful vehicles for conveying deeper meanings and connecting performers and audiences to their heritage and beliefs. Gabao (2007) mentions how dance forms mirror the period's culture and reflect the society's political, social, intellectual, and religious nature. One such example is the acknowledgment of Cagayan de Oro's River as a source of gold:

"The Gold panning step, a traditional Kagay-anon method of gathering gold, remains integral to sustaining communities, symbolizing the river's profound influence on their livelihood and significance in their lives." (CC0013)

Dance Steps Reflecting the Past and Present

Cultural street dance performances convey a sense of identity, pride, and storytelling (Ehrenreich, 2007). In dance, expression utilizes body, facial expressions, and gestures to communicate, while dance steps are the physical gestures employed (Camurri et al., 2004). Their integration creates captivating performances with potential audience impact and personal connection to the dance and its cultural context. In the 2023 Oro Higalaay Street Dance Festival and Competitions, the organizing committee came up with rules that were to be followed by the participating groups in their dance presentations: The performers have to articulate nine (9) basic steps as they pass through the major streets of Cagayan de Oro during the date of the competition, from the Rotunda down to the Pelaez Sports Center, the final venue for the tableau presentation. The steps were to serve as icons of the city's dance festival. They must be incorporated into the street and tableau presentations to give substance to the event's purpose and educate the Kagay-anons and guests on the richness of the culture, history, the city's unprecedented progress and development, and the representation of the Cagayan River.

The nine basic steps include: 1.) Kagay steps. They represent the ripples of the Cagayan de Oro River/small but bouncing waters. They represent the events created by the history of people's struggles, heroism, and contributions to a better CDO. 2.) Suba or Kagay Steps. They are a combination of small and big waves of change rushing to the mainstream of the riverbed, especially during the rainy season. The future is always flowing (significance of the river to Kagay-anons). 3.) Kugtong Step. It is a slow but graceful imitation of the movements of the mythical golden fish that played a vital role in the history of the river with the following variations: Pangisda and panarap (fish trap) - livelihood and River activity such as swimming/fishing/communing with nature community and its relationship with nature, a call and need for sustainable development. 4.) Lukso sa Bato ug Lusong sa sulog sa tubig. It is a playful movement of the fisher folks, especially when crossing the river and adjusting to the natural landscape of the riverbed. Thus, balance is necessary, and jumping from one rock to another is inevitable. It speaks about the resiliency of the Kagay-anons. 5.) Dulang sa Bulawan or Gold Panning. This is a very prominent and traditional Kagay-anon way of gathering gold that played a significant role in sustaining the lives of its people. Today, it is still being practiced in the upper river barangays to manifest how the river has nurtured them and made their lives more meaningful. It is a mirror of the local's sense of entrepreneurship and resourcefulness. 6.) Bugsay sa Kagay. It is the pride of the city: The One Town, One Product of Cagayan de Oro that has given life to its popularity as one of the country's tourism highways for adventure activities and, most of all, being declared as the White-Water Rafting Capital of the Philippines. The River Tourism program shapes the City's identity. 7.) Sakay sa Rela. It is a unique and important icon of the city that exemplifies the artistry, innovativeness, and skills of the Kagay-anon people (invented by Mr Rafel Diaz Floirendo). Motorela, or Rela, is a familiar figure traversing the city streets, making people's lives easy and convenient. Cagayan de Oro has a high sense of artistry and creativity and a drive to move forward. 8.) Higala/Amigo Kumusta. This is a gesture of friendliness extended to anyone visiting the city with a ready, helping hand and a genuine smile, thus substantiating the city's claim as the City of Golden Friendship. 9.) Viva Sr. San Augustine. These movements depict thanksgiving and veneration to the Patron Saint of the City, Saint Augustine, for embracing and protecting the people throughout these years with all those challenges, including natural calamities that have wreaked havoc on the entire community. This is also to thank Him for his constant guidance and inspiration to the Kagay-anons, especially in sustaining the Christian Faith. It symbolizes the gratitude to the patron Saint Augustine.

In connection with the nine steps articulated in the Oro Higalaay Street Dance Competition presentation, the cultural elements symbolize language, as the performers deliver chants as a way of praising and protection. These signify that cultural elements and the nine steps are intangible, while cultural materials are tangible, represented by props and accessories. Religious elements in street dancing can profoundly influence the expression and meaning conveyed through the dance (Gaston & Gaston, 2014). Incorporating religious motifs, symbols, or narratives into choreography adds layers of significance and depth to the performance. For dancers who share the same religious beliefs, these elements may serve as a spiritual expression, allowing them to connect more deeply with the dance and its message. In essence, religious elements in street dancing matter because they enrich the expression of the dance, imbuing it with deeper meaning, cultural resonance, and emotional power.

Finding a Unique Sound

Integrating music into religious street dancing is essential in enhancing the participants' spiritual journey, fostering community unity, and preserving cultural heritage. During the composition process for the Higalaay

Festival, a significant emphasis was placed on the intricate relationship between music and dance, and through consultations and workshops organized by the Department of Tourism Region 10, renowned experts, including festival directors and musicians, gathered to explore the fusion of traditional instruments such as dabakan, agong, gong, kulintang, kawayan, bamboo flute, and kubing. This is made apparent in one of the responses,

“Historical references were based on the existing traditions; we then enhanced it. For example, we used kulintang, agong for the Moro dances, and dabakan for the Higaonon dances.” (MC007)

These instruments were meticulously arranged according to their respective rhythmic patterns, drawing inspiration from the Higaonon style of music. Throughout this collaborative endeavor, various comments surfaced, reflecting the dedication and creativity required in crafting a unique musical arrangement that resonates with the essence of the festival. For instance, one musician mentioned,

“If the choreographers create dance steps that mimic the waves of the river, then we look for an instrument that would make wave sounds., another added, “We use a rainmaker indigenous instrument to create sound waves.” (MC008)

In indigenous dance, the music is very important because it reflects the community's culture and traditions (Kaepler, 2000). They use traditional instruments and rhythms that have existed for a long time. This music is not just background noise—it helps tell stories and make the dance more emotionally laden. For indigenous people, music is a big part of their lives—how they communicate, keep their culture alive, and express their spirituality (Diamond et al., 1994). Their instruments, like drums or flutes, depend on their specific customs and history. The music often sounds like nature, with rhythms and melodies that remind them of the forests, rivers, or animals. So, when one watches indigenous dance, the music is like a window into their culture and connection to the land. It makes the performance look real and meaningful.

Meaningful Attire and Use of Cultural Materials

Street dance competitions allow dancers to showcase their skills and creativity. However, not just the dance moves make a performance stand out. The clothing and accessories worn by dancers can be instrumental in telling their story and reflecting their cultural background. For instance, an interviewee mentions

Attires get inspiration from Higaonons by using some accents, patterns, and colors like red, white, yellow, and black. These colors are the basis for the transition of dances to transform these colors to gold.” (CC0015)

In these competitions, most dancers often wear attire that holds deep religious or cultural significance. For example, they may adorn themselves with beads, crosses, shells, or other religious symbols to express their faith. The clothing they choose, including the colors and patterns, can also represent their cultural heritage and convey a sense of pride in their identity. Dancers also often incorporate props or objects significant to the cultural or religious traditions in their performances (Dibia & Ballinger, 2012). For instance, one costume designer mentioned the use of hand props – a golden ‘Oro’ fish and a headdress, which was inspired by the bishop’s hat worn by St. Augustine (CC0013). These items, such as traditional handicrafts or scarves, reflect the community and environment of the performers and add authenticity to their performance. This also allows viewers to gain insight into the cultural background of the dances.

There are also allusions made to Cagayan de Oro’s rich history. One pertains to how the first settlers lived in a village along the bank of the Taguanaw River, eight kilometers south of Cagayan. They later moved to the bank of the Kalambagohan River, where Cagayan now stands, and named their settlement Kalambagohan after the lambago trees that grew abundantly on the riverbanks. Therefore, Cagayan’s first name was Kalambagohan. A participant mentioned how they “...use accents of gold inspired by Lambago trees as backdrop and props.” (CC0015)

But not just the Lambago trees make the ‘City of Golden Friendship’ golden (Villa, 2020). Gold deposits have previously been found in the Cagayan de Oro River (Almaden, 2014), and several of the contingents use this history as inspiration as they “.... used chairs to create stones, a flat round-shaped rice winnower for gold panning.” (CC006)

Some props also allude to the conversion of Cagayan de Oro's Indigenous population, as one participant mentioned how they

"...brought a big crucifix to signify the Christianization of the Indigenous people." (CC0013)

Aside from Christianity, Cagayan de Oro was also fraught with encounters from their neighboring Moro warriors. These also inspired some costume and props designers to *"...use traditional materials as shields and spears in the fighting scene between the Higaonon and the Moros."* (CC0014)

As a trading center, Cagayan de Oro has also hosted various businessmen of diverse nationalities (Satur, 2018). Some of the most influential business figures in the city are Chinese, and their ties to the city go back decades. Their influence is also apparent in some participants' choice of costume, as one contingent *"...brought pineapples as props to symbolize luck and loyalty."* (CC0014)

However, there are also instances when the attire is not uniquely Kagay-anon,

"Some attire/ costumes were borrowed or rented from other festivals. They just made some innovations in some details, renovating the costumes just to suit the celebration of the street dance." (JD0013)

After careful consideration, it is evident that the clothing and accessories used by street dance competitors are not simply superficial decorations. Rather, they serve as a mode of self-expression, allowing the performers to display their individuality and cultural heritage (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2015). By integrating traditional materials into their performances as props, dancers imbue their routines with a greater sense of significance and authenticity, which resonates with their audience on a deeper level.

Integrating Culture into Routines

Street dance festivals have evolved to creatively integrate historical and religious elements, cultural narratives, rituals, and symbolism into their routines. This adds depth and meaning to performances, connecting dances with their heritage while captivating audiences with powerful storytelling through movement. Incorporating nine steps can guide the storyline of the dance routine of the story of Cagayan de Oro, and it should follow the three communities framed from the storyboard. Several participants have mentioned how these nine steps are essential in the presentation, alongside the water rafting site, OTOP, and a way to paddle the river in the water rafting. Each presentation should be relevant to the story and have a connection to the city. As one participant mentioned,

"Before rehearsal, our choreographer oriented the whole team on each figure and its connection to our city's history." (PF0010)

Often, this takes a lot of time and effort on the participating troupe's end, as *"...there is the presence of dynamism in the way we move; it took us three weeks to grasp and internalize the proper movements."* (CC0014)

During the presentation, some presenters used modernized chants to tell stories in an organized and structured manner. They also included a traditional music piece for the Higaonon tribe, using a standard music pattern. A jingle for contemporary dance was also included to add creativity and a modern touch. Basic figures for the Higaonon steps, such as 'basic steps from Higaonon, are also incorporated. The performance can begin with the community, war, or struggle/conflict movement and follow the historical storyline. It can incorporate dance depicting the three major cultures – Higaonon, Maranao, and Bisaya. The sequence of the three communities can be started with a variation of dances, and then the storyline can follow. As with the costume, Cagayan de Oro's historical context is also considered in the choreography; as one participant mentioned,

"All storylines should adhere to the given storyboard as their frame of what is happening the first exposition of the tribe until the Spaniards came and spread Christianity." (CN001)

Aside from the Spanish colonization, there is also the mention of the myth of the Oro fish,

"It felt so good to know the story of Cagayan de Oro, how it started, and its progress; the challenging part is the connection of the goldfish to the term Oro. Anyway, it is a legend and mythical." (CC0013)

Alternatively, the sequence can be switched depending on how the concept of the choreography is delivered. The challenge for choreographers is to be adaptive; as a choreographer mentions,

"As a traveler choreographer in different places, in May, when I joined the competition, I realized there was a need to adopt another style (festival); it is also trending with the hope that we will win in the competition." (CC0015)

Adaptability also calls for research and creativity (Meneely & Portillo, 2005). As another choreographer mentioned,

"Do not just rely on the workshop but research, add more knowledge, go deeper into the original roots, get more information through oral traditions in some places to enhance the dance routine and knowledge." (CC0012)

While a lot of the choreographers insist that they have incorporated Kagay-anon steps and choreography, those more critical also recognize how *"...some of the choreography does not portray Kagay-anon; they take inspiration from different festivals."* (JD0013)

4.0 Conclusion

The primary goal of this study is to investigate the historical background and cultural importance of the Higalaay Festival's street dancing, including the tableau presentation. Due to the scarcity of resources and documentation on this particular aspect of the festival, the study seeks to emphasize how these performances can enrich the understanding of Cagayan de Oro's history and cultural heritage while filling gaps in the city's documented traditions and historical accounts. This study will fill the gap in the existing literature by illustrating how the Higalaay street dances serve as a medium to reflect and communicate the city's cultural evolution. By portraying the different eras—under the Indigenous people (Higaonon, Muslims), Spaniards, Japanese, and Americans—through dance, this research will provide a deeper understanding of how these historical influences have shaped Cagayan de Oro's identity. This approach will offer new insights into how performance art, particularly dance, can be used to bridge the gaps in documenting and preserving the city's rich, yet underrepresented, cultural history.

Cultural and religious elements have been integrated into the interpretation of the dances included in street dancing. These are theme; expression and dance steps; music; attire and cultural materials; and choreography which includes sequence, arrangements, execution, and style. Themes in street dancing often intertwine cultural and religious elements, thus enriching the interpretation of dances. Another element integrated into the interpretation of dances is the expression and dance steps. In dance, expression makes use of body, facial expressions, and gestures to communicate, while dance steps refer to the use of physical gestures. In the 2023 Oro Higalaay Street Dance, the organizing committee declared that the performers had to articulate nine (9) basic steps as they danced through the city streets. Music is another element considered in the interpretation of dances. Integrating music into street dancing making use of the traditional elements, is essential in enhancing the spiritual journey, fostering community unity, and preserving cultural heritage. Attire and cultural materials compose another element. The clothing and accessories worn by dancers are instrumental in telling their stories and in reflecting their cultural background. The fifth element integrated into the interpretation of the dancers is choreography, which includes sequence, arrangement, execution, and style. Choreography adds depth and meaning to performances, connecting dances with their heritage while captivating audiences with powerful storytelling through movement. Street dancing does not only improve the dancers' personality but, at the same time, reflects the history and culture of the city. The public will understand and appreciate the evolution of the culture of the city that was once under a community of Indigenous people, the Muslims, the Spaniards, the Japanese, and the Americans through the dances that portray the different eras. Through street dancing, local tradition, culture, and expression can be preserved.

The study is anchored on the theory of Multiculturalism, specifically the salad bowl theory. The salad bowl theory deals with a heterogeneous society in which people coexist but retain at least some of the unique characteristics

of their traditional culture. Different cultures are brought together but retain their distinct flavors. In this study, multiculturalism is represented through the street dances that showcase those that have been attributed to the different ethnic tribes and foreign conquerors that once inhabited Cagayan de Oro. Cagayan de Oro represents a multicultural community. It has been inhabited by different ethnic groups/tribes and some foreign “conquerors” who have managed to live harmoniously. Thus, the salad bowl theory of multiculturalism is confirmed in this study.

Some limitations in this study warrant further research. The CDO Higalaay Festival Committee is encouraged to orient participants in street dancing on the history, origin, and cultural significance of the dances they will perform, ensuring a deeper understanding of their contribution to the local heritage. Additionally, Physical Education (PE) departments in colleges and universities should consider offering street dancing alongside traditional sports to broaden students' appreciation of cultural expression. It is also recommended that the local government enact an ordinance to sustain the Oro Higalaay Street Dance, preserving its cultural relevance. Future researchers may replicate this study in other contexts by examining other Philippine festivals that integrate historical and cultural themes in their street performances. This allows for a comparative analysis of how history is represented through dance.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The authors confirm their contribution to the paper as follows: Artazo, A -study conception, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the result, draft manuscript preparation. Tolod, L - initial conceptualization, advising, and research direction. Manaois, J -editing, writing, supervising.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest with the publication of this paper.

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