

The Babaylan Festival

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Abstract

The study looked into the festival's origin, concepts, experiences, strengths, and weaknesses. To gather data, we conducted series of interviews with the cultural officer of Bago City, who had the best experience in handling the said festival. Seven themes emerged from the study. These are the main role of the healer, the festival's concept, the festival's celebration, the festival's origin, challenges and difficulties encountered, cultural beliefs and rituals, and the festival's promotional strategies. Best practices of the city in managing the festival are affirmed in this study. Areas for improvement were also identified.

Keywords: tourism, festival, narrative inquiry, individual interview, Philippines

Introduction

Festivals are an essential sub-field within event studies and of particular interest to scholars in various disciplines because of the universality of festivity and the popularity of festival experiences (Getz, 2010). Festival is a way to bring about cultural awareness among community members and hand over traditions by sharing stories and experiences from one generation to the next (Quinn, 2010). Festivals are cultural celebrations and have always occupied a special place in societies. Their celebratory roles, and the many cultural and social implications of ritual and festivity, have long attracted the interest of sociologists and anthropologists (Getz, 2010). Cultural events help foster cross-cultural communication that can promote understanding between the host and the guest (Sdrali and Chazapi, 2007).

Festivals attract tourists and create festival tourism. Tourists are attracted by many elements, which seem interesting, sometimes foreign culture, presented during the events (Quinn, 2010). Festivals have increasingly become an important source of income for many individuals. According to Cudny (2006), tourism, where the main motive is the participation in cultural events, such as film, theatre, music, street festivals, or other entertainment, fun, and sport, should be considered separately and referred to as festival tourism. At the peak of a festivals' popularity, these are attended by several dozen to several thousand people; it comprised several dozen art events held during the week and was an ideal place of contact with culture, including high culture (Cudny, 2006).

“Festival tourism” is an essential element in “event tourism,” so much so that the term “festivalization” has been coined to suggest an over-commodification of festivals exploited by tourism and place marketers (Quinn, 2006). It is particularly true of festival settings that provide a context for social relationships and shared experiences (Kyle and Chick, 2007). It is reported that festivals contribute to the local regeneration and prosperity of the destination. Festivals can generate new employment opportunities (Prentice and Andersen, 2003a; Smith, 2004). It encourages the development of a kind of infrastructure that is visitor-friendly and sustainable. Bachleitner and Zins (1992) assert that festival tourism enhances residents learning, awareness appreciation of community pride, ethnic identity, tolerance of others, and brings about the opening of small and medium-sized family enterprises.

Cultural festivals are perceived to attract revenue and expenditure linked to cultural tourism and contribute to the development of the local economy and the improvement of the city's image (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Festivals show common characteristics, namely, production and cultural experience, resulting from a condensed program planned with a specific purpose in mind (McKercher et al., 2006). For festivals to perform their functions better, organizers often have to adjust their offer to the needs of their audiences, mainly tourists.

Festivals attract tourists and create festival tourism. Tourists are attracted by many elements, which seem interesting, sometimes exotic, presented during the events (Quinn, 2010). Authenticity is achieved by meeting visitors' expectations about how a place looks and feels (Prentice and Andersen, 2003a). However, festivals may cause a false reception of the local culture because it is trivialized and adjusted to the tastes of the mass audience.

The value of a cultural festival may be approached from various standpoints (Devesa, 2006) since the artists are directly involved. It constitutes the production of a cultural good in itself. In contrast, for those attending, it may provide a range of use-values (aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, cognitive value, etc.), as well as existence value related to its symbolic repercussion (Throsby, 2003). These use-values led to a festivalization of cities (Prentice and Andersen, 2003b; Quinn, 2006), as a process involving the creation of cultural experiences aimed at potential tourists, drawn by the culture, and at residents, for whom these festivals offer an alternative urban leisure facility and an opportunity to identify with the city (Richards, 2007).

Thus, many cultural festivals are held in summer or during holiday periods, becoming important tourist attractions and satisfying individuals' desire for leisure and cultural consumption (Yeoman et al., 2004). Moreover, finding out who benefits from an artistic activity may prove vital when designing promotion strategies, advertising, and management of cultural activities (Pizano, Zuleta, Jaramillo, & Rey, 2004).

For over three decades, the festival has been promoted to help develop local communities and meet their social, environmental, and economic needs by offering a tourism product. However, while many projects have been funded, their success has not been widely monitored, and, therefore, the actual benefits to local communities remain largely unquantified (DOT, 2008). There are festivals in almost all cities and municipalities in the Philippines. We wanted to vividly describe the how's and why's of one of these festivals known as the *Babaylan* Festival.

Objective

The study sought to describe the *Babaylan* Festival in Bago City, Negros Occidental, Philippines.

Framework of the study

Prentice and Andersen (2003) opined that not everyone at a destination during a festival could be assumed to be a festival-goer. With this, they suggest to festival organizers not to be overly enthusiastic about the drawing power of festivals. Importantly, they caution that all festival attendees are motivated to visit the destination to participate in the festival. Instead, they suggest that festivals, like other attractions, attract a broad spectrum of visitors, from those who traveled specifically to participate in the event to those for whom it represents an ancillary or complementary activity. Indeed, festival and special event organizers themselves often question their economic value (Gursoy et al., 2004), with many viewing the festival not as a money-making tourist attraction but as an enjoyable community-based event (de Bres & Davis, 2001).

Research trends and themes have been revealed, and three significant discourses have been identified and described. The structure for the review was provided by a framework for understanding and creating knowledge about events (Getz, et al. 2007) that places planned festival experiences and meanings as the core phenomenon of festival studies.

Festivals celebrate community values, ideologies, identity, and continuity. Perhaps more reflective of the modern approach to naming events as festivals Getz (2005) defined them as “themed, public celebrations.” Events and festivals do not only influence the development of tourist places.

In the Philippines, each town or city has its distinct festival to establish a name and identity. It is the time to draw both local and foreign tourists to one's place. Among the festivals in Negros Occidental, one such celebration is the *Babaylan* Festival in Bago City. It is a culture-related event. It is rooted in culture, shapes, and presents it. *Babaylans* acted as healers, prophets, and mediums, curing illnesses and exorcising evil spirits from objects or people, and before, they are known as the

most intelligent individuals in the community. It is in this context that the Babaylan Festival, which is a cultural festival, was conceptualized. It is a time of celebrating culture (Cudny, 2014). It is closely connected with the development of human civilization, which dates back to humankind's historical roots (Klein and Blake, 2002).

Festivals provide opportunities to learn about other cultures, customs, and lifestyles, which encourages greater understanding of and tolerance for cultural diversity (Douglas et al., 2001). While sustainability might sound like a global “ideal that has evolved to become the buzzword for a new era” (Roosa, 2010), it is instead formulated and effectively performed at the local scale, within particular contexts and drawing upon those contextual values. Roosa’s study aimed to advance our understanding and expand and redefine the concept of “sustainability” for the specific context of the contemporary performing arts festival and eventually elaborate a proper conceptual framework for the “sustainable” festival.

According to our conversational partner, *Babaylan* Festival is known because of its history and culture. *Babaylans* are gifted to heal the spirit and body of a person. Rituals can be a strategic way to 'traditionalize,' that is, to construct a type of tradition. Still, in doing so, it can also challenge and renegotiate the very basis of practice to the point of upending much of what had been seen as fixed previously or by other groups (Bell, 2009).

For its role, *Babaylans* are sometimes described as priestesses or shamans. According to Aping (2016), they “come from either spiritist groups, diviners (a group that practice divination). They may also be persons who were previously saved from illnesses or death. Also, they may have encountered epiphanies or mystical experiences who became convinced that they were destined to help sick people after receiving healing powers bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit or other supernatural beings.” Saydoven (2009) defines “Traditional medicine also known as indigenous health knowledge and practices include approaches, knowledge, and beliefs incorporating plants, animal and mineral-based medicines. Healing by diviners may also be spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to

maintain well-being, as well as a treat, diagnose or prevent illness".

People who attended and witnessed *Babaylan* Festival can understand the meaning of the festival. They have an idea of why it is celebrated and commemorated. In addition, from an intangible perspective, successful festivals can serve as a means of building community pride and cohesiveness (Gursoy, Kim, and Uysal, 2004). It also promotes sustainable development by teaching about unique cultural heritages, ethnic backgrounds, and local customs (McKercher, Mei, and Tse, 2006).

As to the festival's challenges and difficulties, the shortage of budget is one reason. While festivals have a considerable potential to be artistically innovative and economically successful, there is a constant danger that government intervention undermines this potential by introducing distorting incentives and imposing all sorts of restrictions (Frey, 2000).

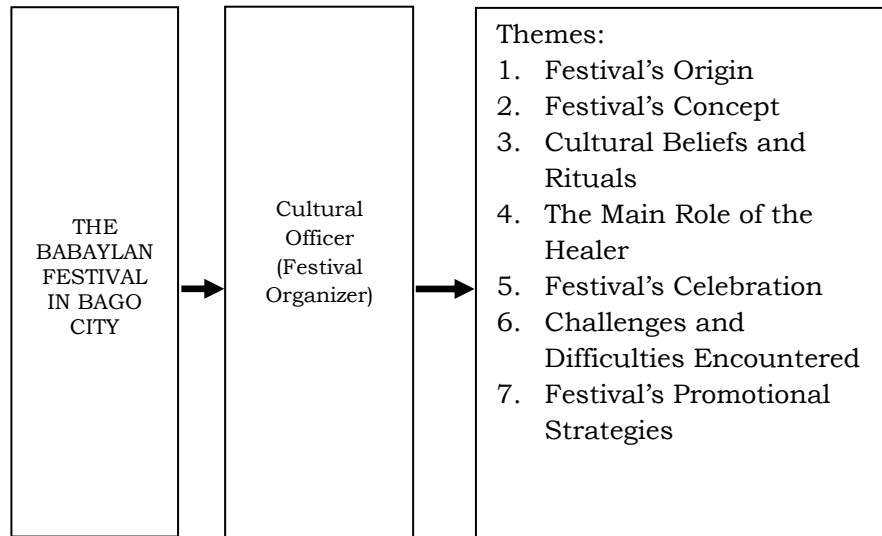


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram

Babaylan Festival is known in other cities and regions because of promotions and feedback from those experienced. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) promote local cultural festivals as tourism attractions (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003), for they are felt to possess attributes that make them appealing to visitors. Celebrations must also focus on perpetuating local traditions, promoting creativity among entertainers, tourists, locals (Wilks, 2009), and encouraging interaction and involvement across the entire industry (Smith & Richards, 2013).

Festivals influence communities through cultural development, tourism development, community integration, city-image improvement, and economic development. For festivals to have these beneficial results, marketing must be strategically planned and implemented through festival programs. Getz (2008) pointed out that 'event management is a fast-growing professional field where tourists constitute a potential market for planned events. The tourism industry has become a vital stakeholder in the success and attractiveness of such events. Therefore, the unique benefits of festivals can be communicated to prospects to create and increase the demand. On the other hand, tourists who travel to a particular destination to attend a specific event should directly determine the concept of event marketing and indirectly define destination marketing.

Methodology

Research Design

The study centered on how the *Babaylan* Festival is celebrated. The qualitative research using narrative inquiry was employed to narrate how the organizing committee works behind the traditional festival in Bago City to stage a significant celebration and how selected guests describe their experience during the festivities. Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena (Hancock, 2006). It aims to help people understand the social world and why things are the way they are. It is concerned with the social aspects of the world and seeks to answer questions like why people go and

patronize specific festivities and what kind of experience is derived from it.

Conversation Partner and Inclusion Criteria

In this study, the selected conversation partner was the cultural officer of Bago City, who had a rich experience and knows everything about the said festival. The conversation partner provided the exact information about the celebration of the *Babaylan* Festival, which is celebrated annually.

The gatekeeper of the researcher's conversational partner was the head of the Tourism Office of Bago City, Senior Tourism Operations Officer. Central elements of access are gatekeepers. These people can help or hinder research depending upon their thoughts on the validity of the research and its value and approach to the people's welfare under their charge. They may be internal and external gatekeepers for a study (Ortiz, 2004). The researchers referred only to an internal gatekeeper.

Research Instrument

The researchers used a voice recorder and field notes during the conduct of interviews with the conversation partner. The first/overarching question was based on the objective of the study. Follow-up questions were based on the responses of the conversation partner. The interview focused on the celebration of the *Babaylan* Festival.

Data-Gathering Procedure

The researchers coordinated with the Department of Tourism of Bago City to gather pertinent data about the study at hand. The researchers were then introduced to the cultural officer with whom a series of interviews were conducted until data was saturated. A series of interviews were conducted in the City Tourism Office. The researchers used a voice recorder to ensure that the collected data were recorded, safe, and secured.

Trustworthiness (Ensuring the Quality of the Findings)

Credibility. Credibility has been understood as one of the criteria of relevance judgment used when deciding to accept or reject retrieved information (Rieh & Danielson, 2007). Credibility relies on definitions, approaches, and field-specific presuppositions (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). To ensure that the findings have credibility, the researchers used member checks. The conversation partner was requested to edit, clarify, elaborate, or delete his own words from the narratives and the initial themes (Creswell, 2009; Doyle, 2007).

Transferability. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004). To ensure the transferability of the findings, the researchers purposefully chose the conversation partner – someone who has prolonged engagement with the festival. Also, a thick description from the conversation partner's statements was used to support each theme that emerged from the data. According to Li (2004), thick description “enables judgments about how well the research context fits other contexts, thick descriptive data, i.e., a rich and extensive set of details concerning methodology and context, should be included in the research report.”

Confirmability. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but are derived from the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). To ensure that the study has confirmability, the researchers made the audit trail. As the researchers were doing the data explication, original statements of the conversation partner were matched with the emerging themes. According to Bowen (2009), an “audit trail offers visible evidence from process and product that the researcher did not simply find what he or she set out to find.”

Dependability. Dependability involves participants evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations of the study to make sure that they are all supported by the data received from the informants of the study (Cohen et al., 2011; Tobin & Begley, 2004). To ensure the dependability of the study, the researchers used stepwise

replication. The researchers divide the group into two clusters with two members to analyze the same data separately and develop themes decided by each member. In the given period, with the help of the research adviser, the two groups discussed and planned what themes should be used. (Chilisa & Preece, 2005).

The researchers also used the code recode strategy. From the answers of the researchers' respondents, the researchers code data twice in code 1 and code 2. Each code is composed of a different definition based on each statement. The code-recode strategy is also referred to as code agreement. The research process allows multiple observations by the researcher, suggesting that the inter-rater or inter-observer code the data and compare the coding done by the inter-rater (Ary et al., 2010).

Procedure for Data Analysis

We used Braun & Clarke's (2006) guide to conducting a thematic analysis divided into six steps. The first step is familiarizing ourselves with our data by "repeated reading" and actively reading the data, searching for meaning, patterns, etc. Then, we generated initial codes where we came up with an initial list of ideas about the data and what is interesting. Subsequently, we searched for themes. We begun with these when all our data have been initially coded and collated, and we had a list of the different codes we have identified across our data set. This is where we started to analyze our collated data, and we considered how we could combine different codes to form an overarching theme. We re-focused our analysis on the initial themes we have derived from the codes.

We have generated initial themes. These were refined by collapsing some and combining two or three initial themes into one. After this step, we finalized and described the final themes. Lastly, we prepared our research report.

Results and Discussion

The data gathered through interviews were analyzed, and seven themes emerged. The themes include the festival's origin, the concept of the *Babaylan* Festival, beliefs and rituals of the

Babaylan, the role of the Babaylan in the community as a healer, how it celebrated, the challenges and difficulties they encountered, and how they advertise the festival to the people and in the whole. The themes also show that Babaylan played a significant role in the culture of the people living in Bago City. It becomes a festival that they annually celebrate until now.

Festival's Origin

Community-based festivals and events are also called local events-originate within a community sector with a need or desire to celebrate a feature of its life or history (Dimmock & Tiyce, 2000). And for this, our conversation partner mentioned that *"...the very first time that the small group of people from Bago City talked about staging a unique celebration that would establish its identity as a people, they thought of highlighting the leader who hailed from the place and spelled a significant part in its history – General Juan Araneta. It was suggested that they feature the mountain and the resorts in the place."* He further added that *"the leader then asserted that they should underscore the religious aspect of the people, just like Kanlaon. They should instill in the contemporary residents that there are Babaylans, wise elders who can provide healing and comfort as well as wisdom and enlightenment."*

Moreover, festivals represent diversity at play in each community. Research is undertaken to ascertain how festivals, like other cultural institutions, can contribute to the communication of ideas, information sharing, inculcation of values, promotion of active citizenship, improving the understanding of different cultures and lifestyles, and building social partnerships (Kelly and Kelly, 2000). Our conversation partner affirmed this by saying that *"some people say that the babaylan is not a human they are "aswang" they said they are not good. Whatever! But we persisted because whether you like it or not, it is part of our culture.... they are really powerful in the community. I think even today. They are in different forms. Before in ancient history, the Babaylan is the one who connects to the spirits...they are healers, basically. We don't just ignore them*

because Babaylan is culture-based. Their practice is part of our culture. And now it is still there, you know, in a different form.”

Festivals attract tourists and create festival tourism. Tourists are attracted by many elements, which seem interesting, sometimes exotic culture, presented during the events (Quinn, 2010). Besides, tourists want to attend events of unusual atmosphere, meet people of similar interests, and learn more about the world. This is what our conversation partner has to say, “*so starting 1998, it was adopted and became the Babaylan festival. Of course, since it was the first year, all the choreographers did not understand yet, I mean the concept, and we were conceptualizing the whole festival.*”

Every festival has its origin. The Philippines have dozens of festivals, and most towns have their own and national ones. Filipino hospitality is legendary, and it is more in evidence than at the festival time. Since Filipinos are one of the most joyful and sociable races, we have a long list of festivals and celebrations all year round. These festivals or fiestas are some of the most anticipated events in the country as they are commonly called. Fiesta season, which covers the months from December to May, attracts tourists worldwide. Event tourism is an important and rapidly growing segment of international tourism (Getz, 2008).

Festival’s Concept

In the case of the *Babaylan* Festival, like our conversational partner said, “*a festival is not just any celebration. It is based on a particular idea.*” It is meant to promote the culture of the indigenous Filipinos that they believe in a high authority that could advise them on how to live life, heal them from discomfort and pain, link them to spirits, and intercede for them. This festival is based on gathering many different groups of people, including the government, and the collaboration of people to put together a great event. “*The Babaylan Festival was conceptualized because organizers thought that the culture of Bago City is interspersed with the presence of healers who have the potential to deal with spirits and assist the ordinary people in*

getting relief from whatever symptoms they may encounter when they are sick.”

All over the world, people of different religions and ethnic groups celebrate an important event. Such celebration or event is regarded as festivals, which has to do with the whole community. Festivals are significant aspects of life. This importance is affirmed by our conversation partner when he said that *“the faith of the people has been nurtured well, and it may take another lifetime to sway them away from their beliefs.”* They are the most important activities for social and religious purposes, and they represent occasions of feasting and celebration involving series of performances, entertainments, merry-making, ceremonies, and rites (Lawal, Sadiku & Dopamu, 2005). Our conversation partner mentioned that *“as a theme for the charter day instead of just a parade.... Well, Babaylan doesn’t need any technology because what is technology in the Babaylan?... As I said before, we don’t need technologies.”*

Festival visitors look for unforgettable and pleasant memories and experiences. In this sense, they are consumers of specific products- festival performances in the context of experience marketing of the city. Participants in some festival performances look like their resort experience “for affective memories to create a holistic personal experience” (Ali, Hussain & Omar, 2016). Our interviewee explicitly stated that *“people who come to witness the annual fair are never disappointed because great time, effort, and ingenuity have been spared to make the festival a great venue for people to converge and enjoy. More and more people come each year to experience the celebration”.*

The interviewee acknowledged that the government is not hesitant to give its all-out support to realize the small group's ideals that started this festival many years ago. It has continued to grant considerable assistance in finances, ideas, and mechanisms, just so the yearly celebration is as spectacular as the last one. Like any other endeavor, this festival would not be possible if not for the unity and *Bayanihan* spirit of the people of Bago City. The *Babaylan* Festival is proof that *Bagonhons* can work well with one another.

According to our conversational partner,

“It came from the MICE, and then we came to Buenos Aires... But sometimes, the forum comes the day before. But the ideas and concepts originated from the city’s first lady Janet Torres.”

“So, from there, once it was decided.... We then called one of our choreographers Boy Dela Cruz to come up with a dance.

Well, mainly, the festival aims to train our dancers, our choreographers that’s why we always have workshops for them in the art of dance, in the art of music, in the art of choreography. We have a committee. I head the committee, that’s all. And then the long list of the 25 people. Of course, we have a Mayor, the tourism officer, and 26 or 30 other people that run the festival. The Mayor, the choreographers, I’m the chairman every year.”

Festivals come closest to fulfilling the function that culture provides in contemporary society. They can accomplish the threefold goal of attracting intense expenditure, forging a new urban image, and acting as a driving force behind cultural creativity and social cohesion. We are currently witnessing a spectacular growth in the number of cultural shows and performances organized in urban and rural settings to the extent that nearly all major cities now boast at least one festival devoted to some art form. The contributions above led to the festivalization of cities (Prentice & Andersen, 2003; Quinn, 2006). The festivalization of cities is perceived as creating cultural experiences aimed at potential tourists drawn by culture and residents. These festivals offer an alternative urban leisure facility and an opportunity to identify with the city (Richards, 2007).

Cultural Beliefs and Rituals

There are several perspectives under the cultural umbrella to be reviewed, including making distinctions to clarify tangible and intangible culture (Filipova, 2010). As a form of tourism, festivals and culture can be analyzed concerning their social and cultural contexts (Derrett, 2003). The cultural officer told us that *“one of the reasons we have the Babaylan is to remind people of our culture because we tend to forget it. In these progressive days, with technology and computers, we forget our culture. That’s the reason why we have the Babaylan festival. Although what we showcase now are the remnants of Babaylan in different forms.”*

Values and beliefs are often treated differently. Several authors have developed models in which culture means beliefs about the consequences of one’s actions, and these beliefs can be manipulated by earlier generations or by experimentation. For example, (Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales, 2008) show how individual beliefs are initially acquired through cultural transmission and then slowly updated through experience, from one generation to the next. The cultural officer described that *“the culture of Bago City has been shaped for a long time with little changes or modifications here and there, but the main meat of the matter is still the same. The people believed in a supernatural being seeking healing and refuge from everyday life struggles. The people’s faith has been nurtured well, and it may take another lifetime to sway them away from their beliefs. People do not rely on their strengths and resources. They always call out to someone more powerful and more equipped to deliver them from their predicaments. They offer food, you know it is a ritual, and they do that every year. They come here from Kanlaon.”*

The cultural officer further added that *“for the ritual, we don’t do it of course but it still there. Some people still go to Babaylan. Sometimes you know it happens when you go to whatever places and if “something” happened to you go to the healers. And they are the ones explaining to the people. Like for example, that time they don’t know about lightning, so they think the Gods are angry.”* Rituals and festive events often occur at particular times and places and remind a community of its worldview and historical aspects. In some cases, access to

traditions may be restricted to specific community members (Bering, 2005; Bulbulia, 2004).

The Main Role of the Healer

The Babaylan, in Filipino indigenous tradition, “is a person who is gifted to heal the spirit and the body. He is the one who serves the community through her role as a folk therapist, wisdom-keeper, and philosopher. He also provides stability to the community’s social structure. He can access the spirit realms and has a vast knowledge of healing therapies (Strobel, 2010). Our conversation partner proudly shared that *babaylans are there to heal. They were the most intelligent person in the village before. But at this time, they are not that powerful like they were in the past.*”

Moreover, Spiritual beings are real, not fictitious. They are treated like a close family member: a spouse, sibling, parent, or cousin. Healers are created because spirits interact and dwell in people’s body for the spirits took pity on people’s sufferings. The spirit/s initiates the offer to help. This favor shall be reciprocated if the person is willing to allow this spirit to use its body to heal others who are inflicted by illnesses. *“They don’t have the large role like before they were the consultant of all people in the community and also the elders would consult them for anything and everything... that’s the role of the Babaylan. Shaman, man-spirits, and healing. Also, the Babaylan is the most intelligent person in the village, in the community, so it explains a lot of things. The Babaylan is talking to the gods.”* as described by our conversation partner.

A similar condition is believed to be the platform for devotion to the saints. Food offerings, festive events, and other forms of spectacle are expected to please the patron saints - ensuring another blessed and fruitful life (Arriola, 2011).

Traditional healing systems still play a significant role in help-seeking behavior for the mentally ill on the continent, despite advances in western-style psychiatric services (Quinn, 2007). Traditional healing has been defined as the practice of

using local herbs for the treatment of diseases. Traditional healers are qualified and legitimate within their communities and are the first resource many immigrant people of Bago City turn to for their healthcare, psychological and emotional needs. Today, traditional healing practices such as Shamanism, Spiritism, and many others are re-emerging in large cities and are being practiced alongside contemporary forms of counseling and healthcare.

Our conversation partner narrated that *“the Babaylan’s primary function is to heal. Whenever any member of the community acquires sickness, they go to the Babaylan. She is there to heal the wounded and the afflicted. She makes sure that the harvest is bountiful and hunting is successful. Also, the Babaylan is the most intelligent person in the village, in the community, so it explains a lot of things. Also, he records what’s on her mind. However, nowadays, they are not that powerful anymore. They are just the healers. They’re still there, and they still respected by the people,”* as detailed by the cultural officer of the city.

These forms of traditional healing generally include a system of classifying and explaining illness and distress and ideas about the best treatment for particular problems. Traditional healers are trained to administer locally prepared herbal medicine for the treatment of diseases (Crawford & Lipsege, 2004; WHO, 2002)

Festival’s Celebration

Filipinos like celebrating occasions – from the simplest to the most lavish. The *Babaylan* Festival is an occasion for locals and tourists to come together and enjoy the festivities. Rituals structure a ritual sociality that comes to life in times of celebration. Celebrations facilitate social configurations that enable collective epiphanic experiences, revealed in drinking and partying within festivals, carnivals, and other convivial forms of celebration (Wilks and Quinn, 2016) or singing sacred music (Salzbrunn, 2016).

Our conversation partner affirmed this as he revealed that *the Babaylan Festival started in 1998. They used to call the spirits. But they do not do that anymore. Times are modern, but they have not entirely forgotten about the concept of the Babaylans. They held a forum for this aspect of the culture to be continuously passed on to the younger generations. Street dancing is still a significant part of it. Food stalls are everywhere. Many people come and celebrate because there is always an abundance of food. People have prayerful wished that the next year would be as blessed and as abundant as before.*

Similarly, Rokam (2005) supports the idea that the celebration of festivals provides a community with a sense of shared identity by creating feelings of shared history. In other words, such celebrations offer a common platform where individual members of a community share a mutual sense of joy. For Rokam (2005), cultural festivals emerged as a common platform for individuals to come together and display a socio-cultural ethos.

Our interviewee joyfully shared, *“as long as the people accept it, when the people reject it, when there’s no more audience, it will stop. As long as there are audiences, it will continue the practice of the Babaylan from Panay and here. We don’t have a fiesta to celebrate and be happy; what else to that alcoholic drink you drink. There was a time, during the time of Jxxxx Txxxxx, the festival was on stage the final performance after the street dancing we have to go to the coliseum and be gone to stage. Then we went back to the arena type, and now this year, we are hoping to be back on stage. Last year we want on stage, and we’re hoping to maintain that for a while, so that’s how it evolved. We invite people to speak on the Babaylan. We are not after the foreigners but the local tourists.”*

The value of a cultural festival may be approached from various standpoints (Devesa Fernandez, 2006). For the artists directly involved, it constitutes the production of a cultural good in itself. Whereas, for those attending, it may provide a range of use-values (aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, cognitive value, etc.), as well as existence value related to its symbolic repercussion (Throsby, 2003). For policymakers, organizing a

cultural festival is framed within the provision of a public good, which may have an economic impact as well as specific intangible effects in the medium term on the area in which it is held (Herrero, Sanz, Devesa, Bedate & del Barrio, 2006).

Challenges and Difficulties Encountered

Festivals and events showcase a community's strengths at play and demonstrate its capacity to cope with external stresses and disturbances resulting from social, political, and environmental change (Adger, 2000). According to Chalip (2004), long-term event leveraging is about developing images to assist place branding and a city's market position. The destination's image will be affected by the events that it hosts. The particular effect will depend upon which dimensions of the destination image are compatible with the event (Chalip et al., 2003). Just like any undertaking, the festival also has its share of struggles. Foremost among which is money. Although the government appropriates funds for this, some private individuals and entities give financial support through sponsorships and the like. Expenses are still increasing each year. Finances prove to be the greatest challenge, but there are still many reasons to be thankful.

According to our conversational partner,

“Of course, first of all you know, money, financial you know to put things together, everything should be in place, the judges would be there, they have to be credible judges they have to be you know.”

“So well, security sometimes can be a problem and expect it that we are not biased. The people know that we want to address security problems. We had rain, but the celebration will continue.”

“Another source of difficulty is the unpredictable weather. If there is a storm or a typhoon, then there is no other choice but to cancel. But so far, with God's grace, we only had to postpone the activities

for a few hours until the weather has improved, but it has never been canceled. The Babaylans of good weather have always blessed us.”

Urban events risk suffering from ‘serial reproduction’ (Richards and Wilson, 2004), becoming formulaic (Evans, 2001), and being devoid of real connections with place. Yet, while the literature identifies in urban festivals the potentially homogenizing effects of globalization, other perspectives on culture-led urban regeneration argue that the reproduction of sameness need not be the outcome. For example, Bailey et al., (2004) argue that homogenization is not inevitable but is attributable to urban management approaches that fail to understand how local particularities could be cultivated to counter the globalizing influences of cultural production in city arenas. More generally, some have questioned the prevailing ‘just add culture and stir’ approach to urban regeneration (Gibson and Stevenson, 2004), querying the extent to which it usefully serves public interests either in the short or the long term.

Festival’s Promotional Strategies

It is also believed that a city or a region can make a name for itself by establishing its competitive position among countries through tourism (Smith, 2004). Festivals can make a town or city regenerate and enable a tourist destination to become famous. For one, they open doors to new job opportunities. They also bring about the development of infrastructure that is visitor-friendly, environment-friendly, and sustainable.

Further, cultural festivals and events cultivate multi-cultural and intercultural communication that can promote understanding between the host and the guest (Sdrali and Chazapi, 2007). In comparison, *Babaylan* Festival is promoted through social media and TV networks, according to our interviewee.

Our conversation partner expressed that:

“It is not difficult to advertise the festival because it has a great long history. People who witness the annual fair are never disappointed because great time, effort, and ingenuity have been spared to make the festival attract people to converge and enjoy. More and more people come each year to experience the celebration.

“20 years ago, there is already social media. And then that’s why we, we join others like we’re joining Aliwans (merrymaking). You will be linking with other countries that have Babaylan.”

“There’s already RPN, AXX-CXX, and even GXX were there already 21 years ago.”

“Well, when you promote, you promote the City of Bago wherever may go, you bring along our festival, but I guess we almost promote Babaylan festival through social media, and then linkages. It is a perfect advertisement for Buenos Aires.”

Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) promote local cultural festivals as tourism attractions (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003), for they are felt to possess attributes that make them appealing to visitors. Festivals can provide an opportunity to showcase the destination’s rich intangible heritage, local traditions, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural landscapes. Lee and Lee (2001) concluded that segmenting festival markets through motivations enables event managers to identify the strengths and opportunities of each market and helps guarantee their satisfaction. Arts festivals are a cultural highlight in many towns, cities and countries worldwide. Celebrations of the richness and diversity of culture and creativity, they often encompass a variety of contemporary and traditional art forms — dance, music, theatre, arts and crafts. Culturally, they offer a unique snapshot of a community’s identity, both providing an opportunity to revitalize and preserve cultural practices, and often serving as a creative laboratory for contemporary performers. Socially, they are a means of strengthening intercultural dialogue, promoting

deeper understanding through shared experience; and economically, they can generate sizeable, long-term financial benefits and significant business and employment opportunities.

General Statement

Babaylan Festival is a unique celebration held in Bago City annually. It is a way to preserve the people's unique culture and grow financially, socially, and spiritually. It is a vehicle to magnetize tourists to come and continue exploring the city's beauty and richness. The local government of Bago City may want to venture into a more objective study to find out their festival's specific strengths and weaknesses and solicit feedback from the visiting tourists. How else can they bring in more revenues from tourists turn-out? Generally, our conversation partner had provided information about how *Babaylan* Festival was celebrated in Bago City.

The conversational partner shared everything about the *Babaylan* Festival, which they celebrated every year. Our conversation partner invited us to witness the *Babaylan* Festival. The researchers experienced an exotic character of the *Babaylan* through their different costumes, actions, and the true essence of the *Babaylan*. The dancers used some medicines and materials in the healing process: incense, "tawas" (alum), triangular scarf, a piece of cloth, etc.

Having witnessed the celebration, we realized that *Babaylan Festival is one of the most colorful, enduring, and historical festivals in Negros. The City of Bago preserved their cultures and traditions generated into dancing and playing different instruments that create an excellent example in celebrating the festival. The dancers put dye and paint to their hair and body. They wear different kinds of clothes of the Babaylan to show how the Babaylan dressed in the past.*

At one time, the City's Tourism Office adapted the theme "*Babaylan-Simbahan.*" They agreed on it because the *Babaylan* and the church have their similarities in believing in God. The only thing that the *Babaylan* differ was that they consult first the spirits or called it "surog" before talking to God. According to our

conversational partner, *Babaylan* was placed among the highest-ranking leaders of the group or tribe. When the Spanish colonizers came to Negros Island, their rituals were suppressed, making way to the Christian religion.

The vivid description of our conversation revealed that the festival's origin and concept are rooted in the healer's cultural beliefs and rituals and primary role. As years go by, the festival's celebration has evolved and attracted more participants and visitors, many challenges and difficulties were encountered. However, the city thought of various promotional strategies. Thus, the festival continues and keeps on attracting more tourists.

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