

Research Article

The Feature and Components of the Arabay Festival of Arimbay, Legazpi City

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ABSTRACT

This study is a documentation of the salient features and components of the Arabay Festival of Barangay Arimbay, Legazpi City. *Arabay* is derived from a local term which means to do things together. The festival was deemed a good start-up initiative for a community-wide program on culture, with the end-view of forging community identity and solidarity, and encouraging local development. Data for the study were gathered through review and analyses of pertinent documents and materials such as narrative reports, facilitator's notes, training design, and evaluation by theater workshop participants. The study is grounded in theoretical paradigms which view culture as an important basis for social solidarity and for alternative local and regional growth. The findings showed that the Arabay Festival is rooted in the culture and history of the community of Barangay, Arimbay. Its creation is in line with the provisions and tenets of culture-based governance and national development agenda of the country, which recognize culture as a crucial pillar of sustainable development. In giving shape and form to the festival, two major approaches were employed - community-based development theater approach and capacity-building for festival managers and culture-bearers in the community. The findings of the study may serve as template and inspiration for similar endeavors on growing a signature festival.

Keywords: Creative Spaces, Cultural Capital, Resilient Communities, Shared Celebration

1. INTRODUCTION

Why are people drawn to festive events? What makes them come back year after year to the same events? In every culture, people recognize the need to set aside certain times and spaces for communal creativity, joy and celebration. This impulse for joyful revelries has been around as early as 534 B.C. (Rutagand, 2024) Festivals allow people a unique space where they can break free from their humdrum existence, and experience a heightened sense of vitality and expressions. The Peñafrancia Festival in the Bicol Region, considered the largest Marian observance in Asia, for example, illustrates the captivating effects of a festival on entire communities. In his study on the Marian festival, Peterson (2020) paints a vivid picture of devotees from all walks of life engaged in various ritual performances. The entire community erupts with colors, songs, sounds, dances, gestures, aromas, and all kinds of activities and expressions which make the festival something to look forward to each year. The stimulating effects of celebratory events can act as elixir, that even in the face of bondage, enslaved people found a certain degree of freedom and respite in their cultural expressions. Negro Slaves through their music, rooted in their traditions and Christian beliefs, were able to transcend the physical oppression. (Garett, 2023). Their spirits soared free and strong with the strains of their music, sustaining them in their quest for freedom. It is a fact that throughout human history, the plight of colonized people who were totally alienated from their cultural tradition or any manifestation thereof, almost always ended up in wholesale decimation of races, as in the case of the Maoris of New Zealand (Smale, 2017) and the Indigenous tribes of Canada (Voce, Cecco & Michael, 2021). But, for as long as there remain traces of cultural expressions to serve as totem pole to preserve memories, then the race has a chance to survive well into the next generation.

Significant impacts on various aspects of society are attributed to festivals. These benefits are summarized as follows:

Community Well-Being

Festivals become a platform for collective participation which allows individuals to form connections and networks,

engendering in them a sense of psychological sense of community (Hassanli, et.al., 2020). A sense of identity and belonging is fostered, which becomes a powerful tool for building resilient communities. (Rutagand, 2024). As societies become more fragmented, and people become footloose, there is a growing need for human connections. Sharing in a community tradition, bridges social divides. (Smith & Doe, 2023), (Coldevero & Aguila, 2020). This contributes to increased social capital which is essential for community development.

Cultural and Aesthetic Contributions

Art and music festivals animate the life of the community. Art has therapeutic effects which contribute to the improvement of mental health. (Qu & Cheer, 2020). For instance, the refreshing beauty of open spaces and parks in urban centers offer relief for wearied residents and visitors alike. Revitalizing places enhance quality of life. Moreover, festivals help preserve local heritage by showcasing traditional cultural expressions, thereby strengthening community identity and pride.

Economic and Tourism Benefits

Cultural tourism allows tourists to savor the unique and authentic cultural facets of a place. In doing so, they influence the community to devise ways to meet visitors' expectations, through improvement of necessary services, infrastructure and event offerings (Lopes & Hiray, 2024). This revitalizes the place of destination and stimulate growth of local economies.

Individual Happiness and Sustainability

Repeat engagement in cultural activities has been found to foster happiness and community bonding, leading to the sustainability of the observance. Mesana and De Guzman (2022), brought up the notions of festival happiness. "Aesthetics, spirituality and nostalgia play a role in storing up pleasant memories of a cultural event. This strengthens the sense of rootedness in participants. Also sense of pride and self-satisfaction are developed when participants are able to contribute altruistically to the success of the festival. This concept provide incentives for repeat participation in festivals."

Identity and Reputation

The Arabay Festival has been celebrated annually for eight years now. Residents credit the festival with strengthening community cohesion and with imbuing their community with a positive renown.. Kumari's(2024) study on Indian festivals noted the close link between place and cultural images in creating a distinct identity. She also averred that not only does the local businesses get a big boost, but the folklife of people are enhanced. Her papers also provided insights on how policymakers can help encourage eco-friendly and sustainable cultural practices within the festival. A positive reputation encourages more tourist arrival creating more demand for services. This leads to the creation of jobs and employments. Infrastructure are also improved and so is the surrounding environment. (Nyandoro, 2024)

When it comes to selling reputation, South Korea has shown the way. It is said to be the only country in the world that is so single-minded in exporting its pop culture to gain soft power (Roll, 2021). Soft power was coined by 1990s American social scientist, Joseph Nye, to refer to the "intangible power that a country wields through its image, and not through force." The intangible power of culture has encouraged many countries to gain international influence and persuasion through cultural exchanges and development initiatives (Hanes & Andrei, 2015)." This certain image or brand that South Korea has cultivated has imbued its other export products. Its Samsung cars, appliances and computer wares are among the most-preferred brands in the world today.

Countries like South Korea which have learned to leverage their cultural assets into flourishing creative industries have greatly boosted their economic status. These countries used to rely on a purely materialistic model of development. But in the 21st Century a big change has come to shape the world's economic mindset. It is now viewed that imagination and creativity will fuel the world's economic engine (UNCTAD, 2010). Culture and arts provide the best training ground for imagination and creativity. Towards this end, these countries have made the smart decision to put a high premium on their heritage.

The first attempts to measure the value of the creative industry was done in Australia and Great Britain in the 1990s. Today, the concept of the 'creative industries has evolved into an inclusive wider creative economy. Notions of what creative industry is may vary, but one thing is common among them, it revolves closely around arts and culture.

Filipinos are no strangers to festivities. They thrive on them. No matter how humble or remote a community is, there is longing among its people to animate their mundane existence through some forms of cultural expression or activity. It is like they have grasped intuitively the power of Albert Camus' observation that "without culture and the relative freedom it involves, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future." (Camus)

Festivals like the Sinulog of Cebu (The Spirit of the Sinulog Festival, n.d.), the Penafrancia of Bicol (Peterson, 2020), and the Black Nazarene of Quiapo (Fortunado, n.d.) have grown in stature and fame, not just in the country, but even overseas. The fame and success of these iconic cultural events has fueled the race among local government units to have their own signal festival - that there are those who cook up festivals with scant historical bases. But without the backing of cultural research and without any sound historical bases, these festivals appear contrived and may even lead to festival fatigue.

But, while it has now been acknowledged by practically every country in the world that the combination of culture and commerce generates wealth, and invest a place with distinctive image, the Philippines has been lagging behind their Asian neighbors in this aspect. But recent developments has indicated the determination of Philippine Government to harness its cultural capital for national development, with the passage of a law on the promotion of the creative industries in the country (Deligero, 2024). The current slogan of the Department of Interiors and Local Government (DILG), “There is money in culture (May Pera sa Kultura),” draws inspiration from this. The DILG through Memorandum Circular 2017-133 has mandated each Local Government Unit (LGU) to create Local Culture and Arts Council (LCAC) in its respective area. The LCACs are supposed to oversee the culture and arts programs of the LGUs and ensure that it is inclusive, responsive and deeply rooted in authentic local heritage. Additionally, the DILG, through the Seal of Good Local Governance award, recognizes that culture should be an essential benchmark for good governance. It has gone further by enjoining local communities with cultural events to learn how to “position themselves to the world”, by finding a distinct handle by which a cultural event may be recognized and remembered on the global stage.

Inspired by this vital insight, a festival was conceptualized and birthed in Arimbay, Legazpi City. Called the Arabay Festival, the event intended to rekindle interest in local culture among Arimbayanos. More than imbibing in the locals a sense of pride of place, the long goal is to use the festival to stimulate the development of small-scale creative enterprises. The festival was launched in 2018 during the barangay fiesta celebration. The pandemic, however, and the lockdowns which ensued in 2020 momentarily stymied the observance of the event. The festival is relatively new and small in scope compared to the more established ones. However, its proponents see it as an important contribution to the national agenda to harness culture for development. Inclusive development, ideally, must start at the grassroot, and the festival could be a means towards this goal.

The study determined the features and components of the Arabay Festival of Barangay Arimbay in Legazpi City. The study objectives were: 1.) Determine the socio-demographic profile of Barangay Arimbay, Legazpi City. 2.) Identify the features and components of the Arabay Festival in terms of: a.) History and Background, b.) Activities and Objectives, c.) Legal Mandates, d.) Persons and Agencies Involved, and 3.) Identify the training design and approaches that were adapted for the festival theater play.

The following theoretical lenses were considered in this study. In his seminal work, *Division of Labor in Society* (Jones, 1986), Durkheim highlights the concept of social cohesion which arises when people of shared values and belief form bonds. The Arabay Festival typifies this by becoming a medium for shared celebrations, enhancing community solidarity.

Beyond the aesthetics and entertainment aspect, the festival was conceived to eventually encourage the emergence of creative industries in the community. The link between culture and economy is further bolstered by the Creative Economy Model of Economic Growth, refined and popularized by the United Nations Development Program (UNCTAD, 2010) and the UNESCO (UNESCO, 2020). Creative industries have paved the way for local and regional communities as alternative sites of growth areas, and have vastly contributed to the efforts of creating live-able spaces and cities.

Additionally, the Sociological Aesthetic Theory espoused by George Simmel (2020) assumes “art as a social phenomenon involving body, mind and symbols”. Festival dances reflect cultural history and identity. Festival dances, including the Arabay are shaped to be dynamic expressions of the local heritage and of what communities aspire for.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed qualitative-descriptive phenomenological method, combined with desk research in exploring the essential features and components of the Arabay Festival. Desk research involved collecting, reviewing and analyzing data from existing resources (Rutagand, 2024). These primary resource materials were generated in the process of conceptualizing and implementing the Arabay Festival, such as documentation narrative reports on the theater and capacity-building trainings, the training designs, facilitator’s notes on real-time observation and participation in actual festival events, and evaluation by participants. The study leader who was herself a facilitator and proponent of the festival project, leveraged her first-hand knowledge, experience and compiled resource materials to support and enhance memory recall for the study. Secondary data included enabling laws which provided legal bases for the creation of the festival. Given the nature of desk research, field work was not required.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1.) Profile of Barangay Arimbay in Legazpi City

The locale of the project, Barangay 47- Arimbay, is a coastal barangay of Legazpi City, Albay, Philippines. It is located four kilometers north of Legazpi City proper. It is bounded on the north by Barangay Bigaa; on the east by the Albay Gulf; on the

northwest by Barangay Bagong Abre; on the southwest by Barangay San Joaquin; and on the south by Barangay Rawis. Barangay Arimbay used to be part of Barangay Bigaa, until it evolved into an autonomous barangay. It has a total land area of 151.4 hectares, of which 33% or 49.99% hectares is estimated to be build-up areas, classified as residential, commercial, light industrial (non-polluted and non-hazardous) and institutional. It has a public elementary school and a secondary school. Topographically, the locale has upland, lowland, coastal and riverside communities.⁴ Barangay 47-Arimbay, as determined by the 2020 Census had a population of 4,004. This represented 1.91% of the total population of Legazpi. Owing to its topographical make-up, Barangay Arimbay, has a diverse culture. As Legazpi City continues to grow into a highly urbanized city, development efforts has spilled over from the center of the city to communities in the north which includes Barangay Arimbay. The barangay has benefitted economically from this spill-over, particularly the community proper (Barangay 47 - Arimbay, n.d.).

2.) Features and Components of the Arabay Festival

a.) History and Background of the Arabay Festival

The Arabay Festival started as an extension project of the Performing Arts Department of the College of Arts and Letters of Bicol University in 2018. The project is a theater-based initiative aimed at stimulating interest in local culture, and eventually pave the way for the development of creative industries in the area. The project is in line with the National Development Agenda (*Philippine development plan 2023-2028, January 18, 2023*) which calls for culture-sensitive plans and programs at all levels. This reflects the view popularized by UNESCO that in the 21st century culture will be the engine for inclusive and sustainable development. The project proponents utilized developmental and participatory theater to mobilize the community of Arimbay in support of the project's objectives. A festival with street dancing was deemed a good start-up to a full blown communitywide program on culture.

The initiative for the project came from Ms. Ma. Teresa A. Ruivivar, the head of the secondary school in the community. The school was looking to provide a living laboratory for its senior high school students taking up the Humanities strand. The course requires students to go out to the community and acquire real-world experience in endeavors related to their course. This initiative is aligned with the provision in the New Education Curriculum (Republic Act 10533, 2013) which encourage teachers to contextualize, indigenize and localize instructional materials using local heritage. Knowing that the Bicol University has a performing arts department, they requested training in theater so they can come up with culture and arts program, heralded by a signature festival. The university responded by drawing up a Memorandum of Agreement with the school and the local government of Arimbay. A training design for a festival street dance theater was developed. The University tapped relevant line agencies of the government to assist them in the project.

Two major strategies were employed in accomplishing the objectives of the project: 1.) community mobilization through the use of developmental/participatory theater, and 2.) capability-building for culture-sensitive governance which included festival management.

a.1.) Community mobilization through development/participatory theater

Building a full-blown program on culture and arts for a community needs to start somewhere. In this case, a festival was the most feasible way to go.. For starter, an initial 6-day theater workshop adapting the BITAW Method (Basic Integrated Theater Arts Workshop), popularized by the Philippine Educational Theater Association (Philippine Educational Theater Association, n.d.). the methods of Viola Spolin (Backstage Staff, 2025), Rudolf Laban (University of Maryland, n.d.) and Augusto Boal (Markham, 2024), was conducted for fifty-five (55) secondary students and faculty of Arimbay High School (AHS). This select group became the core members of the cast of the festival dance theater. The theater approaches enabled the exploration of prevailing social realities in a community, while serving as vehicle for cultural expressions. The theater course made use of participatory and developmental techniques for this purpose. Participants shared experiences and insights about their community. In these sharing they identified prevailing issues, as well as their vision and aspirations for their community. These sharing provided them with narratives for their improvised storytelling which they mounted into mini-dramas. From this initial workshop, a play script was developed and mounted for public consumption during the barangay fiesta, marking the launch of the Arabay Festival. Later a choreography based on the playscript was developed for street dancing, which took place a day after the launching activity of the festival. The Arabay Festival dance has become a medium for cultural storytelling, echoing Chandanasaro's (2025) view that the intricate interplay between body movement, symbolism, and spatial dynamics are the physical embodiments of the interpretation of local cultural heritage. Edwards (2020) concurs by saying that in dance performers express messages through bodily movements. It is a continual interplay between the body, mind and environment.

To reinforce the learning in the initial workshop, another week-long refresher dance theater course was given the following year. This time, sessions on creative costume and props-making, and composition of festival music were included. This enabled a faculty participant to compose music distinct for the Arabay Festival. The trained core members later served as guide-facilitators to those intending to join the festival dance cast.

The festival has become a rallying point for the entire community. It also shows how local heritage can be harnessed for educative purposes. These are in line with the mandate of the New Basic Education Curriculum (BEC), otherwise known as the K-12 Curriculum to utilize the community as living laboratory for learners. The cultural products produced become part of the heritage of the school and the community. The Arabay project is a work in progress. It has also become an umbrella program under which other artistic and cultural activities can be added as the community grows in its capacity to grow and nurture its cultural program.

The Arabay Festival Dance

Choreography for the Arabay Dance was developed by the lead choreographer, Prof. Ian V. Bello, former faculty of the Arimbay High School, and currently faculty of the Humanities Department of Bicol University. The festival dance is based on the Arabay Play which was written by Prof. Agnes G. Lasin of the same university. She was the lead proponent of the Arabay Festival Project, and also served as overall training-workshop facilitator.

Table 1. Structure of the Arabay Festival Dance

Dance Segments	Meaning/Symbolism	Description of Basic Steps/Movements/Gestures
Pag-Harang	Asking for prayers for protection from natural disasters like volcanic eruptions, frequent typhoons, and other misfortunes; and blessings for abundant produce and good health and wellbeing.	Arms, extended upward, head/face turned upward, knee bent a little in a genuflecting or supplicatory posture to signify humility before the Divine. Arms lifted then lowered. Turning side to side.
Pag-Arabay	Communal Spirit/Bayanihan – local folks come together in conviviality to help out one another in facing whatever challenge there is, ensuring community well-being and continuity. A metaphor for the challenge faced is a bridge which represent the trek to a new settlement to start a new community.	Dancers' hands interlocked in a wave-like movements simulating crossing a bridge to get to another side to start a new settlement.
Kabuhayan	Livelihood – fishing, farming	Simulate/Depict farming and fishing activities
Pagrukyaw	Honoring/Glorifying/Thanking God and his Blessed Mother for all the graces received	Movements similar to Pagharang, but done in livelier pace accompanied by chanting and yells.

Background of the Arabay Play

The forty-five (45) minute play is entitled, ARABAY: Tulay sa Kapungawan (Nostalgia for the Past), Paghinguwa (Struggles and Toil) buda Pangaturugan (Hopes and Aspirations). Arabay is a local term evoking unity, harmony and care for one another. The short play gives a glimpse of the culture of the community going all the way back to pre-colonial times, to its present situation, as well as its hopes and aspirations. Through the long years of toil and existence of the barangay, the golden thread of oneness and communitarian spirit prevails, helping Barangay Arimbay thrive. The play incorporated Tanawan Bridge as a trope around which the events unfolded. Tanawan comes from the word Tanaw which means to view, or to take a look. According to locals, the bridge used to be made of bamboos, and the people, in crossing the bridge would often say “Arabay na kita pagbalyo sa ibong (Let us go together in going over to the other side.)” Later on the word Arabay became Arimbay. The past, present and future of the community was made to meet up and unfold by the bridge before the very eyes of the lead characters – a precocious young boy and his grandmother, who was steeped in the history and culture of the community. Also, in developing the play, the authors derived inspiration from the previous studies done on local culture by internationally recognized Bicol Historian, Dr. Danilo M. Gerona (*Albay: Winding down the historic abaca Trail, 2011*). As a scholar and researcher in three prominent university-museums in Spain, Dr. Gerona perused first-hand accounts of pre-colonial life in Bicol Region. He wrote that during the pre-Spanish period, communities situated at the hem of Mayong had the belief that the volcano was the resting place of their Anitos (spirits of dead relatives). This is very similar to early Austronesian belief that once a relative passed away, his/her spirit is placed in limbo - awaiting a time when he/she is sent back to earth to take the form of nature in order to serve as guide for the living relatives (Chua, 2025). Dr. Gerona, observed that nowhere in the manuscript he studied was there any mention of Mt. Mayon or Mt. Magayon. But there was mention of Mayong. In Dr. Gerona's study, Mayong during ancient times, was considered sacred ground that no one dared to climb it or haunt in its vicinity. It was also believed that the Mayong's restiveness was due to the struggles to be free by a strapping young warrior-hunter. The adventurous warrior was caught and imprisoned in the bowels of the volcano, by an enchantress who was guarding the place. The hunter was pursuing a wild boar, and wandered over to the forbidden area, where he was prevailed upon by the enchantress. This long forgotten tale was woven into the play but given a twist. The enchantress took a fancy to the warrior but he rejected her, thus earning her wrath. She then had him chained deep in the bosom of the mountain.

Costumes and Hand Props

Costume for the Arabay Dance consists of the colors yellow representing ripe grains in the farm; blue for the sea and fishing livelihood, and green to reflect the lush natural environment. Dancers wear kerchiefs called putong which are worn by farmers in the field. They also carry hand props like bamboo spears for fishing, baskets for gathering the rice grains, and candles indicating prayers of thanksgiving.

Arabay Dance Music

The music for the festival dance was composed by Mr. Alvin Nonsol, faculty of the Arimbay High School. Musical arrangement was done by Prof. Ramil Chavenia of the Department of Humanities of Bicol University. Arabay has a simple AB Structure with modulation on the Finale part. It has a simple melody for easy recall. Rhythmically, the music is set to a duple meter in fast to moderate tempo. Yells or chants were incorporated to add color to the mood of a happy and rhythmical celebration of Arabay festival. The music has become so associated with the community of Arimbay – that it has become iconic.

a.2.) Capability-building for culture-sensitive governance

To ensure the sustainability of the festival project, the college conducted a 2-day Culture-Sensitive Governance Training for Barangay Arimbay, which included a session on Festival Management. A total of twenty (20) participants composed of Barangay Council members, Department of Education (DepEd) faculty, and youth leaders attended. Invited resource speakers for the seminar were the Chief of the Arts Education Department of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), and a Local Government Specialist from the DILG-Albay Provincial Office.

The DILG representative tackled the salient points of culture-focused legal mandates. She provided insights on how the council can explore their fiscal capacity to provide adequate funding for the cultural project. The latter expressed pleasant surprise at what the BUCAL was able to achieve at Barangay Arimbay. She said that the college has jumpstarted the national call for a cultural resurgence at the local level. She underscored the call of the national government to utilize culture for livelihood, succinctly captured in the tagline: “May pera sa kultura” (there is money in culture). It was pointed out to the community that the resources needed for sustaining their creative programs are within their power to legislate. This is crucial to the continuous survival and growth of its culture and arts program. Culture and arts is the life blood of the creative economy. She bared that forty percent of Filipinos, based on data of the Department of Trade and Industries (DTI), are employed in the creative sector -- clearly illustrating that there is money in culture and the arts. But LGUs are still grappling with the question of where to incorporate culture and arts in their development plans. They seem to gloss over the obvious fact that they have legislative powers which they can use to enact plans and programs for converting culture into a livelihood. It’s like hitting two birds with one stone – do economics and culture and arts at the same time.”

She added that it is no longer a choice but a mandate for the local government units to have a functional culture and arts council in their locale. Their performance in this aspect will be their ticket to gaining the Good Governance Seal.

a.3.) Festival Management

Prior to the workshop on festival management, a discussion was held with the resource speaker, Mr. Ronie B. Mirabuena of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), to apprise him of the need of the stakeholders of the Arabay Festival Project, which must be addressed in the seminar. It was articulated in the discussion that Mr. Mirabuena should dwell on: 1.) the importance of having a culture-based festival; 2.) give practical tips on how to grow a festival reflective of the local culture; and 3.) provide feedback on areas for improvement for the current festival.

The resource person walked the participants through the experiences of select LGUs in the country, in creating and managing festival projects. Lessons and challenges from these experiences were highlighted to serve as inspiration for the Arimbayano community. He also pointed to the Philippine Development Philippine (PDP) as the strategic framework and legal basis for promotion of culture and arts. “One’s own culture is important because it gives a sense of identity, dignity and belonging. As a people, Filipinos love to relate to others, to nature and to God. They show this penchant for relating through festivals and merry making. But festivals should not be done out of imposition, as in the case of the school imposing such kind of activity on students, or simply out of a whimsical desire to have one, regardless of its cultural or historical moorings. In the case of Arabay Festival, the people behind it will have to determine the future directions of their festival. To do this, it is necessary to go back to the basics – the artistic vision of the festival. Having big dreams is good but the community has to start somewhere. Undertaking an inventory of cultural resources of Arimbay can generate new stories and perspectives which then can be incorporated into the festival. The name of the game is collaboration. Taking care of the newly created festival requires a show of many willing hands. Important questions or issues need to be dealt with such as: Is the Arabay Festival necessary? Has it potential for commercialization? Has it been an opportunity for education?”

The Covid Pandemic dampened and hampered the celebration of the Arabay Festival, but once normalcy returned the community went full blast in the observance of their festival. The Arabay Festival was integrated into the barangay fiesta and other activities were added. The repertoire of events and activities in the Arabay Festival of Barangay Arimbay can be categorized as;

b.1.) Religious – Novena Masses and Christening

The nine-day novena masses for the patron saint of the barangay – Mary, under the title of Lady of Salvacion – continued to be observed. Baptism of newly-born and very young infants were included. This is an occasion for expanding the family clan by adding “ninangs and ninongs” These are persons chosen by the child’s parents to serve as spiritual parents for the child.

b.2.) Cultural- Street Dance Competition, Rawit-Dawit/Tigsik, Laro ng Lahi, Arabay Play

Cultural events take the form of street dance competition based on the Arabay signature choreography. This traffic-stopping event is looked forward to as it really adds color to the celebration. Baton twirling of the school bands are part of the attraction. There are readings of indigenous Bicol poetry called rawit-dawit and tigsik. The former has rhymes but its measure can somewhat vary from line to line. The latter – the Tigsik – observes exact/uniform meter and must rhyme at the end of each line. It is Bicolanos answer to the Japanese Haiku. The cultural part also is an avenue for re-learning and enjoying the traditional games (Laro ng Lahi), which sadly are no longer played much at home. The games encourage children and adults to be physically active which good for body and brain health. Then there is the presentation of the Arabay story in dance theater form.

b.3.) Environmental – Clean and Green, Coral Viewing

Greening and making the surroundings spic and span in order to make the community live-able is part of the observance. Each block or purok in the barangay engages in a friendly competition to beautify their place. One place of interest which the barangay is proud of are the coral islands. In order to protect the corals, the Barangay Council has included coral-viewing in their festival program. This serves to make people aware of the need to protect these natural heritage.

b.4.) Sports – Basketball Tournament, Fun-Run

Sports activities consist of inter-purok basketball tournaments and the fun-run. Basketball Fun-runs are usually done early morning before the sun is up. This activity provides platform for the more sports minded populace of the barangay.

b.5.) Talent Show - Singing, Dancing

Talents show consists of singing and dancing competitions. Anyone can join simply for the fun of it, or as a way to showcase one's talents and gain more confidence in performance. This activities have served as a social leveler as residents and visitors from all walks of life could join regardless of social and economic status. What counts is pure talent and willingness to perform in public.

b.6.) Beauty Pageants – Ms. and Mr. Arabay Festival, Ms. Gay Arabay

One of the usual crowd-drawers and highlights of the celebration are the beauty pageants. The former is open to ladies and the latter for members of the LGBTQ community. Participants are expected to be well-versed in the culture of their community, and demonstrate appreciation for it. The pageant usually has a portion where participants must wear attire made out of found materials or indigenous materials. This opens up an avenue for those with talents in fashion design to showcase their talents. Lately, the pageant organizers have allowed the participation of outsiders as a way to promote the festival.

b.7.) Socials - community dances for the senior citizens, youth, and the general population

Social dancing for different sectors of the community take place during the festivities which could last a week. These activities enable the residents to come together in mutual conviviality, which contributes to the strengthening of community solidarity.

c.) Legal Bases for the Creation of the Arabay Festival

Issuances such as those listed below provided the legal framework for the creation of the Arabay Festival of ArimBay, Legazpi City.

1. Republic Act 7356 – The Establishment of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts - Sections 4, is about creating and distributing cultural opportunities especially to the marginalized sectors of the society; tasked the Commission with the development of the vast potentials of Filipinos as responsible catalyst of change in society, and ensuring the freedom and creativity of the human spirit. Section 5, states that the Filipino national culture shall be evolved and developed by the people themselves in a climate of freedom and responsibility.; and Section 6, provides for the creation, promotion and dissemination of artistic and cultural products to the greatest number of people (Republic Act No. 7356, 1992)
2. Republic Act 11961 - The Cultural Mapping Law. Mandates Local Government Units to undertake cultural mapping and enhanced cultural education in their locality as a way to conserve and protect Philippine cultural Heritage. The republic act amended R.A. 10066 otherwise known as the National Heritage Law of 2009 (Republic Act No. 11961, 2023).
3. Memorandum Circular 3017-133 of the DILG enjoins Local Government Units to put in place a functional local culture and arts council in their respective cities and municipalities (Memorandum Circular No. 2017-133).
4. Republic Act 10533 New Basic Education Curriculum – Otherwise known as the K-12 Curriculum. In section 5 of the law, there is provision for the contextualization, localization and indigenization of instructional materials through integration of local heritage, in order to make learning effective and meaningful for the learners (Republic Act 10533, 2013).
5. The National Development Agenda of 2022-2028 recognizes culture as one of the important pillars of sustainable and inclusive development. Culture is a national asset (*Philippine development plan 2023-2028*).
6. Republic Act 11292 Seal of Good Local Governance is an institutionalized recognition for local government units (LGUs) in the Philippines with the aim to promote good governance and encourage continuous improvement in various areas. Tourism, Heritage and Culture and Arts is one area that the LGU is expected to perform well (Government of the Republic of the Philippines, 2019).
7. The UNESCO – Development to be sustainable must be informed and harmonious with local culture (UNESCO, 2020).

d.) Persons and Institutions Involved

The partnership and collaboration of the following agencies/institutions were crucial in the creation of the Arabay Festival. These entities may be considered the gatekeepers of the festival project.

1. The Bicol University College of Arts and Letters (BUCAL) was the lead proponent and implementer of the project. The

college acted on the request of the principal (Ms. Ma. Teresa Ruivivar) of Arimbay High School to help them create a festival which shall serve as a community laboratory for students under the Humanities course of the Senior High School. Right away, the college tapped the Department of Performing Arts and the Humanities Department to render the needed extension services to the high school. The Performing Arts faculty designed a course package consisting of a Theater Workshop and a Culture-Based Local Governance Training-Seminar. The Faculty of Humanities Department provided training in festival music composition, and in costume and props making.

2. The Arimbay High School at the onset of the project was implementing the New Education Curriculum which was cognizant of the role of culture in teaching and learning. Section five of the republic act 10533, challenges teachers to indigenize, localize and contextualize their instructional materials using local heritage. The school deemed that a festival woven out of local narratives may be a good way to encourage faculty and students to be aware and appreciative of their heritage. The school fielded students and faculty to assist in the formation of the core group of the Arabay Festival Dance Theater. The official music for the festival dance was composed by a faculty of the school.
3. The Barangay Council of Arimbay provided necessary support, material and in kind, for preparatory activities leading to the creation of the festival until the launch, and subsequent annual observances.
4. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts was tapped by BUCAL to send a resource person from the Cultural Center of the Philippines to provide assistance and insights into how the fledgling festival can be management and grown sustainably. The Commission provided funds for the honoraria and plane ticket of the resource person.
5. The Cultural Center of the Philippines, represented by Mr. Ronnie Mirabuena, provided practical insights and know-how on managing a festival.
6. The Department of Interiors and Local Government was the agency responsible for mobilizing the Local Government Units (LGUs) in the entire country to form functional culture and arts councils in their respective locales. It provided encouragement for the creation of the Arabay Festival. It challenged the community to think of placing the festival on the world map, and to think of ways economic revenues may be generated from it.

3.) Training Design and Approaches

The theater module made use of improvisational and participatory approaches in the building of community theater like the Basic Integrated Theater Arts Workshop (BITAW) developed by the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA). The module is community-based and utilizes participatory theater techniques. It incorporates insights from Viola Spolin, Rudolf Laban and Augusto Boal. BITAW provides an avenue for understanding artistic expression through an approach that blends creative drama, movement, sound, writing, and visual arts. (Philippine Educational Theater Association, n.d.)

Viola Spolin is considered the mother of improvisations. At the heart of her pedagogy is spontaneity. She changed the craft of acting by encouraging actors to connect with their spontaneous impulses, and to respond from their subconscious rather than their intellect, releasing childlike creativity (Backstage Staff, 2025). The output of the training-workshops unleashed the creative imagination and artistry of the participants enabling them to contribute much to the creation of the Arabay Festival.

Rudolf Laban's (Edwards, et.al., 2020) revolutionary ideas bridged the gap between the performing arts and science. For him, movement is expressive, transformative, organic, and 3-dimensional. His theory and method revolved around 3 basic elements common to all movements and dances. These are Efforts, Shape and Space. According to Laban there is an inner impulse that supports movement, which become evident through man's organization of Space and the qualities of the movement, called Effort. Combination of these elements can be used for creating narratives for the theater such as what was done in the Arabay Festival Street Dance.

Image Theatre is a technique developed in theater by Augusto Boal. It is a tool for helping participants to embrace a practice of seeing and knowing things in different ways. It allows for more expressivity among participants through learning experiences that are playful in various contexts. Audiences are transformed into active participants ("spect-actors") who can identify and address oppression in their lives and offer possible solutions to the problem situation (Markham, 2024).

The theater course developed for the Arabay made use of techniques such as improvisation, creative movements and choreography, creative drama and storytelling, group dynamics, festival music development, props and costume-making. The training started with an opening program where the rationale and objectives of the training, including the overview of project were laid out. This was followed by the main workshops. At the onset, the participants played games and did group dynamics to dispel their inhibitions and warm them up to the succeeding activities. Since the participants were the core cast members of the Arabay Festival Theater, it was important that they develop camaraderie, so they underwent team-building sessions. In the succeeding workshops participants explored movements, themes and symbols which they can use for creating narratives. From simple movements, they went on to more complex ones. Mini showcases were mounted. In crafting the storyline for the Arabay, a collaborative approach was employed. To start off, participants were asked about their sense perceptions of their barangay, and the events happening there as a way to stimulate their imagination and gut feel about their community. As an example, they were asked questions like, "What color do you associate your community with? Give explanation." Participants candidly and eagerly shared experiences and insights about their community. Facilitators took notes of the sharing, highlighting issues prevailing in the community that were elicited in the creative storytelling. In addition, participants were asked to share their vision and aspirations for their community. Out of the sharing, they improvised storylines and mounted mini-dramas using movements and dialogues, blockings, improvised sounds and music. These provided material for the play script entitled, *ARABAY: Tulay sa Kapungawan (Nostalgia for the Past)*, *Pagbinguwa (Struggles and Toil)* buda *Pangaturugan (Hopes and Aspirations)*. The play was mounted for the public,

marking the launch of the festival. The Arabay story was also translated to street dance theater. Workshop on developing moving choreography was conducted to the tune of the Arabay music. The music was the output of a session on festival music composition conducted for the participants. As a result of the workshop, a faculty participant was able to compose the music distinct to the Arabay Festival. To round out the entire theater workshops, a session on costume and props making was added, in order to help the participants create fitting design for their costumes and other festival paraphernalia. Participants rated the training experience and the facilitators excellent. They expressed gladness that they were part of the making of the festival.

4. CONCLUSION

The study reveals the following findings:

1. The socio-demographic profile of Barangay Arimbay, Legazpi City.

The community of Arimbay is culturally diverse. It's proximity to the city has benefitted its economy.

2. The features and components of the Arabay Festival in terms of :

- a. History and Background

The festival project came about in response to the need of a local school for the establishment of the festival project to cap off their yearly culture and arts celebration in light of the directive emanating from the K_12 Curriculum for an indigenized, localized and contextualized instruction. The project implementation is in line with national legal mandates which view culture as important pillar of community development. Several line agencies collaborated to birth the project. The festival is grounded in local history and culture of the community.

- b. Activities and Objectives. The festival since its inception has expanded and offers activities which cater to different interest groups within the community encouraging participation from various sectors.
- c. Legal Mandates. the festival's existence and relevance is covered by several strong mandates on culture and arts.
- d. Persons and Agencies Involved. participation and commitment of a number of line agencies of government and the resources they invested in the project was crucial to its success and continuing existence

3. The training design and approaches that were adapted for the festival theater play.

The training design incorporated methodologies and approaches that are participative, improvisational and developmental. This enabled the participants to discover narratives about their community which they used as bases for their creative storytelling.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Profile of Barangay Arimbay – The barangay is one of the fast-growing barangays in the city not only in terms of population, but more so in terms of economic development. It has diverse cultural qualities. This has ramifications for the socio-cultural aspects of the community. The community can grow its signature festival and have it included as one of the significant events in the city's calendar of festivities.
2. Features and Components of the Arabay Festival
 - a) History and Background

The Arabay Festival is based on the culture and history of Barangay Arimbay. It was created out of the desire of the community to have a signature festival. It is aligned with landmark laws on utilization of local heritage as foundation for sustainable development. Several agencies and institutions helped in bringing the project to fruition.
 - b) Activities and Objectives
 - a. There are varied activities covered by the festivals which entail communitywide participation. These contributed to making the celebration vibrant. However, there is no indication of the contribution of the festival to the local economy. This aspect can be the focus of another study. Capitalizing on the festival to boost local economy should be the next step to be taken by the community. In this way, it can be demonstrated that culture and arts are viable capital for livelihood.

- c) Legal Mandates
 - a. The festival project stands on solid legal grounds. It would be best to explore the nuances and provisions of these enabling laws and harness them fully, for long-term cultural and economic impact in the community.
 - d) Persons and Agencies Involved
 - a. The creation and implementation of the Arabay Festival involved not only the local community and the local school, but engaged the expertise and resources of several line agencies of the government. Significant stakeholders or gatekeepers are essential to sustaining the spirit and intent of the community event.
3. Training Design and Approaches
- The training approaches were community-based and encouraged active participation and inputs from the participants. This approach gave the participants a sense of ownership of the festival right at the birthing of the community cultural event. It was also designed to capacitate the local community to manage their own event sustainably. The training design used in the creation of the festival can be used as template for those attempting a similar community project

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Research Article

Digital Inclusion in Agriculture: Profiling the Factors Influencing Social Commerce Adoption among Farm Cooperatives

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ABSTRACT

Social commerce (SC) enables direct product sales and purchases and expands vendors' market reach. From the current literature, although SC adoption has been extensively studied, still few studies examine its adoption in relation to digital inclusion issues. Therefore, this research investigates digital inclusion in agriculture, focusing on the factors influencing SC adoption among farm cooperatives. Employing a mixed-methods approach, 52 farm cooperatives across the Bicol Region, Philippines were surveyed and interviewed to address three key research objectives. Firstly, key SC adoption factors were identified and examined. Results show that digital literacy, perceived usefulness, and organizational readiness facilitate adoption. Secondly, digital inclusion challenges faced by farm cooperatives were explored, highlighting issues such as limited internet connectivity, and scarce digital resources. Lastly, the role of technological infrastructure and digital resources was assessed. Access to reliable internet connectivity and digital resources emerged as crucial facilitators, while inadequate infrastructure posed significant barriers. Furthermore, the study provides valuable insights into the roles of digital literacy, perceived usefulness, and organizational readiness. These findings highlight the importance of equipping farm cooperatives with the necessary skills and understanding to leverage digital tools effectively.

Keywords: digital inclusion, social commerce, social commerce adoption, digital divide

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is a significant contributor to the economic advancement of developing nations (FAO, 2017b), since it aids in reducing poverty, increasing income, and improving food security (World Bank, 2023). However, the agricultural sector continues in facing notable challenges such as meager farm revenues, restricted rural job prospects, inadequate food safety, and reduced agricultural competitiveness resulting from limited market connections (Sumalde & Quilloy, 2015). Additionally, exploitative traders or intermediaries who impose suggested retail prices further compound these challenges (Piabuo et al., 2020). Intermediaries exert significant control over the agricultural market in numerous developing countries, thereby dominating the supply chain (Acosta et al., 2019). Following the harvest, farmers often find themselves with limited choices and are compelled to sell their crops directly to intermediaries on their own farms, receiving significantly lower prices compared to the market (Giles et al., 2019). The complex network of intermediaries in the supply chain causes delays, resulting in increased pricing for both farmers and consumers. Consequently, both producers and consumers incur economic losses (Moreno et al., 2020).

With widespread Internet and electronic device use, commercial activities such as e-commerce, the buying and selling of products and services, are executed electronically. E-commerce is a popular method of value exchange with various payment alternatives, increasing business competition and sales (Wahyuni et al., 2020). Farmers in developing nations have embraced e-commerce for rural economic growth (Couture et al., 2021) allowing farmers to participate in the local, national, and international economies (World Bank, 2016). Consumers and farmers in developing nations, through e-commerce, may gain benefits from reduced price dispersion, and less wastage of agricultural products (Liu et al., 2021).

With the progress and widespread use of Internet-based apps developed on Web 2.0, namely social media, e-commerce activities are merged with these platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. This approach allows consumers to directly comment on product pages (Huang et al., 2018), promotes online business models (Lin & Lo, 2016), and affects trust, engagement, and loyalty (Dzulfikar et al., 2019). This emerging approach of e-commerce known as social commerce (SC) uses social media to

facilitate electronic activities and transactions in online markets and communities. SC allows people to generate and share content and expands vendors' market reach by integrating consumers' social networks (Hajli, 2015). It allows people to sell and acquire products without intermediaries, which is popular in developing nations (Camacho & Barrios, 2022).

Farm Cooperatives

Cooperatives are widely prevalent in several countries, encompassing a wide range of industries such as agriculture, food production, finance, healthcare, marketing, insurance, and credit services (ILO, 2016). A cooperative is a self-governing organization formed by individuals who come together voluntarily to fulfil their shared economic, social, and cultural objectives and goals through a collectively owned and democratically managed firm. It is a type of business organization that uses its guiding principles to pursue initiatives aimed at promoting both broad and specific sustainability goals (Verhofstadt & Maertens, 2015). It possesses inherent benefits in tackling the difficulties related to reducing poverty, ensuring food security, and generating employment (Pérez-González & Valiente-Palma, 2021). Traditional cooperatives involved community members pooling their financial resources through an association of people with common goals to mobilize resources, particularly financial ones, and distribute them among members (Masuku et al., 2016). Similarly, economic democracy and marginalized community empowerment are essential to sustainable development and collective accountability (Innocent & Adefila, 2014).

Moreover, cooperatives are the main institutional and organizational instrument for independent farmers to compete with local and worldwide retailers. Farm cooperative has been a key component of the social economy (Kalogiannidis, 2020). Similarly, smallholder farmers can benefit from institutions that help them overcome hurdles and improve their collective bargaining power. Agricultural cooperatives can also help farmers overcome market inefficiencies and increase production and market access. Cooperatives also help allocate agricultural credit to producers and laborers, supply agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and agrochemicals, organize storage, marketing, and processing of agricultural produce, secure raw materials for industries, and provide technical guidance like technology introduction to farmers, all while promoting social and economic welfare. Thus, donors, governments, and researchers are refocusing on cooperative farmer organizations to institutionalize smallholder agricultural performance, particularly market involvement.

In addition, agricultural cooperatives play a crucial role in agro-food systems, enabling farmers to collaborate, make collective decisions, and expand market connections, resulting in economies of scale that individual farmers cannot achieve (Abate, 2018). These organizations can also help small-scale farmers negotiate for inputs, transportation, and market information. Since cooperative commercial operations influence them, farmers can actively participate in and benefit from established value chains (Feng et al., 2016).

Use of Digital Technology in Agriculture

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have great potential to be a beneficial instrument for boosting the development of rural areas, especially in the areas of online commerce, digital healthcare, and agriculture (FAO, 2017a). ICTs also improve rural people's consumption options and agricultural productivity, promoting sustainable rural and agricultural development. It also helps farmers get finance, reducing their poverty risk, and promote e-commerce platforms, which boost rural economies (Ma et al., 2023).

This generation is experiencing a huge transition toward digitalization, or the use of digital technologies in agriculture. The UN Global Compact (UN Global Compact, 2017) defines 'digital agriculture' as the integration of new and advanced technology into one system to increase food production for farmers and stakeholders in the agriculture value chain. Its main goal is to improve farming practices' profitability and sustainability, support global food systems, and achieve sustainable agriculture development to ensure the production of safe, nutritious, and affordable food for all. Digital agriculture can boost agricultural productivity, lower prices, and open new markets, as well as increase communication and inclusivity (Rashida, 2020).

In addition, the Internet has also changed agriculture's marketing, distribution, and consumer value chain (ADB, 2018). Digitalization in agriculture involves integrating digital technologies into production, supply chains, and financial access. Similarly, digital technologies can reduce waste and costs in supply chains, improve relationships between farmers, institutional buyers, and consumers, and increase connectedness in the agri-food system (Labios et al., 2021). To address information asymmetry in food chains, digital technologies can improve collaboration and supply chain management by decentralizing information (Abideen et al., 2021).

Additionally, there is a growing need for support to educate farmers about the use and benefits of e-commerce in agriculture and to help them acquire information about online sales and marketing, including selecting the best online technologies for their business needs and guiding their effective use. Cultural attitudes and practices must be adjusted to help farmers switch to online sales using computers or mobile phones. However, rural farmers' low literacy, limited financial resources, and limited