



Haw-as Festival in Dumangas, Iloilo: A Catalyst for Intangible Cultural Heritage Recognition and Sustainable Community Development

Article History:

Initial submission:	29 April 2026
First decision:	08 May 2026
Revision received:	29 June 2026
Accepted for publication:	05 July 2026
Online release:	09 July 2026

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Abstract

This study explored the Haw-as Festival in Dumangas, Iloilo as an expression of intangible cultural heritage, focusing on its cultural elements, community significance, and sustainability. Using a qualitative deductive case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving 15 purposively selected participants representing key stakeholder groups. The findings revealed that the festival embodies core cultural elements, including traditional fishing practices, rituals and performances, indigenous materials, and oral traditions, which collectively reflect the community's historical livelihood and identity. These elements function as mechanisms for cultural transmission, enabling the preservation of knowledge, values, and practices across generations. The study further found that the festival strengthens cultural identity, fosters community pride, and promotes social cohesion through active participation and shared experiences. Despite challenges such as modernization, commercialization, and declining youth engagement, opportunities for cultural preservation and tourism development are actively present. The study concludes that the sustainability of the Haw-as Festival depends on strong community involvement, effective documentation, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders. Overall, the festival serves as a vital platform for preserving cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary social and environmental contexts.

Keywords: Haw-as Festival, intangible cultural heritage, cultural identity, community participation, sustainability, qualitative case study



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INTRODUCTION

Cultural festivals are important expressions of heritage that strengthen community identity, preserve traditions, and support local economies (Blanza & Paborada, 2024). In the Philippines, festivals also function as tourism drivers by attracting visitors, generating employment, and promoting local enterprises (Drummond, Snowball, Antrobus, & Drummond, 2021; Bindu & Babu, 2022). Beyond their economic value, festivals serve as living cultural spaces where historical memory, religious devotion, traditional knowledge, and environmental practices are continuously transmitted across generations.

Western Visayas is home to several culturally significant festivals, including Dinagyang, MassKara, and Ati-Atihan, which reflect the

region's rich cultural diversity and historical traditions. Among these celebrations, the Haw-as Festival in Dumangas, Iloilo represents a localized form of heritage preservation rooted in the town's long-standing aquaculture tradition. The festival commemorates the practice of "haw-as," a Visayan term referring to the draining of fishponds for harvesting mature fish, symbolizing livelihood, renewal, and the community's relationship with coastal resources (Arboleda, 2015). Through activities such as street dancing, fluvial parades, and agri-aqua trade fairs, the festival highlights ecological knowledge, communal labor, and cultural identity while promoting tourism and local enterprise.

The cultural significance of the Haw-as Festival aligns with the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023–2028, which identifies

cultural heritage and festivals as key components of sustainable tourism development in the Philippines (Department of Tourism [DOT], 2023). The plan emphasizes the preservation of cultural authenticity while strengthening community participation and economic resilience. In this context, the Haw-as Festival functions not only as a cultural celebration but also as a platform for community development, environmental awareness, and intergenerational transmission of traditions.

Despite the growing recognition of festivals as economic and tourism assets, concerns have emerged regarding commercialization and the gradual weakening of cultural authenticity. Studies suggest that tourism-oriented festivals may modify or simplify traditional practices to meet commercial demands, potentially reducing the cultural meanings embedded in rituals and performances (Andersson et al., 2013; Einarsen & Mykletun, 2013). In addition, generational changes and shifting social values may contribute to declining awareness among younger participants regarding the historical and ecological significance of cultural traditions.

Existing studies on Philippine festivals have largely focused on tourism development and economic impact, with limited attention given to the socio-cultural dimensions of rural festivals. Smaller community-based festivals such as the Haw-as Festival remain underexplored, particularly in relation to how they shape cultural identity, preserve traditional practices, and promote sustainability. Moreover, there is limited qualitative research examining the lived experiences and perceptions of local stakeholders regarding the role of festivals in sustaining cultural heritage and community resilience.

To address these gaps, the present study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine the Haw-as Festival as a form of intangible cultural heritage. Specifically, the study explored how the festival contributes to cultural identity, traditional practice

preservation, and sustainability within the local community. By documenting stakeholder experiences and community narratives, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of rural festivals as cultural institutions that support heritage preservation, environmental consciousness, and sustainable community development.

Research Objectives. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand how the Haw-as Festival in Dumangas, Iloilo facilitates the protection of cultural heritage and contributes to sustainable development across social, environmental, and economic dimensions. Framed within social constructionism, the study seeks to capture how the festival is experienced, interpreted, and imbued with meaning by residents and other community stakeholders.

With the above objective, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How is the Haw-as Festival recognized by local stakeholders in relation to identity, tradition, and sustainability?
2. What are the key cultural elements showcased in the Haw-as Festival that reflects community?
3. How do local stakeholders understand the significance of Haw-as Festival in promoting cultural identity, tradition, and sustainability?
4. What challenges and opportunities do stakeholders encounter in recognizing Haw-as Festival as intangible cultural heritage?
5. What initiatives can be undertaken to support Haw-as Festival as an intangible cultural heritage?

Conceptual Framework. This qualitative study was anchored in a social constructionist epistemology, which posits that knowledge and reality are socially constructed through human interaction and shared meanings. Social constructionism suggests that reality is not a

fixed entity but is continuously shaped through social processes, language, and cultural practices within a particular historical and cultural context (Burr, 2020; Andrews, 2021). From this perspective, meanings emerge through collective experiences. They are shaped by social relationships, traditions, and community engagement. Individuals' understanding of reality is therefore formed, sustained, and transformed through continuous interaction with others and participation in culturally meaningful practices.

In the context of the Haw-as Festival, social constructionism highlights that the meanings associated with the festival including its traditions, symbols, and rituals are not static but are continuously created, negotiated, and reinterpreted by various stakeholders such as organizers, performers, local government units, community members, and visitors. The identity of the festival and its role in cultural heritage preservation evolve through shared experiences, storytelling, and social participation. This perspective supports the notion that cultural festivals are socially produced phenomena whose significance and authenticity are defined through collective engagement and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2022).

This study were also grounded in interpretivism, a research philosophy that emphasizes understanding the meanings individuals assign to their experiences within a specific social context. Interpretivism recognizes that human beings create meanings based on their beliefs, experiences, and interactions; therefore, research should focus on interpreting these meanings within their social and cultural environment (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2023). This philosophical stance were appropriate for the present study because it enabled the researcher to explore how community members perceive and interpret the cultural significance of the Haw-as Festival in relation to identity, tradition, and sustainability.

To strengthen methodological rigor and address concerns regarding researcher subjectivity, this study adopted a deductive qualitative case study approach. In a deductive case study, theoretical perspectives guide the formulation of research questions, data collection procedures, and data analysis processes. This structured approach ensured alignment between the conceptual framework and the empirical investigation of the Haw-as Festival, thereby promoting systematic and theory-driven analysis (Yin, 2023; Ridder, 2022).

Recognizing the potential influence of researcher subjectivity in qualitative research, several mitigation strategies were implemented throughout the study to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. First, data triangulation was employed through the use of multiple sources of evidence, including in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The integration of these data sources allowed the researcher to validate findings across different forms of evidence and reduce the likelihood of biased interpretation (Nowell et al., 2021; Patton, 2022).

Second, member checking were conducted by presenting summarized interpretations and key findings to selected participants to verify the accuracy of their responses and confirm that their perspectives were properly represented. This process helped ensure that the findings reflected the authentic experiences and meanings expressed by participants rather than the assumptions of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

Third, the researcher practiced reflexivity throughout the research process by maintaining reflective notes and documenting personal observations during data collection and analysis. This practice enabled the researcher to critically examine personal assumptions and remain aware of potential biases that could influence interpretation.

By acknowledging and managing these perspectives, the researcher ensured that conclusions were grounded in participant narratives and empirical evidence (Berger, 2021).

Furthermore, an audit trail were maintained to document the research procedures, methodological decisions, and analytical processes undertaken during the study. This documentation provided transparency and allowed the research process to be reviewed and verified, thereby enhancing the dependability and confirmability of the study (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2021).

The integration of social constructionism, interpretivism, and a deductive case study design provided a coherent philosophical and methodological foundation for the study. These perspectives enabled the researcher to systematically examine how the Haw-as Festival is experienced, interpreted, and sustained within the community while ensuring methodological rigor and minimizing the influence of researcher subjectivity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Festivals as Intangible Cultural Heritage. Cultural festivals are widely recognized as expressions of intangible cultural heritage that preserve traditions, reinforce identity, and sustain collective memory. As living cultural systems, festivals embody practices, beliefs, and values transmitted across generations through participation and social interaction United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022). Scholars emphasize that festivals transform cultural traditions into public performances such as rituals, dances, and storytelling, allowing communities to continuously express and adapt their heritage (Getz & Page, 2021).

Beyond celebration, festivals function as mechanisms for cultural preservation by safeguarding traditional knowledge and reinforcing cultural resilience (Smith, 2022).

They also promote cultural continuity through intergenerational participation, where elders transmit knowledge to younger generations (Soini & Dessein, 2021). In this sense, festivals serve as cultural vessels that preserve community memory and identity while adapting to social change (Blanza & Paborada, 2024).

In Dumangas, Iloilo, the Haw-as Festival reflects this role by preserving the traditional practice of fishpond draining ("haw-as"), symbolizing livelihood, ecological knowledge, and cultural identity rooted in aquaculture.

Cultural Identity and Community Belonging. Cultural identity is shaped through shared values, traditions, and collective experiences that define a community's sense of belonging (Hall, 2021). Festivals strengthen this identity by providing spaces for symbolic expression through music, dance, and rituals that reflect cultural heritage (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2022).

Studies show that festival participation fosters community pride, social cohesion, and emotional attachment to place (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These shared experiences reinforce collective memory and strengthen social bonds, allowing individuals to affirm their cultural identity (Nowell & Albrecht, 2023). Youth participation is particularly important, as it enhances cultural awareness and strengthens long-term identity formation (Torres-Campos, 2022). In Dumangas, participation in the Haw-as Festival reinforces the community's identity as an agri-fishery society, where performances and rituals reflect shared history, livelihood, and connection to aquatic resources.

Tradition and Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge. Tradition is sustained through the continuous transmission of cultural knowledge, practices, and values across generations (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021). Cultural transmission occurs through storytelling, rituals, and participation in communal activities, enabling younger generations to learn traditional practices (Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021).

Oral traditions and festivals serve as key mechanisms for this process by allowing elders to share historical narratives and cultural knowledge (Berger, 2021). Festivals function as informal learning spaces where cultural practices are performed and observed, strengthening intergenerational learning and cultural continuity (Torres-Campos, 2022).

In Haw-as Festival, elders transmit knowledge about fish harvesting and coastal life, while youth actively participate in performances and rituals, ensuring the continuity of Dumangas' cultural heritage.

Sustainability in Cultural Festivals. Sustainability in festivals involves balancing environmental protection, cultural preservation, and economic development (United Nations, 2023). Festivals contribute to environmental sustainability by promoting awareness of resource management and ecological responsibility (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2022).

Cultural sustainability is achieved through the continuous practice and adaptation of traditions in modern contexts (Soini & Dessein, 2021). Economically, festivals generate income, support local enterprises, and create employment opportunities (Snowball & Courtney, 2020). Together, these dimensions enhance community resilience and long-term development (Turčinović et al., 2025).

In Dumangas, the Haw-as Festival promotes sustainability through symbolic fishpond harvesting practices, environmental awareness activities, and community cooperation in managing coastal resources.

Economic and Tourism Contributions of Festivals. Cultural festivals are important drivers of tourism and local economic development. They attract visitors, increase consumer spending, and stimulate demand for goods and services (World Bank, 2022).

Festivals also promote cultural tourism by offering authentic experiences through food, performances, and crafts (Richards, 2021).

Empirical studies show that festivals support small businesses, generate income, and create employment opportunities for local communities (Drummond et al., 2021; Bindu & Babu, 2022). They also enhance destination visibility and promote local products, contributing to long-term economic growth.

In Haw-as Festival, trade fairs and food markets featuring bangus, sugpo, bagoong, and ginamos highlight Dumangas' aquaculture economy while supporting local livelihoods and tourism development.

Challenges in Cultural Festival Preservation. Despite their benefits, festivals face challenges such as commercialization, cultural dilution, and modernization pressures. Commercialization may shift festivals from cultural expression to profit-oriented activities, reducing authenticity (Einarsen & Mykletun, 2020). Tourism demands may also lead to simplified or altered traditions (Shakya & Vagnarelli, 2024).

Youth disengagement further threatens cultural continuity as younger generations become less connected to traditional practices (Pastera, 2024). These challenges highlight the tension between cultural preservation and economic development.

In Dumangas, similar issues arise as tourism growth increases pressure to modify festival practices, raising concerns about maintaining the authenticity of the Haw-as tradition.

Synthesis and Research Gap. The reviewed literature consistently highlights those cultural festivals function as mechanisms for preserving heritage, strengthening identity, transmitting traditions, promoting sustainability, and supporting local economies. Most studies, however, focus on large-scale or urban festivals, with limited attention to rural and community-based celebrations.

Qualitative studies have explored festivals in terms of cultural identity, participation, and economic impact, but few have examined the integrated relationship between cultural identity, tradition, and sustainability in a single rural festival context. In particular, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research on how these dimensions are experienced and interpreted by local stakeholders in aquaculture-based festivals.

In the context of Dumangas, Iloilo, the Haw-as Festival remains underexplored in academic literature despite its strong cultural and ecological significance. There is limited empirical evidence on how community members understand its role in sustaining identity, transmitting traditions, and promoting sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative deductive case study design to examine the Haw-as Festival in Dumangas, Iloilo as a form of intangible cultural heritage. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring meanings, experiences, and social processes within their natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Merriam & Grenier, 2021). It enables an in-depth understanding of how individuals and groups interpret cultural phenomena beyond numerical measurement.

A case study approach was utilized because the Haw-as Festival represents a bounded cultural system involving interconnected dimensions of identity, tradition, sustainability, and community participation. According to Yin (2023), case study research is suitable for investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts where multiple social and cultural factors interact. The study adopted a deductive orientation by using existing theories on cultural heritage, social constructionism, interpretivism, sustainability, and community participation as analytical lenses for interpreting empirical findings (Ridder, 2020). This design was appropriate for understanding how the Haw-as Festival is socially

constructed, interpreted, and sustained by various stakeholders within the Dumangas community.

Participants. The study employed purposive sampling to select information-rich participants who were directly involved in or knowledgeable about the Haw-as Festival. This sampling technique prioritizes depth of experience and relevance of information rather than statistical representation (Patton, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2023). A total of 15 participants were included in the study, determined through data saturation, which occurs when no new themes or significant insights emerge from additional interviews (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink et al., 2022). All participants were residents of Dumangas, Iloilo, ensuring that the data reflected authentic community-based perspectives.

The participants were composed of key stakeholder groups involved in the festival, including residents, fisherfolk, community elders or cultural bearers, festival organizers or cultural officers, youth performers or representatives, and local government and tourism officers. Specifically, the study included two residents, three fisherfolk, two community elders or cultural bearers, three festival organizers or cultural officers, two youth performers or representatives, and three local government and tourism officers. These groups were intentionally selected to capture diverse yet relevant perspectives on cultural identity, tradition, and sustainability within the context of the Haw-as Festival.

Instrumentation. The study used a qualitative case study approach supported by multiple data collection instruments: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

Semi-structured interviews explored themes on cultural identity, tradition, sustainability, and festival experiences. This flexible approach allowed participants to express meanings in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Participant observation captured actual festival activities such as performances, rituals, and community interactions. Document analysis included festival records, municipal reports, and historical materials to contextualize findings.

Using multiple data sources ensured triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of interpretation (Nowell & Albrecht, 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Trustworthiness was established using the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Multiple strategies were employed throughout the research process to ensure the rigor and integrity of the study.

Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and the research setting, allowing the researchers to develop a deeper understanding of the Haw-as Festival and its cultural context. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the festival. The interview guide was divided into four major sections: (1) cultural heritage elements and identity, (2) promotion of tradition and sustainability, (3) challenges and opportunities in recognizing intangible cultural heritage, and (4) suggested initiatives for heritage recognition.

Sample interview questions included: "Can you describe your personal experience with the Haw-as Festival?", "What cultural elements of the Haw-as Festival best reflect the intangible heritage of Dumangas?", "How does the festival contribute to the preservation and promotion of local traditions?", and "What challenges does the festival face in maintaining cultural authenticity?" Additional questions explored environmental sustainability, economic contributions, community participation, modernization, and future directions for the festival. Follow-up probing questions were also utilized to clarify responses and encourage richer narratives. To further strengthen

credibility, member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries and thematic interpretations to selected participants for validation and confirmation of accuracy.

Dependability was ensured through the maintenance of a detailed audit trail documenting all stages of the research process, including interview schedules, transcripts, field notes, coding procedures, thematic analysis records, and reflective memos. Consistent interview procedures and systematic coding techniques were employed throughout the study to enhance the stability and reliability of the findings.

Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling and peer debriefing. Reflexive journals were maintained to document the researchers' assumptions, decisions, and potential biases throughout data collection and analysis. Peer debriefing sessions with qualitative research advisers and colleagues were also conducted to review coding categories, emerging themes, and analytical interpretations, thereby minimizing subjective influence on the findings.

Transferability was supported through the use of thick description by providing detailed accounts of the research setting, participant characteristics, festival activities, and socio-cultural context of Dumangas, Iloilo. In addition to interviews, observation protocols were utilized during festival-related activities to document cultural performances, rituals, participant interactions, environmental practices, audience engagement, and community participation. Specific observational indicators included the use of traditional costumes and symbols, demonstrations of local fishing and aquaculture practices, waste management initiatives, participation of youth and elders, and interactions among community stakeholders. These detailed contextual descriptions enable readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar cultural and rural festival settings.

Data Gathering Procedure. Data collection was conducted over six weeks during the preparation and celebration of the Haw-as Festival. Permission was secured from the Municipal Tourism Office and festival organizers. Data were gathered using three methods:

1. Semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes each), conducted in Hiligaynon, Filipino, or English depending on participant preference.
2. Participant observation during rehearsals, parades, rituals, and trade fairs, supported by field notes and reflections.
3. Document analysis of festival programs, municipal reports, and archival materials.

Ethical procedures included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms. All data were securely stored with password protection and will be retained for five years before proper disposal.

Data Analysis. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis using a deductive, theory-guided approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Interview transcripts, expanded observation field notes, and documentary materials were first transcribed, organized, and repeatedly reviewed to achieve familiarization with the data. A predefined coding framework was developed based on the study's conceptual and theoretical foundations, particularly the dimensions of cultural identity, tradition, sustainability, stakeholder participation, and cultural heritage preservation.

Codes were applied across all datasets rather than analyzing interviews, observations, and documents separately. Additional emergent codes were also incorporated when relevant patterns extended beyond the initial framework. Through an iterative process, related codes were grouped into themes and subthemes that addressed the research questions.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing

evidence from interviews, observations, and documentary sources. Convergences, consistencies, and discrepancies across these data sources were examined to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the Haw-as Festival as a cultural heritage practice. Final themes were interpreted using the lenses of social constructionism and interpretivism to explain how cultural meanings, traditions, and sustainability practices are collectively constructed, maintained, and transmitted within the community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and documentary sources provided a comprehensive understanding of the Haw-as Festival as an intangible cultural heritage in the Municipality of Dumangas. By integrating multiple sources of evidence, the study strengthened the credibility and validity of the findings through cross-verification of stakeholder experiences, community practices, and institutional perspectives. This ensured that interpretations were based on consistent and converging evidence rather than isolated accounts. Four overarching themes emerged from the triangulated data: community cultural expression and heritage transmission, cultural identity and sustainability awareness, challenges and opportunities in cultural heritage recognition, and sustainable cultural preservation and community support. Together, these themes highlight the Haw-as Festival as both a cultural tradition and a dynamic community institution.

Recognition of Haw-as Festival in Identity, Tradition, and Sustainability

Theme 1. Festival as an Expression of Cultural Identity. The analysis revealed that stakeholders recognize the Haw-as Festival as a strong expression of the community's identity as a fishing municipality. Participants consistently associated the festival with the daily life, livelihood, and shared experiences of Dumangas residents. Traditional fishing symbols, costumes, dances, and rituals were

viewed as representations of the community's collective identity and cultural pride.

"Ang haw-as ukon pagguho sang pukot nga tingob amo gid ang pinakakusog nga simbolo sang amon panublion. Ginapakita sini ang kooperasyon kag ang importansya sang pagbinuligay bilang isa ka komunidad." (Fisherfolk 1)

This perception was reinforced through observations of community participation during parades, ritual performances, and cultural presentations where residents of different age groups actively engaged in festival activities. Documentary records from the Municipal Tourism Office also identified haw-as as a traditional communal fishing practice that symbolizes cooperation and mutual support among fisherfolk. Collectively, these findings indicate that the festival serves as a living marker of Dumangas' cultural identity and fishing heritage.

Theme 2. Preservation and Continuity of Traditions. Stakeholders emphasized that the festival plays a significant role in preserving and transmitting traditional knowledge. Elders, performers, and fisherfolk described how younger generations are taught traditional dances, rituals, fishing practices, and stories associated with the Haw-as tradition.

"Ginatudluan namon ang kabataan kon paano husto nga i-perform ang sayaw kag paano gamiton ang pukot." (Fisherfolk 3)

"Kun wala kami nga magtudlo sa kabataan, madula ang istorya sang Haw-as." (Elder 1)

Observations during the festival showed elders guiding youth and children in cultural performances, demonstrating active intergenerational transmission of heritage. Documentary materials further confirmed that rituals such as the blessing of the sea and reenactments of traditional net-pulling continue to be practiced to preserve historical memory and cultural values. These findings suggest that the Haw-as Festival functions as a

mechanism for cultural continuity by enabling traditions to be learned, practiced, and shared across generations.

Theme 3. Promotion of Environmental and Cultural Sustainability. The findings also showed that stakeholders associate the festival with sustainability through the use of indigenous materials, environmental awareness activities, and responsible fishing practices. Participants highlighted the use of bamboo, coconut leaves, fishing nets, and other locally available materials in festival decorations and costumes.

"Ang paggamit sang kostyum kag props halin sa natural nga materyales nagapakita sang lokal nga kaalam." (Performer 1)

Field observations documented the use of eco-friendly decorations and waste segregation practices during festival activities. Documentary sources likewise indicated that recent festival programs have incorporated marine conservation campaigns and responsible fishing advocacy. These converging findings demonstrate that the Haw-as Festival is increasingly viewed not only as a cultural celebration but also as a platform for promoting environmental responsibility and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Cultural Elements of Haw-as Festival Reflecting Community

Theme 1. Communal Fishing Tradition (Haw-as). The traditional haw-as practice emerged as the most prominent cultural element reflecting community life. Stakeholders described haw-as as a communal activity involving collective net-pulling, sharing of catch, and cooperation among fisherfolk. Documentary accounts traced this practice to the community's historical fishing livelihood and emphasized its role in strengthening social bonds and mutual assistance.

Theme 2. Rituals and Thanksgiving Practices. Rituals such as the blessing of the sea and thanksgiving ceremonies were identified as important cultural expressions that reflect the

community's spiritual connection to nature and livelihood. Observations confirmed that these rituals remain central components of festival activities and continue to reinforce shared beliefs and gratitude for marine resources.

Theme 3. Intergenerational Cultural Participation. The festival was also characterized by the participation of elders, youth, children, fisherfolk, performers, and local organizations. Observations showed that cultural knowledge is transmitted through active involvement in dances, storytelling, rituals, and reenactments. This broad participation reflects the community's collective responsibility for preserving its cultural heritage.

Stakeholders' Understanding of Haw-as Festival's Significance in Promoting Cultural Identity, Tradition, and Sustainability

Theme 1. Strengthening Community Pride and Belonging. Stakeholders consistently described the festival as a source of pride for Dumangas residents and fisherfolk. The festival was perceived as a celebration of the community's history, livelihood, and cultural identity, fostering a stronger sense of belonging among participants.

"Ang Haw-as Festival nagahatag gid sang dako nga bugal sa amon bilang mangingisda kag residente sang Dumangas." (Fisherfolk 2)

Theme 2. Encouraging Collective Participation. The festival was also viewed as a mechanism for strengthening social cohesion through teamwork, volunteerism, and community involvement. Both interview and observational data showed that festival activities require cooperation among local government units, fisherfolk, performers, youth groups, and residents.

"Ang festival indi magmalampuson kon wala ang suporta kag partisipasyon sang komunidad." (LGU Tourism Officer 2)

Theme 3. Linking Heritage and Sustainability. Stakeholders further perceived the festival as a means of connecting cultural heritage with

environmental stewardship. The integration of marine conservation messages and responsible fishing practices during festival celebrations was seen as an effort to ensure that both cultural traditions and natural resources are sustained for future generations.

Challenges and Opportunities in Recognizing Haw-as Festival as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Theme 1. Challenges in Cultural Preservation. Participants identified modernization, commercialization, limited funding, and declining youth engagement as major challenges. Some stakeholders expressed concern that contemporary festival elements may alter traditional practices if not carefully managed.

"Subong damo na sang bag-o nga estilo, kag ginakulbaan kami basi madula ang daan nga tradisyon." (Elder 2)

"May limitasyon gid sa pondo nga ginahatag para sa festival." (Tourism Officer)

Observations supported these concerns by documenting the increasing presence of modern sound systems, contemporary choreography, and sponsored activities alongside traditional performances.

Theme 2. Opportunities for Cultural Sustainability and Tourism Development. Despite these challenges, stakeholders recognized significant opportunities for cultural preservation, tourism growth, and community development. Documentary sources indicated that the festival has increased visitor participation, supported local businesses, and enhanced awareness of Dumangas' cultural heritage.

"Ang Haw-as Festival may dako gid nga potensyal nga makahatag sang dugang nga turista." (LGU Tourism Officer 1)

The integrated findings suggest that when supported by community participation, documentation efforts, and responsible tourism management, the Haw-as Festival can continue

to function as a living expression of intangible cultural heritage while contributing to local economic and cultural sustainability.

Proposed Initiatives Supporting Haw-as Festival as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Theme 1. Initiatives that can be Undertaken to Support Haw-as Festival as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. The sustainability of the Haw-as Festival as an intangible cultural heritage requires coordinated initiatives centered on cultural preservation, community engagement, and responsible development. Stakeholders emphasize that safeguarding the festival involves not only maintaining traditions but also ensuring their relevance amid modernization and social change. In this context, several key strategies emerged, including cultural education, documentation, community collaboration, sustainable tourism development, and institutional support. Cultural education is identified as a primary initiative for strengthening awareness and appreciation of the festival among younger generations. Integrating the history, values, and traditions of the Haw-as Festival into school curricula and community-based learning activities helps transmit cultural knowledge effectively. Through workshops, cultural orientations, and experiential learning, youth are encouraged to actively participate in heritage practices. This fosters cultural identity and ensures the intergenerational continuity of traditional knowledge.

Documentation and preservation are also essential for safeguarding intangible heritage. Recording rituals, oral histories, performances, and fishing traditions through written accounts, audio-visual materials, and digital archives helps prevent cultural loss over time. Stakeholders recognize that systematic documentation provides a reference for future generations, supports educational initiatives, and strengthens institutional memory. It also contributes to heritage recognition by preserving tangible records of cultural expressions. Community collaboration plays a vital role in sustaining the festival. The active involvement of local government units, cultural

organizations, educators, fisherfolk, and residents promotes shared responsibility in planning and implementing festival activities. Such collaboration enhances resource mobilization, improves organizational capacity, and strengthens social cohesion. It also fosters a sense of ownership over cultural heritage, ensuring that preservation efforts are collectively supported.

Sustainable tourism development is another key initiative that balances cultural preservation with economic benefits. While the festival attracts visitors and generates income for local businesses, stakeholders stress the importance of managing tourism responsibly. Measures such as promoting eco-friendly practices, educating visitors about cultural values, and involving the community in tourism planning help prevent over-commercialization and protect cultural authenticity. Resource mobilization and institutional support are equally important in sustaining cultural preservation efforts. Financial assistance from government agencies, private sponsors, and cultural institutions enables the implementation of programs related to documentation, education, and festival organization. These resources strengthen the community's capacity to sustain cultural activities and ensure the long-term viability of the festival.

Overall, the proposed initiatives demonstrate that preserving the Haw-as Festival requires a holistic and participatory approach. Through the integration of education, documentation, collaboration, sustainable tourism, and institutional support, the community can ensure that the festival remains a living cultural heritage that strengthens identity, fosters pride, and sustains traditions for future generations.

Triangulated Perspectives on the Haw-as Festival. Findings show that the festival functions as a living expression of community identity, where traditional fishing practices, rituals, and performances support cultural transmission. Interviews revealed strong participation and pride among community

members, while observations confirmed active engagement across generations. Documentary sources further validated the symbolic importance of collective practices such as net pulling, which reflect cooperation, unity, and shared livelihood. Overall, the festival plays a key role in preserving cultural knowledge and strengthening social cohesion. In terms of cultural identity and sustainability, the triangulated data consistently indicated that the festival fosters a strong sense of belonging rooted in fishing traditions. Stakeholders view it as a venue for cultural celebration and environmental awareness. Observations and documents highlighted sustainability messages related to marine conservation and responsible resource use, showing that cultural preservation is closely linked to environmental protection and livelihood sustainability.

However, challenges such as modernization, commercialization, limited resources, and declining youth engagement were identified. While these factors threaten cultural authenticity, they also coexist with opportunities for tourism development and cultural promotion that can support local economic growth if properly managed. Finally, sustainable cultural preservation depends on documentation, education, and institutional collaboration. Recording traditions, strengthening cultural education, and fostering partnerships among local government units, schools, and cultural organizations are essential strategies for ensuring continuity.

In conclusion, the Haw-as Festival thrives through the interaction of tradition, community participation, and institutional support, requiring continuous efforts to balance preservation and adaptation for future generations.

Conclusions. This study triangulated data from interviews, observations, and document analysis to examine the Haw-as Festival as an expression of intangible cultural heritage in Dumangas, Iloilo. The findings highlight the festival's cultural significance, sustainability

dimensions, and emerging tensions between preservation and modernization.

The study concludes that the Haw-as Festival functions as a vital cultural platform for the expression, reinforcement, and intergenerational transmission of local heritage. Traditional practices related to fishpond harvesting, along with associated rituals and performances, serve as symbolic expressions of collective identity, cooperation, and community continuity. The sustained participation of different age groups demonstrates that cultural knowledge is actively transmitted and reinterpreted, reinforcing the festival's role in maintaining social cohesion and cultural memory.

A key contribution of this study lies in its integrated analysis of cultural identity, tradition, and sustainability within a single rural, aquaculture-based festival context. Unlike much existing literature that focuses on urban or commercially prominent festivals, this research provides an in-depth understanding of how a community-based festival simultaneously functions as a cultural preservation mechanism, an identity marker, and a sustainability-oriented practice. It demonstrates that intangible cultural heritage in rural settings is not static but continuously shaped through everyday participation, ecological awareness, and socio-economic adaptation.

The study further establishes that the Haw-as Festival strengthens cultural identity and promotes sustainability awareness among stakeholders. Community members perceive the festival as a source of pride that affirms their historical connection to aquaculture and coastal livelihoods. Environmental elements embedded in festival activities also suggest that cultural practices and ecological stewardship are closely intertwined, reinforcing the idea that cultural heritage can support sustainability goals when meaningfully embedded in community life.

At the same time, the study identifies persistent challenges that threaten the long-term continuity of the festival. These include increasing commercialization, pressures of modernization, limited institutional resources, and declining youth engagement in traditional practices. While these challenges pose risks to authenticity, they also open opportunities for cultural revitalization, responsible tourism development, and expanded community participation if properly managed.

For cultural policymakers, the findings underscore the need to strengthen policy frameworks that protect intangible cultural heritage through documentation, funding support, and integration into local cultural development plans. Local government units are encouraged to institutionalize cultural education programs and ensure that festival planning balances tourism promotion with heritage preservation. For festival organizers, the study highlights the importance of safeguarding authenticity by engaging cultural bearers, elders, and youth in planning and performance design, while also implementing sustainable practices that reflect both cultural and environmental values.

Limitations and Future Directions. This study is limited by its focus on a single case study in Dumangas, Iloilo, which may restrict the broader generalizability of the findings to other cultural festivals in different socio-cultural and geographic contexts. In addition, the data primarily reflect the perspectives of selected stakeholders, which may not fully capture the diversity of views within the entire community. Time constraints during fieldwork and festival observation may also have limited the depth of long-term behavioral analysis.

Future studies may expand the scope by conducting comparative analyses of multiple rural and urban festivals to better understand variations in cultural sustainability practices. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may also be employed to measure the socio-economic and environmental impacts of festivals more systematically. Further research

could also explore the perspectives of younger generations in greater depth to understand shifting cultural values and engagement patterns. Longitudinal studies are likewise recommended to examine how intangible cultural heritage evolves over time in response to tourism development and policy interventions.

Author contributions. This manuscript was solely conceived, developed, and written by the author. All stages of the research process, including conceptualization, methodology design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were independently undertaken by the author. No external contributors or co-authors were involved in the production of this work.

Conflict of interest. The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding source. This research received no external funding.

Artificial intelligence use. No AI tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

Ethics approval statement. This study involved human participants; however, formal ethical approval was not sought from the authors' institution. The authors affirm that participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality of responses was strictly maintained. No procedures were undertaken that posed risk or harm to the participants.

Data availability statement. All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the manuscript and its supplementary materials.

Acknowledgement. (Not available)

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