

## **From the Street to the Beach: Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta in the Eyes of Grupo del Oeste**

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### **Abstract**

Grupo del Oeste is considered the most awarded group of the Iloilo Paraw Regatta Festival's Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta in which the researchers are members. Our four championship trophies (2008, 2009, 2011, and 2012), and runner-up awards (third place in 2010 and first runner-up in 2013), made Grupo del Oeste the group to beat. Taken from the idea of what made and kept Grupo del Oeste win in the competitions, this interpretivist study aimed to look into our experience and perceptions of the competition. Data were gathered through written reflections and verified through one-on-one interviews. The findings of the study revealed salient points on the reasons that made us win and the challenges we met to keep winning. Definitions of participation that we realized on our road to winning along with valuable skills and essential attitudes that we gained from our participation with Grupo del Oeste were also highlighted. Furthermore, we also identified our contribution in promoting the Ilonggo culture as one of the vital points of the inquiry. All these conceptual themes summed up Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta in the eyes of Grupo del Oeste.

*Keywords:* Grupo del Oeste, Interpretivist study, Paraw Regatta, Sinamba

The sunny but cool and windy February climate paved the way for the annual Paraw Regatta along Iloilo Strait. Colorful paraws (native sailboats) will vie for trophies and cash prizes for the different categories of the contest. The event gives tribute and honor to this water vehicle as an indispensable partner of local fisher folks and as a conventional means of transportation between Iloilo and Guimaras and other nearby coastal towns in the early days. Iloilo Paraw Regatta can never miss out on exciting side events which include the *Pintawo* (body painting), *Pinta Paraw* (sailboat design), and the adrenaline pumping and excitement-filled *Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta*, a mardi gras inspired beach dance competition (Bheibheiboy, 2013).

Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta competition has developed into a tourism event in the city of Iloilo. As an annual mardi gras competition for Iloilo Paraw Regatta Festival, it is slated on the 2nd week of February. One of the characteristics of the festival that made it unique is the two rounds of competition undergone by the competing groups. The first round is done on the streets of the city followed by a mass dance at the Iloilo Freedom Grandstand. The second round is in the morning of the Sunday of that week held on the shores of Villa Beach along with the sailing competition.

Grupo del Oeste of West Visayas State University in which the researchers are members, is one of the groups to have regularly joined Iloilo Paraw Regatta Festival Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta. Our group is considered the most awarded group of the festival. Its four (4) championship trophies (2008, 2009, 2011, and 2012), a third place finish in 2010 and a first runner-up award in 2013 made Grupo del Oeste the group to beat.

People would consider certain factors that would trigger them to participate in any activity. According to Williams (2010), individuals pursue their participation when they have learned something new, witnessed skill improvement, mastered the task at hand, or had given their best effort. Furthermore, Williams (2010) added that if individuals have had received good technical instruction and realized its worth, they are free from self-defeating fear of failure and are giving maximum effort. If individuals would come to terms with this idea, performance and winning would take care of themselves.

In the area of the performing arts, the best way to find out if learning has taken place is good performance. Through this scenario, learning is expected to occur in different forms. In terms of concepts, students have to formulate ideas in order to initially start with the presentation. The forming

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of concept entails discussions and brainstorming to incorporate all the ideas that can make each member of the group think. In terms of skills, as soon as the concept is fixed, the repetition of the activity to perfect the presentation is both training the body to be fit for the activity. This repetitive manner is an act of injecting to the muscle memory the proper execution of the needed skills. Through this repetition, the body is geared towards executing the skills automatically. In terms of attitude, staging a presentation commands a lot of conflict resolutions. In here, students have to learn to compromise with each other to facilitate the presentation. At times, the most assertive is likely to overpower the rest of the members, but in the end, the group members who were able to settle their individuality are likely to succeed.

The theories and approach that provided scientific groundwork for the study were Constructionism (Crotty, 2003), Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 2003, as cited in Crotty, 2003) and Narrative Inquiry (Carter, 1993).

Constructionism, as defined by Crotty (2003) is a view that all knowledge and all meaningful realities are congruent with human practices being constructed in and out of interaction with human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within a fundamentally social context.

On the other hand, symbolic interactionism according to Blumer (1969, as cited in Crotty, 2003) states that human beings act toward things on the basis of meanings that these things have for them. This meaning of such thing is derived from and arises out of the social interaction that one has with his fellow and these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

Furthermore, discussing the essence of the theories mentioned above is facilitated through the use of lived experiences, which according to Carter (1993), can be translated into productive narrative stories. These, frequently, have become a powerful tool for researches. Carter (1993) further noted that the purpose of the narrative inquiry is to capture the richness and indeterminacy of experience resulting in narrative stories as the central focus.

Inspired by Grupo del Oeste's achievements, the researchers as members of the group, looked into our experiences in Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta through our personal reflections. Specifically, this study intended to describe the reasons that made us win and the challenges we met and addressed to keep winning. Moreover, this study aimed to provide concepts on participation that

we realized on our road to winning, and delineate insights we gained from our participation with Grupo del Oeste. Looking into these salient points, we hoped to disclose how we viewed Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta.

### **Methodology**

With understanding as the central purpose, this interpretivist study used narrative inquiry as an approach.

#### **Narrative Inquiry**

As we make our way through life, we have continuous experiences and dialogic interaction both with our surrounding world and with ourselves. All of these are woven together into a seamless web, where they might strike one as being overwhelming in their complexity. One away of structuring these experiences is to organize them into meaningful units. One such meaningful unit could be a story, a narrative (Moen, 2006).

Sourced out from our personal reflections, all 15 of us who were informants of the study were choreographers (3), male lead dancers (4), female lead dancers (4), and back up dancers (4). Our written reflections centered on the reasons that positively contributed to our performances. Valuable traits and essential attitudes that we gained from our participation with the group and our contribution in the promotion of the Ilonggo culture were highlighted in our reflections. Verification of answers was also conducted through individual interviews with the informants. To draw out a clear outline of the concepts above, our collective narratives as members of Grupo del Oeste were transcribed, coded, and themed.

Narrative research is increasingly used in studies of educational practice and experience, chiefly because teachers like all other human beings, are storytellers who individually and socially lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, as cited in Moen, 2006). Narrative research is thus, the study of how human beings experience the world, and narrative researchers collect these stories and write narratives of experience (Gudmundsdottir, 2001, as cited in Moen, 2006).

Narrative approach is a frame of reference, a way of reflecting during the entire inquiry process, a research method and a mode for representing the research study (Moen, 2006). Hence, the narrative approach is both the phenomenon, and the method (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, as cited in Moen, 2006).

With interpretive paradigm as our map, we hoped to convey a comprehensive picture of Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta in the eyes of Grupo del Oeste.

## **The Context**

Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta has been a side event of the Iloilo Paraw Regatta Festival for quite some time but had its big bang in 2008 when it employed two venues and time slots for competition. One is an evening street dancing competition on the streets of the city with a grand presentation at the Iloilo Freedom Grandstan. The other is a morning beach dance showdown at the shores of Villa Beach in Arevalo to entertain audience while they wait for the announcement of winners of the Paraw racing competition.

Grupo del Oeste of West Visayas State University has been the most anticipated entrant to join Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta. From its initial participation in 2008 up to its recent showdown in 2013, Grupo del Oeste has never failed to awe the audience and judges alike.

In retrospect, Grupo del Oeste, as an interest group of the College of PESCAR was encouraged to try its luck in Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta in 2008 to answer its College BPE program objectives which are to provide students with opportunities to self-actualize their knowledge and skills through leadership and management in the areas of P.E., dance, recreation and sports, and to involve students in the preservation and promotion of the dynamic Filipino culture. With the sponsorship from Dr. Regil Palmares, an alumnus of the College of Medicine, and a performing arts enthusiast, the group was able to bag its first championship on its first year of participation.

Grupo del Oeste was composed of Bachelor of Physical Education students, alumni, and teachers of the College of PESCAR. The group was formed through the initiative of Prof. Liberty R. Porras who is the artistic director and the head choreographer of the group. Other choreographers who shared their expertise with the group are Prof. Noel P. Mondejar, Prof. Ryan L. Puljanan, and Prof. Jemuel B. Garcia Jr.

For 6 years, the group has showcased the mark of excellence. Grupo del Oeste had managed to bring home two runners-up awards, and four championship trophies along with several minor awards like best in music, best in costume, best in performance, and best in choreography.

## Results and Discussion

To present the main concept of Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta in the eyes of Grupo del Oeste members, we identified conceptual themes from our collective reflections.

### Winning Big Time

The reasons that made us win in every competition were our skillful dancers and choreographers, the belief in the essence of constant correct practice, the unique appeal of our group, and the total impact of the production. Moreover, valuable traits such as passion, dedication, discipline, cooperation, perseverance, patience, and unity among us also helped. Likewise, we acknowledged as factors a background in dancing and choreography and financial support from the administration.

Reflections of Prof. Liberty R. Porras, choreographer, Prof. Ryan L. Puljanan, dancing choreographer, and Archie Concepcion, back up dancer highlighted the reasons and are visually presented in figures 1 and 2.

*Choreographers' passion and expertise (choreography, staging), management style (commitment, don't settle for less), materials (dancers), support from the College, administration, Parents Faculty Association, Inc., and friends from the community who believe in us, concept, production design, and costume that we look different from others. (Liberty Porras)*

*Compared to other groups, Grupo del Oeste had dancers who were specializing in ballroom dancing. Moreover, dancers are well rounded that they could portray several roles in the production. Most of the performers are multi-awarded dancers in Iloilo and in the Philippines as well. Through the persons of Prof. Porras, Abrico, and Mondejar, the group had always outstanding performances and choreography. They always conducted brainstorming activities in coming up with their choreography. The bottom line is, unity binds them all for a purpose. Without the support from the administration, Grupo del Oeste would not have won. From the start, the group had fabulous costume, props, and other aids because of the financial support given by the administration as well as the general services and staff. (Ryan Puljanan)*

*One of the factors that made Grupo del Oeste clinch the top honors is, it is composed of skilled performers, and some of them are alumni of the college that already have an idea of the contest. Most of them are really equipped with the basic skills of samba which made them win the competition. Since the nature of dance, samba, is taught in our ballroom class, we, the dancers can perform it properly. Since most of us are performers, it can be a plus factor for us in getting the nod from the judges and viewers. Just for instance, it is pleasing for the judges to watch a proper execution of Samba than a trying hard execution. (Archie Concepcion)*

Having the right characteristics for competition is essential for winning and we, the Grupo del Oeste had exhibited these characteristics in sync with the demands of Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta competition. This may be attributed to our exposure to dance knowing that our group is composed of Physical Educators and Bachelor of Physical Education alumni and students. Moreover, everybody is a practicing dancer and choreographer, as well. As members of Grupo del Oeste, we may have found connection to Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta with our sports and dance learning experiences provided by our degrees which usually culminate in sport tournaments and dance competitions. Thus, exhibiting the above-mentioned core values is necessary.



*Figure 1.* Our skilled dancers are one of our many assets.



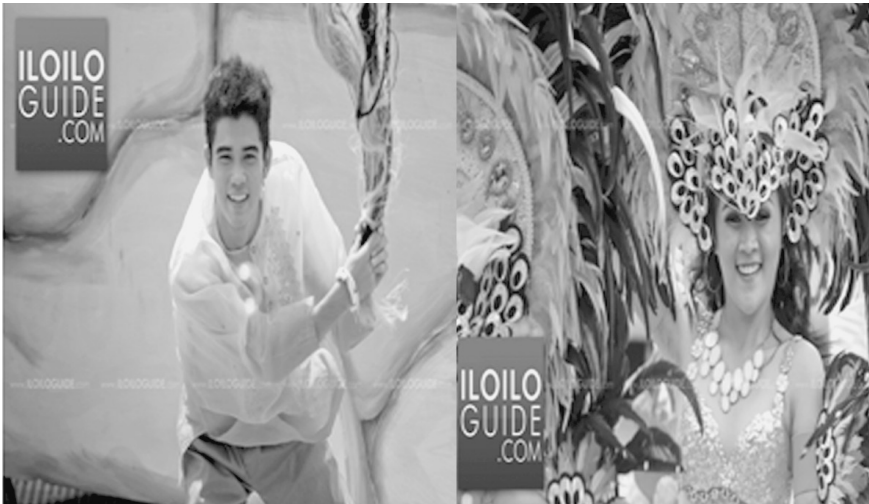


Figure 2. Our great presence commands our every performance.

### Facing the Music

Our experiences were not all of glory. Oftentimes, we encountered challenges that hindered our winning. Most of us agreed that physical fatigue because of late night practices, individual differences, and uniqueness of members were the major challenges that our group encountered and needed to address. We acknowledge as well conflicting ideas, time constraint, issues with other competing groups, and financial shortage. We reiterated as well lack of discipline, stress, and negative feedback.

Some of the female dancers and the picture in Figure 3 present the key points mentioned.

*The challenges are time management, stress and negative feedback, one of it is you can't spend enough to your love ones. Being a versatile kind of dancer, you should expect that without stress and effort you can't reach your main goal. Lastly, learn to accept the fact and let it be. (Kristia Estilo)*

*As a known competitor, we are pressured to defend our title, I think, the biggest challenge that we encounter is on how we are able to balance both academics and extra-curricular activities. As a student then of course we face this as challenge because it is not an easy task to balance both academics and extracurricular. I just think of way on how to handle everything and the secret is patience and time management. (Mary Rosedel Rama)*



*Issues (that other groups have for Grupo del Oeste). I consider this as a challenge since as a performer you are aiming to bring home the bacon. Hearing some issues that other competitors hire some star dancers that was part of our group before, I was alarmed for that. Through those challenges it made me/group to push through. Keep on motivating that we can still fight and win the competition. (Jorja Cantillas)*



*Figure 3.* A well-polished performance is a product of rigorous rehearsals where conflicting ideas usually arise and eventually settled.

With our participation in Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta, we met difficulties as well. Since our group is composed of working professionals and students, balancing our commitment between the group and our work and studies may have been a factor. Furthermore, our group, Grupo del Oeste is made up of different sub-groups like lead male group, lead female group, and back-ups. Since each group has the hand in choreographing the routines (aside from the main choreographers) establishing whose lead to follow may seem to be the source of conflict since almost everybody has an idea of choreography.

### **Sharing the Heart**

On our road to winning, we, the members of Grupo del Oeste had realized that our participation should not be superficial. Instead, it must be passionately done. Our definitions of participation were similarly stated as wholeheartedly giving oneself, volunteerism amidst sacrifices in order to learn, and the act of helping. Sharing of experiences to encourage others, sharing your competence to win, not working physically but performing mentally, socially and participating with a heart were also spelled out as definitions of participation. Moreover, participation to us were giving out your all to showcase your talent, self-fulfillment as well as passion plus commitment plus sacrifice.

Pabiona, Concepcion, and Abrico who were back up dancers delineated the concepts above and captured in Figure 4.

*For me participation is the way how you indulge yourself to sacrifice and put all the aspect in life in a competition. It is how you give all the best that you can in every activity, in the performance required and eagerly show your talent to everyone. (Uer Pabiona)*

*Participation is not just about submitting yourself to get involved but it is how you put yourself voluntarily, accept sacrifices and learn. (Archie Concepcion)*

*Dancing your heart out, and enjoying every moment beyond the odds because I know, I love doing this. (Paulo Abrico)*

On our road to winning, as members of Grupo del Oeste, we had realized that one's participation should not be superficial. Instead it should start from the heart. It could be inferred that as part of the group, we have clearly understood the significance of our engagement with the group. Realizing this is the right aura for Grupo del Oeste.



*Figure 4.* The quality of our performance is the participation we always showcase.

### **Life Gains**

For us Grupo del Oeste members, our participation in Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta had developed valuable skills. Most of us narrated physical skill in dancing, artistic skill in choreography, the emotional skill like confidence and grace under pressure along with management skill like leadership, time

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management, and focus on the activity. Furthermore, we also cited important social skills that we had realized from our participation. These included cooperation specifically in listening, observing and following the lead.

On the other hand, we also noted essential attitudes that we had acquired from our participation and performances. Choreographers and lead male dancers noted these attitudes to be discipline, respect, adaptability, determination, cooperation, open-mindedness and knowing one's role in the group and being grateful for the meaningful learning experiences.

Some of the key points were narrated by lead male dancers and the choreographers are highlighted in Figure 5.

*I can say that my leadership and of course my dancing skill were developed through my participation with the group. I believed it helped me a lot in developing them and enhancing them. (Dave Moreno)*

*I think it is the skill of listening and observing that I developed from my participation because without these you cannot be a productive individual if you don't know how to listen carefully to your trainer and you cannot be the best dancer if you don't know how to observe. (Kirth Teodosio)*

*Developed stamina, nurtured confidence and learned to live with grace under pressure. (Jemuel Garcia Jr.)*

*If dancers can exhibit personal attitude of being good, looking good, and acting good, winning is always possible. (Prof. Liberty Porras, choreographer)*

*As a senior member of the group, the most important attitude that I and every senior member of the group had acquired and exhibited was discipline. Senior members served as role model among young dancers but it went wrong when it comes to discipline. As consequence, often times, seniors were difficult to manage compared to other members. (Prof. Ryan Puljanan, male main dancer, choreographer)*

*Even if I am one of the pioneer batch and an alumnus I still submit myself to my choreographers and other elders. I respect their decisions and judgment, let them correct me if I committed mistakes. I don't consider myself on top of the others because I believe I'm also a learner just like them. And I think in that way I was able to blend with them and got their respect and trust. (Dave Moreno, male main dancer)*

*First and foremost is you must have discipline in yourself because a dancer must possess discipline in order for the group to engage in organization. Another one is teamwork because without this all the performers/participants would not help each other and it will be difficult to them, to unite in every practices. Lastly, you must have passion because it is easier for you to work if you have passion in what you do. (Kirth Teodisio, male main dancer)*

*Adaptability, Open-mindedness, creativity, intuitiveness, and wit. (Jemuel Garcia, Jr., male main dancer)*

We had acquired, developed, and exhibited valuable skills and attitudes from our participation with Grupo del Oeste. Our participation in Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta has been essential, and it is an avenue for meaningful learning experiences.



*Figure 5. Realizing the essential skills and attitudes in performance made us, Grupo del Oeste, exude the aura of confidence.*

### **Realizing the Noble Purpose**

Winning Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta competitions was not only rewarding to our end as members of Grupo del Oeste but to the culture of Iloilo as well. We believed that through our participation, we had helped in the cultural awareness campaign of the Iloilo Paraw Regatta Festival. Prof. Liberty Porrás shared, *Grupo del Oeste's Sinamba themes are anchored on Ilonggo folk tales and its music is arranged to the tune of Ilonggo folk songs.*

We further believed that we had helped in giving color to the celebration of the festival. Our colorful costumes and the dynamism of our presentations highlighted the entertainment value of the festival.

*Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta is undeniably captivating. The samba beat of the dance is a big factor that it drives audience to like it aside from elevating enthusiasm of the dancers because it is just inviting to shake your booty. The colorful costumes of every competing tribe are also a plus factor. However, Grupo del Oeste had not only offered one of the plus factors. It offered a lot more. Its music matched its costumes and highlighted them even more by each well-choreographed and executed movement. (Paulo Abrico, back-up dancer)*

Moreover, the experiences that we had from our participation had been an educational endeavor.

*As Physical Education teachers, this had helped us in creating dance pieces for presentation and competition incorporating concepts and skills we acquired from our participation to Grupo del Oeste to the benefit of our Ilonggo movement learners. (Kirth Teodisio, lead male dancer)*

The benefit that we got from our participation to Sinamba sa Paraw Regatta has come full circle. The recognition that we earned from winning the competition has not only etched a mark for Grupo del Oeste but has also given us the opportunity to continuously promote the culture of Iloilo continuously. Being the most awarded group in the festival, it has opened doors to numerous performance invitations sponsored by notable institutions both public and private for their local, regional, and national conventions within and outside of Iloilo. Moreover, since all of us are Physical Education teachers, our experiences with Grupo del Oeste can be one of our basis for designing learning experiences in dance to our students. Using concepts of Ilonggo culture, like the story of the ten Borneian Datu as shown in Figure 6 we can create an opportunity for our students to experience it through Ilonggo folk tales and songs. In addition, we can as well expose our Ilonggo movement learners to evolving Ilonggo dance ingenuity.



*Figure 6.* The concept of the ten Bornean datu is one of the many concepts Grupo del Oeste portrayed and infused in the competition.

### **Implications**

Pursuing and enjoying something is always interesting especially if it requires distinct expertise and triggered by passion.

According to Carter (1993), narratives have the ability to capture the richness and indeterminacy of one's experiences. On that premise, the findings of the study indicated that our experiences as members of Grupo del Oeste were both challenging and meaningful. Acknowledging our potentials, our weaknesses as well as the learning experiences that we have realized is a vital factor that made us win. As Crotty (2003) in the theory of constructionism said, all knowledge, and therefore, all meaningful reality are contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and develop and transmitted within an essentially social context. Blumer's symbolic interactionism (1969, as cited in Crotty, 2003) explicitly discussed that human beings act on things on the basis of their meanings. The meaning of such thing is derived from



and arises out of the social interaction that one has with his fellows and these meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process used in dealing with the things he encounters. As members of Grupo del Oeste, we were able to acknowledge our unique roles in the group, and by that we were able to reconcile our individual differences that ended up into meaningful learning experiences. Though challenges had graced our road to winning, our profound interest in our craft made us defy the odds. It eventually made our group win competitions for several times.

Being in a group like Grupo del Oeste, it has propelled our desire to be competent in our field. The exposure that we got was meaningful. It has made us continue our participation with Grupo del Oeste for several years (Figure 7). According to Williams (2010), individuals pursue their participation when they have learned something new, witnessed skill improvement, master the task at hand, or have given their best effort. Furthermore, if individuals have had good technical instruction, they are free from self-defeating fear of failure and are giving maximum effort, then performance and winning will take care of themselves.



*Figure 7.* Our desire to be competent made us continue our participation with Grupo del Oeste.



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