

PERCUSSION AND SOCIAL COHESION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SAMULNORI AND HIRA GASY

Haingotiana R*

Department of Performing Arts Management, Sangmyung University, Republic of Korea

Abstract: This study explores the multifaceted psychological and socialcultural roles that traditional percussion-based performing arts play in fostering resilience and enhancing emotional well-being across two distinct cultural contexts: specifically focusing on the nations of Korea and Madagascar. By employing a qualitative comparative research framework, this study examines the Korean Samulnori tradition and Malagasy Hira Gasy as primary cases of community oriented rhythmic expression, that embody the cultural heritage and collective identity of their respective societies. The methodological approach utilized semi-structured interviews and participatory observation with a diverse cohort of practitioners and community members (N=52). The Korean cohort (n=10) comprised 2 professional performers and 8 practitioners; the Malagasy cohort (n=42) included performers, youth participants from two-week ateliers, and audience members. Data were analyzed thematically through the lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). How do traditional drumming ceremonies help us cope in life? Findings reveal that rhythmic performance facilitates emotional regulation, social connection, and collective resilience by providing a structured space for communal belonging. This cross-cultural study addresses a critical gap in contemporary cultural policy by highlighting the measurable psychosocial functions of traditional arts. This study highlights the role of traditional performance not only as cultural heritage but also as a sustainable psychological and sociological resource through a cross-cultural examination.

Keyword: Samulnori, Hira Gasy, performing arts management, social resilience, cultural resilience

Introduction

The arts of traditional performances were not only used to regulate emotions, to revive listeners' memories, and to animate society's practices (Millage L., 2024). Percussions, with their specific strengths, range from body techniques, learned by wrists and breathing, to the language anchoring experience to the community. On the one hand, medical ethnomusicology and music education research establish a connection between group percussion and stress reduction, as well as strengthening social ties (Bakan 2014). On the other hand, cultural policies classify these practices as static heritage to be preserved (UNESCO, 2023), without taking into account their functions towards society on a daily basis. As a result, this study is justified in identifying this discrepancy between the psychosocial effects of analyses and policy frameworks, excluding emotional role.

This research compares two cases:

On the one hand, Samulnori of Korea, institutionalized in 1978 from rural Nongak (peasant music) often presented in one kind of concert, is currently considered a national heritage emblem. Its four-

*Corresponding Author's Email: hrazanakotoniaina@gmail.com



part ensemble (Kkwaenggwari, jing, janggu, buk) requires a large technical virtuosity and contributes to the international dissemination of Korean percussion (Hesselink, 2012).

On the other hand, the Hiragasy of Madagascar is a form of performance rooted in the community that incorporates poetic eloquence (kabary), singing, dancing, and percussion. It manifests itself in civic and ritual contexts, as often in famadihana (exhumation), where troops perform in public squares to convey ancestral wisdom and maintain social cohesion (Mauro 2016). And was recently inscribed on the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Both convene publics and claim continuity with the past, but they pursue different social projects and institutional trajectories.

Although prior studies document health benefits of group percussion (e.g., Mason, 2021; Nijs & Nicolaou, 2021; Fuhr, 2014), few comparative analyses examine how distinct institutional histories and policy framings shape the psychosocial roles of traditional percussion across cultural contexts; this study addresses that gap by comparing Samulnori and Hira gasy through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of practitioners' and participants' experiences.

Research objectives

To address the omission of psychosocial outcomes from cultural management, three objectives are defined:

1. To evaluate the reported emotional and psychological effects of Samulnori and Hira Gasy on professional and community participants.
2. To identify specific participation dynamics such as rhythmic ateliers, call-and-response that foster social cohesion
3. To establish actionable management KPIs for arts organizations to measure their community impact.

2. Methodology

This chapter justifies the study's interpretative phenomenological approach and details the sampling, data collection, and analytic procedures used to compare Samulnori and Hira gasy.

Theoretical framing. Two lenses orient interpretation. First, embodiment and entrainment: rhythmic synchrony aligns bodies and attention, which can regulate arousal and foster affiliation. The foundation of rhythmic belonging is entertainment, the universal tendency for oscillating systems to synchronize (Huygens, 1665). In a community context, I view this as musical social entrainment, where the collective beat acts as an oscillatory peacemaker that aligns the emotional states of a group (Ding et al., 2024; Thaut, 2015).

Second, the role of the audience: when the performances invite viewers to cross the imaginary boundary between the stage and the audience, they become co-authors of the emotional arc of the event.

These perspectives explain why participants describe not only immediate pleasure, but also side effects such as a lighter mood, relaxed relationships and renewed pride. Sustainable communities are built when the public moves from passive consumption to active participation (Calavano, 2018). When a show invites collective appropriation through applause or dance, it creates a sense of well-being (fotsara), clarity of mind and a lighter mood that facilitates social ties (Mauro, 2016).

Methodology and rationale. This research takes a qualitative comparative case study approach, with a total sample of N=52, combining fieldwork in Korea with a comprehensive study in Madagascar to allow for a thorough analysis in each case and a comparison between the two (Yin 2003). The position alternated between that of non-participating observers at formal sessions and that of participating observers at workshops.

Sites and participants. In Korea (n=10), the cohort consists of 8 practitioners and 2 professional artists. In Madagascar (n=42), it includes 7 artists, 15 young participants from two-week workshops, 10 members of the public who agreed to brief interviews or informal debriefings after the events, and 10 community actors, such as workshop facilitators, elders and cultural mediators.

Sampling was reasoned and pragmatic: artists were recruited through existing networks; members of the public were approached locally.

Data collection. The methods used included semi-directive interviews; participating observation (repeats, street performances or public squares, workshop sessions); and, in Korea, short written reflections written by artists after certain rehearsals. The youth workshop in Madagascar included basic percussion rhythms, songs of responsibility and simple group movements to understand how the rhythm is learned and felt by the young participants. Field notes were written locally and completed on the same day; audio notes were recorded with permission.

Analytical approach. The analysis followed the principles of phenomenological interpretative analysis (PIA). API is an idiographic approach that focuses on depth over statistical generalization, focusing on how individuals in specialized units understand complex phenomena (Smith et al., 2009).

The small size of the Korean cohort is justified by the concept of information power. The sample is sufficient because the participants are experts in a specialized social unit. This provides rich and nuanced data for in-depth thematic saturation (Malterud et al., 2016).

Credibility and ethics. The triangulation of data between artists, youth and the public has made it possible to limit the bias associated with a single voice. Where possible, I conducted brief checks with participants such as sharing preliminary interpretations and soliciting correction. All participants gave informed consent and personal data were removed from the report. During the rituals, I observed only with explicit permission and avoided intrusive recording. My role alternated between that of participating observer (by joining the applause and songs when I was invited) and that of non-participating observer during the formal sequences.

Limitations. The sample is voluntarily idiographic and not statistically representative. The unequal size of the cohorts, with the Malagasy sample larger, reflects, inter alia, difficulties in accessing the field and the focus of the study on community-based workshops. This provides richer contextual data for Hiragasy, but limits direct parity in comparative counts. These constraints are recognized in the discussion and inform recommendations for future work.

Table 1. Data overview

| Site | Size | Participants | Methods | Materials |
|---------------------------|--------|---|--|--|
| Korea (Samulnoripilot) | n = 10 | 8 practitioners: 2 performers | Informal interviews; participant observation (rehearsals); written reflections | Fieldnotes; audio notes; performer reflections |
| Madagascar (Hira gasy) | n = 42 | 7 Performers; 15 youth; 10 audiences; 15 stakeholders | Semi structures interviews; participatory observation; youth workshop | Fieldnotes; audio notes; workshop materials |

Note: The number of participants in Madagascar varied according to the event; estimates were recorded in field notes rather than in standardized counts

3. Results

3.1 Korea: Samulnori mastery as a stress pressure-valve

Interviews with the Korean group revealed that percussion acts as an emotional safety valve (Ko, 2015).

For many, the weekly sessions offered a welcome break from work. Several described leaving rehearsal with a sense of relief, even feeling physically lighter.

Interpreters' cohesion emphasizes collective repair, as music requires perfect synchronization at extreme tempo, any error must be corrected immediately by visual contact and subtle rhythmic adjustments. This quick adjustment built trust and confidence among the group (Hesselink, 2012).

Triangulation (biological evidence): these observations are validated by fNIRS data showing that percussion increases levels of oxygenated hemoglobin in the orbitalofrontal cortex (OFC) and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DFPFC). These brain regions are responsible for cognitive control and emotional regulation, providing biological evidence of valve effect (Nam & Kwon, 2025). This biological corroboration strengthens the argument that rhythm functions as more than cultural symbolism; it directly shapes emotional regulation.

3.2 Madagascar: Hira gasy “the ateliers de rythme” and Youth Cohesion

The results of the two-week workshops with local youth showed a profound transformation.

Self-confidence: hesitating at first, young people, from the second week, went from whispering to affirming their presence through music.

Strengthening identity: participants stated that they felt closer to their origins, using the rhythm to internalize ancestral wisdom. This aligns with Fuhr's (2014) and Mauro's (2016) observation about Hiragasy.

Several spectators described experiencing fotsara (a good heart), a sign of a clear mind and a lighter mood through the social bond created by performance (Honda Y, et al., 2026).

Triangulation (EEG topography): rhythmic sequences above 6 Hz were shown through EEG analysis to reinforce emotional control. Frequent in Hiragasy drum cycles, it significantly enhances the dimension of dominance of the emotion. This neurobiological shift from impotence to a sense of control explains the transformation into confident interpreters (Ding et al., 2024).

3.3 Comparative synthesis: Shared Substrate, Distinct Social Projects

In all contexts, the pace of change fostered emotional liberation and social cohesion. However, the centre of gravity differed (Table 2). While Samulnori often affirms national pride, not all performances carry this weight; some are simply enjoyed as communal entertainment. By contrast, Hira gasy consistently emphasizes moral pedagogy. and to repeat common lifestyles

Table 2. Comparative Framework of Rhythmic Resilience

| Dimension | Korean Samulnori | Malagasy Hira Gasy |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Rhythmic Engine | Precision & technical acceleration | Moral oratory & call-and-response. |
| Psychological Aim | Mastery-based catharsis and trust. | Affect regulation & "a good heart." |
| Participation Style | Clapping & brief shouts. | Porous boundary & open dancing. |
| Resilience Driver | Reliability of the ensemble support. | Collective agency in the Highlands. |

As a result, the data highlight a sequential process. Rhythmic training promotes shared attention, which in turn supports emotional regulation.

This leads to a social assessment, a sense of community "we did it together" and ultimately strengthens identity and values.

The preferred social goal appears to vary according to cultural context, identity and representation in a context of community-based collaboration, moral deliberation and community renewal.

Critical Interrogation: Resilience is not a purely mechanical phenomenon. The effect on the prefrontal cortex was significantly greater when the task was socially contextualized (Chmiel, J., & Kurpas, D., 2026).

As McFerran et al. (2020) point out, rhythm is not a mechanical solution, but is complexly woven into the fabric of relationships.

Resilience results from a combination of biological rhythm and a supportive community infrastructure (McFerran 2020; Nam & Kwon 2025).

4. Discussion

Traditional percussion is a legitimate form of alternative medicine for emotional regulation (Vandana et al., 2025). Drum training has been shown to increase prefrontal cortex activity, providing biological evidence of emotional control observed in my participants (Chmiel, J., & Kurpas, D., 2026). For live performance managers, this means that cultural resilience is a resource that can be managed by mobilizing body practices to transform communities after a crisis (Sauda et al., 2025).

Participation as a mechanism. When the audience claps rhythmically, sings the chorus or moves together, they are not just engaged, they help shape the emotional arc of the event. This co-production fosters a sense of self-reliance and belonging, which extends after the event through more warm relationships and renewed motivation to repeat or return. The porous boundary between the artist and the audience, often described as a break-up of the fourth wall according to Calvano (2018), is therefore not a theatrical artifice, but a psychosocial technology.

Critical questioning. To ensure the rigour of our analysis, it is essential to consider that the role of rhythm is less mechanical and more complex, closely linked to a "relational fabric" (McFerran et al., 2020). To avoid oversimplification of trauma, we propose a model that integrates brainstem responses to cognitive and social integration of the connection (Leman 2023; Nijs & Nicolaou 2021).

Strengths and limitations. Nevertheless, the mechanism of participation deserves critical consideration. Most of the work on musical synchrony focuses on training as a causal pathway to pro-social behaviour, suggesting that rhythmic alignment at micro-temporal levels regulates excitement and strengthens cohesion.

However, there is conflicting evidence to support this vision. Cross, Wilson and Golonka (2016) argue that interpersonal coordination in a social context. Rather than a fine synchrony, it is enough to generate cooperation. That increasing the degree of synchrony does not linearly predict stronger social bonds. Our data corroborate these two perspectives. The importance accorded by Samulnori interpreters to collective reparation and the trust of the whole is consistent with the explanations based on coordination. While body descriptions of respiratory regulation by practitioners point to training processes.

In Madagascar, the transition of young participants from hesitant whispering to audible confidence reflects both body regulation and the social perception of coordinated action.

Triangulation of the methods would clarify these claims. Observation coding of collective repair episodes, synchronization measures from performance records, and facilitator checks of participants could help decide between training and coordination mechanisms. Such triangulation would reduce dependence on subjective statements and strengthen analytical rigour. By showing whether psychosocial outcomes consistently correspond to body rhythm, perceived coordination, or both.

5. Implications (Performing Arts Management)

To transform the results into decisions that arts managers can use to design programs, develop audiences, fund operations and evaluate impact, while respecting the heritage and autonomy of the community.

Table 3. Manager’s Snapshot: Performing Arts Management Implications & KPIs

| Pillar | What to implement | Minimal KPIs (Year 1) | Frequency |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| Program design & curation | Run participation-forward segments (guided clapping, short refrains, “join-the-finale”) alongside concertized sets; add a 15–20 min reflection | Participation Quality Index $\geq 4.0/5$; repeat attendance ≤ 90 days +10% | Per event; monthly roll-up |
| Audience development & engagement | Segment families/schools/diaspora; launch a 10–20 person ambassador program with codes/scripts. | First-time return rate $\geq 35\%$; CAC by channel; list growth +20% | Quarterly |
| Partnerships & governance | Formalize “triangle”: ensemble + municipal culture office + school/health NGO; set an advisory circle (elders, youth, disability, safeguarding). | 3 MOU signed; partner NPS $\geq 4.2/5$; 2 advisory meetings held | Quarterly |
| Business & funding model | Target a revenue mix: grants/sponsors 40–50%; earned income 30–40%; service contracts 10–20%. A/B test tiered vs PWYC pricing. | Earned-income share $\geq 35\%$; equity reach (concessions/low-income) $\geq 20\%$; avg. ticket yield stable | Quarterly |
| Operations, risk & | Standardize consent, safeguarding, first-aid, transport, weather back-ups; green travel | Reportable incidents 0; on-time starts $\geq 95\%$; | Per event |

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|--|--|---|-------------------|
| safeguarding | where feasible. | debrief filed 100% | |
| MEL (monitoring, evaluation & learning) | Light Theory of change+ Balanced scorecard (Artistic/Audience/Financial/Learning). Exit cards with 5-item PQI. | Dashboard completeness $\geq 90\%$; partner satisfaction $\geq 4.2/5$ | Quarterly |
| Digital, IP & archive | Releases for rehearsal/performance/workshop; short-form captioned clips; consent-governed community archive. | View \rightarrow RSVP $\geq 3\%$; donation rate $\geq 1.5\%$; 1 archive tranche/quarter | Monthly/Quarterly |
| Sustainability & accessibility | Step-free staging; visual rhythm cues; quiet zones; shared transport; low-energy lighting. | Accessibility checklist 100%; carbon-intensity tracked | Per production |

PQI=5- item Participation Quality Index: synchrony, confidence, agency, joy, connection.

Monitoring these few indicators allows teams to iterate quickly without losing sight of community ethics and language. The results can then feed into annual Social Return on Investment (SROI) or donor reports..

6. Limitations & Future Directions

This study remains exploratory. Its limitations include the small size of the specialized sample (N=52) (Malterud et al., 2021). Future research should focus on longitudinal follow-up of IQP and mixed-method studies associating IPA with real-time biometric follow-up to correlate cultural patterns with neural oscillations (Smith et al., 2009; Ding et al., 2024).

Measurement: results (calm, joy, cohesion) are mainly based on self-assessment and observation; no physiological or behavioural measurement has been used.

Background/translation: some meanings (e.g., "a good heart") lend themselves poorly to a literal translation; the participation of researchers may have subtly influenced events.

Ethics/access: registration was limited in ritual contexts such as Famadihana. This protects communities but reduces the amount of evidence collected.

Transferability: mechanisms (training, co-creation) appear transposable, but objectives and aesthetics are culturally appropriate.

6.1 Future directions (Performing Arts Management: Executive Summary)

Experiment with a participatory format (guided applause/interaction/collective final) in parallel with a standard concert; follow repeated attendance within 90 days and a quality index of participation in 5 items (synchronization, confidence, autonomy, joy, connection). Compare pricing models (e.g., tiered pricing vs. open pricing with suggested pricing) while still income per participant and inclusion (low income groups/sections). Develop a pool of young leaders through 8 to 12 week workshops culminating in the following: Intergenerational performances; training young people as section managers. Formalize a triangular partnership between ensemble, municipal cultural service and school or health NGO through a simple Memorandum of Understanding covering roles, protection and in-kind support. Implement a simplified monitoring and evaluation system: exit reviews, participation monitoring and quarterly partner satisfaction surveys; analyse data and adapt programming quarterly.

7. Conclusion

The comparative study by Hiragasy and Samulnori shows that traditional percussion is a contemporary resource for dealing with difficulties, building connections and learning. Beyond stylistic and institutional differences, a common psychological substrate emerges. The rhythm organizes attention, regulates awakening and harmonizes bodies, while participation transforms viewers into meaningful co-producers. The way communities mobilize this substrate is culturally specific. In Korea, precision and risk-sharing strengthen identity and pride; in Madagascar, rhythmic practice is integrated with moral pedagogy and community renewal. The results refine the theories of embodiment and training. By showing that the pace of change interacts with social perception and the institutional framework. Training, perceived coordination and ritual identity work together rather than as mutually exclusive explanations

Practical implications

Policy makers and funders: Support participatory heritage programmes that combine cultural transmission with simple psychosocial assessment (presence, short pre/post measures) to document dual benefits.

Artistic facilitators and programmers: Design easy initiation devices (applause, questions/answers), deliberate tension-relaxation cycles, and brief moments of reflection to link experience to social significance.

Researchers: Prioritize the triangulation of mixed methods, observational coding, synchrony measurements, and physiological or behavioural measurements to test the mechanisms more rigorously.

Limits. This exploratory study focuses on depth-to-breadth (cohort n = 52; limited period) and is based primarily on subjective statements without physiological substantiation and may reflect researcher participation and contextual variability that limit generalization.

Research opportunities. Conduct longitudinal and experimental field studies, manipulating perceived coordination with respect to micro-synchrony, and combining behavioural, temporal, and physiological measures to distinguish mechanisms and assess sustainability.

In summary, when participation is intentionally incorporated into heritage practice, the pace can simultaneously sustain cultural continuity and promote day-to-day resilience.

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