

Valores patrimoniales identitarios de las expresiones artísticas del grupo músico-danzario Jagüey

Heritage and Identity Values of the Artistic Expressions of the Jagüey Music and Dance Group

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Received: September 8, 2025

Reviewed: September 25, 2025

Accepted: October 15, 2025

RESUMEN: El sustento teórico del artículo está basado en el estudio sobre el valor patrimonial identitario de las expresiones artísticas del grupo músico-danzario Jagüey que tiene como particularidad las connotaciones histórica, religiosa, ideológica, moral y estética en el fortalecimiento de la representación escénica del folklor, al asumir la perspectiva narrativa de la música y la danza como soporte de la investigación social. Por tal motivo, se emplearon los métodos histórico y lógico, análisis y síntesis, inducción y deducción y hermenéutico, con el objetivo de analizar el valor patrimonial de las expresiones artísticas de este fenómeno artístico del movimiento de artistas aficionados de la Federación Estudiantil Universitaria (FEU), a partir del carácter testimonial, auténtico, identitario, excepcional, social, ideológico y de uso.

Palabras clave: Jagüey; Grupo músico-danzario; Valor patrimonial; Identitario; Expresiones artísticas; Folklor

ABSTRACT: The theoretical framework of this article is based on a study of the heritage and identity value of the artistic expressions of the Jagüey music and dance group. This group is characterized by its historical, religious, ideological, moral, and aesthetic connotations in strengthening the stage representation of folklore, adopting a narrative perspective of music and dance as a foundation for social research. For this reason, historical and logical methods, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, and hermeneutics were employed to analyze the heritage value of the artistic expressions of this artistic phenomenon within the amateur artists' movement of the University Student Federation (FEU). This analysis considers the testimonial, authentic, identity-related, exceptional, social, ideological, and usage-based nature of these expressions.

Keywords: Jagüey; Music and dance group; Heritage value; Identity; Artistic expressions; Folklore

Introduction

The amateur artists' movement of the University Student Federation (FEU) in Cuba finds in the Jagüey music and dance ensemble, founded on October 5, 1975, that , identity-affirming, and boundary-pushing archive rooted in the culture of its homeland: the small and the great, that of

the people of Guantánamo and that of the Cubans, marked by an artistic-aesthetic of a folkloric structure, in the manner of the great dance companies and ensembles, demonstrating a powerful transcultural and religious poetics that demands active participation from the spectator in the preservation of national identity, to which it turns to reflect on several of the complex phenomena that have shaped or influenced the course of history.

From the grounds of the town of La Esperanza—now known as Central Argeo Martínez in the municipality of Manuel Tames, Guantánamo Province—an elderly Haitian man, after walking for so long, arrived there to die in a massive Jagüey tree of which the locals were proud.

According to the story, the old man was found curled up in a fetal position inside the crevice formed at the base of the tree to which he had made a pilgrimage to offer a sacrifice. They say that the traveler's ancestors whispered in his ear: "That is the tree of life that grows... it is our tree."

From that mystical legend, unearthed through exhaustive sociocultural research by a group of students from the Raúl Gómez García Pedagogical Institute, the music and dance group Jagüey takes its name. The group belongs to the Movement of Artists Devoted to the Arts and, due to its significance, expressiveness, stage presence, and uniqueness, serves as a national benchmark, delving into the cultural roots of French-Haitian, Afro-Cuban, Caribbean, and popular folklore, earning a trail of awards and recognitions both within and outside the country over more than four decades.

The value of Jagüey's artistic expressions brings to the stage numerous elements of identity, such as the dance representation of the tradition, history, ideology, morality, and religiosity of Afro-descendants and Creoles.

Jagüey's active presence in dance venues constitutes a record and symbolic construction of the cultural milieu of Guantánamo and Cuba in a body of more than 500 works produced over 44 years, highlighting its heritage value while maintaining a unique narrative fabric that is explicitly and implicitly linked to both the production and the understanding of the historical discourse on the formation of Cuban nationality.

It is necessary to clarify that in this research, the term "artistic expressions" is used to refer to the musical and dance representations of Franco-Haitian, African, and Cuban history. This is common in the study on heritage values by Simón and Toledo (2023).

Similarly, in the present study, the term “identity-based heritage value” is used to denote the distinctive qualities of the musical and dance construction shaped by the aesthetic of the Jagüey ensemble and aims to recognize its work as a heritage asset.

Major academic, cultural, and especially higher education institutions in various parts of the world have created theoretical and educational spaces that delve into the study of folk dance and, in particular, into the theories and methods for its analysis from perspectives as diverse as the aesthetic analysis of the work of art; however, the study dedicated in Cuba to Jagüey as a living bearer and reinterpreter of folk dance styles is insufficient, due to the fact that it is a group of amateur artists from the FEU.

Taking into account the aspects mentioned thus far, it was necessary to highlight the use of general research methods—both theoretical and empirical—such as the *historical and logical* approach: to characterize and contextualize the object of study; analysis and synthesis, a perspective that allows for determining the components of the described object, as well as the elements of decomposition of the described process and its parts; *Induction and deduction*, to establish the general and specific reasoning of the music-and-dance discourse in the field of action, as well as to specify the theoretical framework for the analysis of the dance works and reach conclusions; *Hermeneutics*, a valid method for establishing the theory and criteria chosen for interpretation.

For this reason, the objective of this article is to analyze the heritage value of the artistic expressions of the Jagüey music and dance group as an artistic phenomenon of the amateur artists’ movement of the University Student Federation (FEU), based on their testimonial, authentic, identity-defining, exceptional, social, ideological, and practical nature.

It is, therefore, the distinctive character of Jagüey’s artistic expressions—a statement essential for reflecting on Cuba’s musical and dance heritage and its historical representation—that serves as a clear testament to the nation’s memory.

Development

The Jagüey music and dance group entered the artistic scene in Guantánamo in the 1970s, amid a revaluation of indigenous cultural practices, in constant dialogue with national identity traits, and at a time when international events were fostering a greater desire to preserve cultural heritage

through a network of experiences shared by communities, creators, and art institutions that sustain the nation's identity.

Consequently, within the amateur artists' movement, Jagüey has played a fundamental role in the preservation, promotion, and renewal of Guantanamo's artistic expressions, helping this province highlight its Afro-descendant, Franco-Haitian, and peasant cultural richness as a direct means of channeling popular creativity and sustaining the vitality of indigenous traditions.

Jagüey's impact also extends to the symbolic realm, as it represents the ability to tell one's own story through song, dance, and the playing of traditional instruments, fostering a sense of local belonging to keep rituals, festivals, and collective memories alive, even amid adverse socioeconomic contexts.

Jagüey constitutes a heritage of inestimable significance for the people; it expresses values of nationality that nourish and strengthen, in a process of dynamic recreation of identity, therefore, its musical and dance expressions within the university's mandate as amateur artists serve as an ontological resource for safeguarding Guantanamo's identity and heritage, and ensure the perpetuation on local stages of popular and traditional knowledge, as well as knowledge inherited and transmitted by individuals or groups through the very process of ethnocultural formation,

In this sense, it possesses extensive resources and has achieved multiple outcomes in the artistic, educational, research, and museological spheres, and, most notably, in cultural practice itself. Over many years of existence and as part of its achievements in the fields of education, anthropology, history, and art, it holds significant meaning for the university community and for Guantánamo in general.

Of great importance is the presence in Jagüey of individuals, families, groups, and communities that serve as bastions in the preservation of our identity values, as well as in the safeguarding of the nation's cultural heritage. Their activities constitute a social—and therefore communal—necessity, and most of their events are predominantly ceremonial or festive, thus fostering mutualistic and collectivist participation in each locality.

In Jagüey, various expressions of identity—such as ceremonial, ritual, festive, historical, moral, ideological, and traditional events—endure as an individual and collective spiritual necessity. These are dance and musical expressions of our historical memory and stem, essentially from the vocal and physical expressions brought by migrants from different Caribbean regions, as well as

from the diverse dances of various groups from Sub-Saharan West Africa, to which were later added influences from certain areas of the Guantánamo region.

The following are identified as essential principles to be taken into account in the artistic expressions of Jagüey:

- a). The preservation of the authenticity of folklore and its representation within its own sociocultural context.
- b). The promotion of the communities' identity and cultural heritage.
- c). Educational and instructional work with young people as the bearers of traditions and identity.
- d). Conducting field research with members of Jagüey, informants, and community practitioners.

The artistic expressions that constitute Jagüey's identity and, therefore, promote Cuba's tangible and intangible heritage, convey not only popular knowledge but also the musical and dance techniques and skills identified as folklore, as noted by Guanche (2009).

The following characteristics are evident in the artistic expressions of Jagüey, based on the framework established by Verges (1998):

- 1. Forms of artistic representation in which various folkloric expressions are manifested.
- 2. A structure of musical and dance expressions linked to religious practices.
- 3. The presence of university students, teachers, and community members among the participants.
- 4. A community of interests centered on a specific heritage and folkloric identity practice that confers upon it representative significance and effective functional value.

The systematic study of the category of heritage value has served as the theoretical foundation for countless scientific studies on cultural heritage, grounded in UNESCO's legal framework (Mexico Declaration, 1982), which generally emphasizes the qualities of anonymous creations, arising from the popular spirit, and the set of values that give meaning to life—that is, the tangible and intangible works that express the creativity of that people; language, rituals, beliefs, historical sites and monuments, literature, works of art, and archives and libraries, which, according to Niglio (2022), constitute the legacy we receive from the past, what we experience in the present, and what we pass on to future generations.

Several authors have addressed the topic of heritage values in their studies: Riege (2014), the pioneer of the protection and conceptualization of this category, clearly perceived the subjective dimension of values, referring to them as monumental values; those that bring together and incorporate others, he called historical values, which is a response to the universal value of cultural property grounded in the 1931 Athens Charter.

In Jagüey's aesthetics, heritage values are perceived as cultural products; human attributions and an added quality that individuals ascribe to objects as an individual and collective identity.

An analysis of the internal and external structure of the Jagüey folk music and dance performance aligns with the views of Martínez (2006) and Jokilehto (2017), who approached the concept of value in terms of the esteem in which a work is held based on its merit or utility. In this sense, value is an added quality that individuals attribute to certain works, making them worthy of appreciation. We are thus dealing with a relative concept that appears and disappears depending on cultural, historical, and psychological references, varying according to individuals, groups, and eras.

This research highlights Jagüey's work for its artistic, social, and educational capacity, insofar as the audience or audiences interact with it by perceiving relationships between musical and dance disciplines, that is, the internal and external relationships of the artistic work between the plurality of cultural sources of diverse references and the coordinated action of different Afro-Caribbean, Cuban, Latin American, and universal dance resources that create and/or accentuate its meaning, and where all languages function in the interpretation of the world through the body and song.

Furthermore, Jagüey's work dazzles with its exceptionality, testimony, authenticity, identity, and social, political, and practical value—definitions that UNESCO (1982) recognizes as heritage values.

In this sense, there is no denying that the work of this ensemble or group is compelling and transcends the relationship between history and memory, identity and testimony, originality and art. Its authenticity is not only formal but also conceptual; its political and social commitment is undeniable; its interest in preserving immediacy is engaged in relation to the past, present, and future and constitutes a critical examination of its national and international context, provoking social reflexivity.

According to Caraballo (2011), heritage values, as part of a larger complex of social value systems, are ethical concepts that are socially fluid, accepted, and desired as ideals within a specific historical and sociocultural context; they possess a sense of permanence and transcendence, while simultaneously lending meaning and validity to the policies and actions aimed at disseminating and preserving them. For this reason, they exist within the diversity of established social relationships, being a concept that, on the one hand, expresses humanity's changing needs, and on the other, the positive significance of natural and social phenomena for the existence and development of a community.

Jagüey has extensive experience in artistic promotion and creation, particularly when considering the critical analysis that has enabled the study and understanding of these types of heritage values, identifiable by their grand representations of works of art derived from historical events and the accumulated legacy of generational relationships within a socially determined historical period.

These values form part of the core of cultural diversity because their essence is both collective and individual, and they have the capacity to interact with identity in diverse ways depending on the contexts of performance, while simultaneously shaping the interpretation of the dance expressions themselves.

Jagüey has extensive experience in artistic promotion and creation, particularly when considering the critical analysis that has enabled the study and understanding of these heritage values—identifiable by their grand representations of exquisitely crafted works of art, historical events, and other material elements derived from the knowledge accumulated from one generation to the next in daily life. These values, which may be limited to a single person or be part of collective knowledge, form the core of cultural diversity and the human capacity to interact with ecosystems in diverse ways depending on the context; at the same time, they foster a sense of belonging to that place and a sense of distinction from others.

To determine and substantiate the heritage values of the artistic expressions of the Jagüey group in this study, we rely on the provisions of Cuban Law 155/2022: General Law on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage (National Assembly of People's Power, 2023), which establishes:

Article 4. For the purposes of this Law, Cultural Heritage is recognized as the intangible cultural manifestations and movable and immovable cultural assets that constitute the expression or testimony of cultures, and that are valued by communities in their relationship to history, art, science, and society in general.

Article 27. The selection of an intangible cultural manifestation or a movable or immovable cultural asset as Cultural Heritage, and of a natural site as Natural Heritage, requires that these possess value and additionally demonstrate:

b) authenticity and integrity of the attributes on which their value is based, for movable or immovable cultural property;

Article 28. The value of intangible cultural expressions, movable and immovable cultural properties, and natural sites lies in their capacity to convey meaning to society and to be recognized by it; the types of value are as follows:

a) Historical value is the quality of bearing witness to a relevant event or process in political, social, scientific, or artistic history;

b) Artistic value is the quality recognized in a creative work which, due to its formal features, composition, expressiveness, and technical skill, is associated with an aesthetic conception and a specific era;

f) Social value, which relates to traditions and ways of life, viewed as the set of vital and systematic activities of specific societies or communities as they evolve.

Taking into account the foregoing provisions of the law, the heritage values of the artistic expressions of the Jagüey music and dance group are as follows:

Historical value:

The folk music and dance performances bear witness to events, figures, and historical periods of the Franco-Haitian, Afro-Cuban, and Caribbean cultures. Thus, the value of historicity is linked to the capacity to generate history and to elicit, in the memory of individuals, reactions of analysis and interpretation of sociocultural contexts.

Artistic value:

The musical and dance expressions of Jagüey constitute a distinctive, unique activity, recognized for its authenticity; their formal and conceptual features allow audiences to interact with a historical-artistic archive and its sociocultural contexts to create cultural and aesthetic associations across different eras, generations, and contexts.

Social value:

Social value serves as a source of identity and social interaction that highlights Jagüey's identity, as it focuses on identifying and evaluating sociocultural meaning, thereby revealing the essential attributes of society.

Symbolic value:

Jagüey's work represents the present and at the same time serves as a link between the past and the present. It has a direct relationship with its author and with its use over time, insofar as it designates, represents, or evokes a culture and events of the past. His works are full of meanings, which change over time. As they acquire new meanings—exemplified by the way he approaches sociocultural texts and contexts and how stories are determined, it becomes a vehicle for conveying a message.

Use value:

This is one of the most important values of Jagüey's work, where the worldview of Afro-descendant peoples is grounded as they bear witness to their history. This type of art serves to satisfy a specific individual and/or collective need and becomes a cultural product that can/should be used immediately and directly in a tangible way, or alternatively, in an intangible way for the education of future generations and the preservation of historical memory.

The intangible utility of the knowledge outlined in Jagüey's work, through the applied research in the scripts of his plays, enhances understanding of the history and culture of Guantánamo, Cuba, Latin America, and the world. Therefore, this work acts as a transmitter and/or repository of memory to extract information useful for cultural knowledge and practices in new social products.

Aesthetic value:

Jagüey achieves a balance in all elements of his artistic language, highlighting his originality and authenticity, and aligns his aesthetic, ideological, and cultural preferences with those of his audience, thereby always shaping the subject-object-context-subject relationships in some way.

Educational value:

The educational and, at the same time, auxiliary value of this artistic production requires interpreting society and its meanings, as well as the appropriation of mechanisms specific to the historical sciences, in order to become an influential and instructive entity in the perception of social processes, a problematizer of aesthetics and the aestheticization of culture, and a generator of consciousness that preserves individual and collective memory.

This heritage value, due to its psychological potential, distinguishes itself in those who engage with heritage assets through ethical and aesthetic commitment and the emotional influence of learning.

Its narrative management of history, as Simón and Toledo (2023) clarify, is made explicit in the didactic and educational use that enables the systematic appreciation and understanding of the sociocultural realities of past and present historical periods through Jagüey's artistic practice, through dance education, which requires an analysis of the contexts and texts in which it was performed and the reader's prior knowledge necessary for its comprehension. The heritage values contained in Jagüey's artistic expressions cannot be viewed or defined from a rigid stance of absolutism between the tangible and the intangible, but rather are expressed in the UNESCO declaration (1982) as the value conferred upon the result of the close relationship between the content, form, and context of the text in the process of transcultural assimilation, indicating that its meaning is identified through the relevance that individuals perceive in their dialogue with the texts and contexts in the formation of their identity.

The work of this music and dance group possesses a heritage value that allows for the establishment, construction, and reconstruction of processes of social consciousness among the audiences that appreciate it, contributing to the preservation of historical memory.

The ethical stance and aesthetic model established in their artistic language foster an understanding of history and mark a turning point in the dance production of the FEU's amateur artist groups, enabling an ethnographic discourse that fosters the development of individuals capable of extracting sociocultural reality from an artistic archive.

Conclusions

The artistic expressions of the Jagüey music and dance group are shaped by its heritage values, which allow it to reconstruct historical processes based on the identity-forming representations of folklore and thus foster social consciousness for identity formation.

The heritage values embodied in this music and dance group, which emerged within the university context, invite reflection on the mechanisms through which heritage assets transcend generations despite threats to tradition posed by neoliberal globalization, and on the way identity is expressed as a practical manifestation of individuals and societies.

An analysis of the nature of artistic expressions in Jagüey revealed that the specific elements that confer heritage value on the music and dance practices of the amateur artists' movement are not always recognized.

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