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Comparative Study of Rural and Urban Dance Culture in Central Iowa

Introduction

Central Iowa has a diverse population and culture. Between the urban center of Des Moines, college town of Ames, and surrounding rural communities, there are a plethora of opportunities to witness the various cultural components. The motivation for the study was to determine if the same diversity applied to the dance culture in Central Iowa. To accomplish the goal, two different dance communities were selected. Based on background information, urban and rural dance venues were selected to study the diversity of dance culture. Both communities were shown to have unique dance styles and provided ample opportunity to participate in the dance venues.

Objectives

Three objectives were selected to guide the study:
1. Determine the differences in dance styles and genre between urban and rural dance venues
2. Assess whether the motivations for participating in dance are different for rural and urban participants
3. Learn and compare the demographics of urban and rural dance venues and ascertain if the participants reflect the community

Locations of Dance Venues

Figure 1: The six dance venues were chosen to be representative of Central Iowa. The dance hall locations include both the Des Moines area and Woodward, Iowa.

Methods

Complete background research and identify rural and urban dance venues that would be conducive to the study.

Conduct research by visiting each venue and interviewing dancers, observing venue characteristics, and participating in dance if able.

Analyze observations between rural and urban dance culture. Draw conclusions and generalizations about similarities and differences between the dance cultures.

Ankeny, Iowa (Urban) Dance Venue

Figure 4: Conversely, to Lake Robbins, the dance hall studied in Ankeny, Iowa was popular with young and middle-aged dancers. Country dance was most prevalent, though there was no live band and a smaller dance floor.

Woodward, Iowa (Rural) Dance Venue

Figure 2: The Lake Robbins Ballroom is located in Woodward, Iowa, a rural community. The dance hall served as a key case study for rural dance culture.

Figure 3: A large, wooden dance floor surrounded by dining tables sits at the center of the Lake Robbins Ballroom. Swing, ballroom, and country dance are popular among the participants. Weekend nights are typically packed with senior dancers but a wide variety of ages are represented.

Results

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Dance Culture</th>
<th>Rural Dance Culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dancers tend to be 20 to 40 years old</td>
<td>Dancers tend to be 50 to 70 years old</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country line, Latin, and club dance styles predominate</td>
<td>Swing, ballroom, and polka dance styles shown to be most popular</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and personal satisfaction motives for dancing</td>
<td>Dancers motivated by family tradition, community, and personal satisfaction</td>
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<td>Dancing was treated more as a light hobby, with the exception of competition</td>
<td>Dancing appeared to be closely connected to participant’s self-image</td>
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Conclusion

Overall, urban and rural dance culture had distinct differences. However, in both situations dance played a key role in allowing individuals to express themselves and stay connected to their community.

Acknowledgment

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