

Approaches of preserving and conserving dayak culture in borneo

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Culture is a term that is especially difficult to explain. There was a list of over 100 different explanations for the term “ culture” that was reviewed and compiled by the American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, in 1952. One of the many definitions of “ culture” was the quality owned and retained by all people of all social groups. According to Tylor’s definition of culture, culture is a complex whole consisting of art, attitudes, beliefs, customs, rituals, knowledge, and other skills and practices developed by one as a part of society. Culture is extremely important to society as it establishes one’s sense of identity. Therefore, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental organizations, and other bodies have contributed to the preservation and conservation of Dayak culture in Borneo through different ways and methods.

In an effort to preserve and conserve Dayak Culture, government organizations tend to go for a static museum approach. An example of said approach is the Textile Museum in Kuching under the Sarawak Museum Department. The Textile Museum exhibited many woven textiles, costumes and accessories traditionally used for ceremonies by different ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Malay, Iban, Orang Ulu, and other Dayak groups. Items on display in the museum included Pua, clothing, beadwork, ceremonial headdresses and more. However, the museum only showcased items in a static form with mannequins and descriptions of materials used and how it is made. In my opinion, the static format of the museum does preserve but do not conserve the skills and practices of certain groups’ culture. The traditional static museum concept of collecting, preserving, and showcasing valuable items are usually seen as specifically western cultural creations and

preoccupations. However, almost all cultures preserve items of significance and special meaning, and many have established intricate buildings and organizations for keeping and exhibiting said items as well as ways of care and preservation. From many aspects, these practices are akin to the practices of western museums and curatorship. As mentioned, the traditional static museums tend to neglect the intangible parts of culture. On the other hand, the Sarawak Cultural Village in Kuching, which is a collaboration between non-government organization and government organization, preserves and conserves culture through the concept of a living museum. In the Sarawak Cultural Village, there were several traditional houses as well as many cultural performances that help in the preservation, conservation, and appreciation of Sarawak's different cultures. Although the cultural village also displayed items on loan from museums, it focused more on the people, architecture, and lifestyle of the different Dayak groups. Indigenous curation, such as the Sarawak Cultural Village, is recognized as intangible cultural heritage under the Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO). According to Kreps (2008), "Indigenous curation" is a term for non-Western approach on museums, ways of curation, and notions of cultural heritage preservation. The complex and intricate cultural expressions can be said as " museological behavior", which are any activities, knowledge, practices, and belief system that displays a need for the conservation of important cultural items and traditions. This also includes the establishment of organizations, buildings, or space for the storage and exhibition of items as well as the knowledge, skills, and methods

interconnected to said items' use, preservation, and conservation. For example, the Iban longhouse in the Sarawak Cultural Village served as a place to not only create and show traditional items, but also act as a way to educate and enlighten the tourists, locals, and the younger generations about the Iban's history, way of life, arts, and beliefs.

In my opinion, the cultural village does help in the conservation of Sarawak's multi-ethnics cultures and customs while preserving the architectures by combining tradition, architecture, lifestyle, education, and entertainment. However, living museums and cultural heritage may run into the risk of being commercialized as tourist attractions or entertainment as in the case of the Sarawak Cultural Village. In most of the traditional houses, there were no guides or people to explain the meaning to certain decorations or architecture but rather people to sell items and snacks. Also, the decorations in the houses were done in a way to mimic certain events or ceremonies to give a visual impact. In my opinion, heritage tourism is a type of special interest tourism. Heritage tourism is especially problematic as it constantly treads on social and cultural values. There has also been a debate whether cultural tourism aids in cultural rejuvenation or rather a major threat of cultural degradation. In my opinion, cultural tourism could aid in the understanding, knowledge, and the appreciation of Dayak history and culture as well as create stronger connections between a group's past, present and future. In a postmodern setting, heritage tourism would require a lot of effort and planning to properly promote the preservation and conservation of Dayak culture instead of being seen as a form of entertainment.

The Tun Jugah Foundation, under a non-government organization, is a combination of a living and static museum with the workshop, galleries, and museum that aids in the preservation and conservation of Iban ikat weaving. The several galleries showcased tools, raw materials, and implements for weaving as well as clothing, beadworks, and woven textiles. In the workshop, there were weavers and students came to learn the art of ikat weaving. In the museum were valuable and prized items that had been passed down for many generations. After visiting both types of museums in Kuching, living and static, it was evident that the typical, traditional static museum practices were good for the preservation, but not the conservation of Dayak culture. The static approach of museums did not provide a sense of belonging nor did the method allow for the open participation in the conservation of culture. According to Simpson (1996), contemporary museums are not at all novel or foreign ideas in the Pacific, as is frequently claimed, but rather extensions of traditional customs. The living concepts of museums and practices are essentially tangible expressions of the intangible or what is considered as heritage. The concept demonstrate the different approaches in preserving and conserving Dayak culture that are assimilated into architecture and social practices.

Indigenous curatorial techniques may be seen as a way to safeguard both the physical and spiritual integrity of items that reflects a specific group's cultural practices and protocols concerning the usage and treatment of certain items. For example, the museum and the Tun Jugah Memorial in the Tun Jugah Foundation demonstrate such an outlook by separating the older

and more prized items from the other galleries. According to Kreps (2008), while the concept of a living museum show how some museums have been putting in more thought in regards to the safeguarding and conserving of intangible cultural heritage, the acknowledgement and use of indigenous curatorial traditions and alternate methods to the preservation of intangible culture are still a fairly new phenomena in the professional museum world. Anthropologists were concerned in regards to the collection, curation, and preservation of tangible culture but were not, until recently, concerned about learning how these items would be curated from another museological viewpoint. There were also some who considered the living museum concept as jeopardy to the advance of professional museum approaches and regulation which may risk one's ability to appropriately care for the valuable cultural resources. However, the acknowledgment of the need to preserve and conserve intangible culture should not weaken the role of professional curatorship, but rather a different approach to more information, understanding, and know-how. Indigenous curation and methods to the preservation and conservation of Dayak culture are exclusive cultural expressions that should be recognised and appreciated as part of the Dayak's cultural heritage. Therefore, it is great to see non-government organizations, government organizations, and other bodies putting effort into the conservation and preservation of Dayak culture in Borneo through a different approach to the traditional static concept.

In conclusion, the preservation and conservation of both tangible and intangible culture should be acknowledged and appreciated in their own

right. As discussed above, non-government organizations, government organizations, and other bodies have different approaches of preserving and conserving Dayak culture, in forms of static and living museums. Although some choose to focus on preserving items while some conserve traditions, the different methods show the diversity in how one may perceive, care for, and safeguard material and immaterial parts of their culture.