

Cultural tourism policy in developing regions: The case of Sarawak, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

There is a need for empirical data that can be used to confirm or disconfirm literature that makes a case for functional linkages between cultural activity, inbound tourism and wider economic activity. This motivates a case-based investigation using Sarawak, a culturally rich state of Malaysia and which is currently trying to diversify and uplift its economy. Using interviews of tourism operators, artists and cultural brokers, visits to art venues and examination of documentary material, the paper identifies Sarawak's cultural and tourism policies, the ways they have been operationalized, and some of the concrete outcomes. The findings are interpreted by parsing Adorno's concepts of significance and function into their normative, representational and material dimensions. Tourism planners, it is found, have exoticized and marginalized local communities at the cost of developing a diversified economy. The policy dilemma extends to policy objects. How can artists relocated to urban areas be enabled to be productive on their own terms, and how can faraway communities lend support to their artists? Solutions might be sought, it is argued, using a participatory approach to cultural tourism planning.

1. Introduction

The creative industries, as most places routinely refer to their heritage and creative arts, are recognized as having appeal across socio-economic strata, and with that recognition has come economic and political significance. Many universities now offer qualifications in heritage and arts management, and scholarly interest has led to the *Creative Industries Journal* and thematic issues of *Urban Studies*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, and *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. Much of this attention has been directed to the putative potential for cultural projects and cultural activity per se to attract tourism, revitalize neglected urban areas and ameliorate social exclusion (Hall & Page, 2009). In un(der)developed places, however, linkages between tourism, cultural activity and economic/civic development are less well-known (De Beukelaer, 2015). This lacuna is disappointing, as the heritage and creative arts have managed to survive in many places that depend on a narrow range of economic activity and seek ways to broaden their economic bases (Sidaway, 2013). The first aim of this paper, then, is to explore linkages between tourism, cultural activity and development by seeking answers to the following question:

1. What aspects of policy are needed to foster functional linkages between inbound tourism, cultural activity, and wider economic and civic development?

In aspirational places such as Malaysia and newer members of the European Union, firm evidence has not emerged of a linkage between tourism, the heritage and creative arts, and development (Chou, 2013; Tang & Tan, 2013). Advocates have left unspecified both the policy objects (are they properly artists, communities, tourism operators, 'cultural entrepreneurs', developers?) and the value-sets involved (what is prioritized between 'heritage preservation', 'development', and 'the environment'?). This has led some to question if the cultural turn in tourism (Blackstock, 2005) and its potential for development are little more than marketization (Evans, 2005). Although answers to that particular question are likely to differ between particular instances (Robinson, 2011), it is a matter of observation that advocacy of a tourism/culture/development linkage is to be found most often couched in the instrumental language of commerce. Illustration is provided by UNESCO's *Creative Economy Report* (UNESCO, 2013), which uses terms such as "cultural value chains", "human resources" and "management of assets" borrowed from commercial arenas. It is also probable that there exists a gap in knowledge of local participation in policy (Gilmore et al., 2019). The second aim of this paper, then, is to consider the following

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meso-level question:

2. What models can be used to facilitate involvement of artists, performers and host communities in tourism policy design?

The investigation relies on a comprehensive case. Justification for a case approach is found in De Beukelaer (2015) and Mulcahy (2006), each calling for in-depth, lengthy, exploratory studies in developing regions in which researchers may have immersed themselves. The research conducted for this paper identifies extant and potential cultural tourism development in the city of Miri, in Malaysian Borneo. Located close to Brunei and dubbed unceremoniously an oil city, Miri is also recognized as the centre of a region in which some twenty languages, most of them original to the region, are spoken and in which a variety of original arts is practiced. Fig. 1 below shows the area of interest.

The paper identifies tourism activity in Sarawak, the factors shaping its cultural and tourism policies, the impacts on policy objects such as artists, the outputs of those policies in terms of arts production and tourism activity in the state, and specifications for a permanent all-weather arts venue in the region. Five sections take up the remainder of this paper. Section 2 presents a review of the literature on a form of development that has been associated speculatively with tourism and artistic activity. Section 3 defines analytical concepts relied on in the fieldwork and outlines the theoretical orientation and approach to data

collection. Section 4 presents the findings and Section 5 is used to discuss the findings. Section 6 is used to conclude.

2. Literature review

The organization of culturally themed homestays in the highlands of Sarawak, in Malaysian Borneo, where local communities have been able to survive, has been cited as an exemplar of linkages between tourism, culture and development (Harris, 2009). Functional linkages in this context, however, are of little surprise. It can be expected that any economic activity managed by communities in remote, lightly populated areas would be welcomed. Such examples do not belong to urban environments, where any development (or de-industrialization) is contextualized by complex and fast-moving interactions of finance, labour, and information (Sassen, 2002). A development strategy associated with heritage and creative activity, particularly in places experiencing increasing levels of internal migration, will require parsing between urban and rural areas if policy is to work for diverse social groups (Miles, 2005).

The notion that cultural policy can articulate with localized civic and economic development priorities first came to light with establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1946, when cultural policies began to be formulated as ‘development’ policies. Cities have since enthusiastically promoted the use of culture-

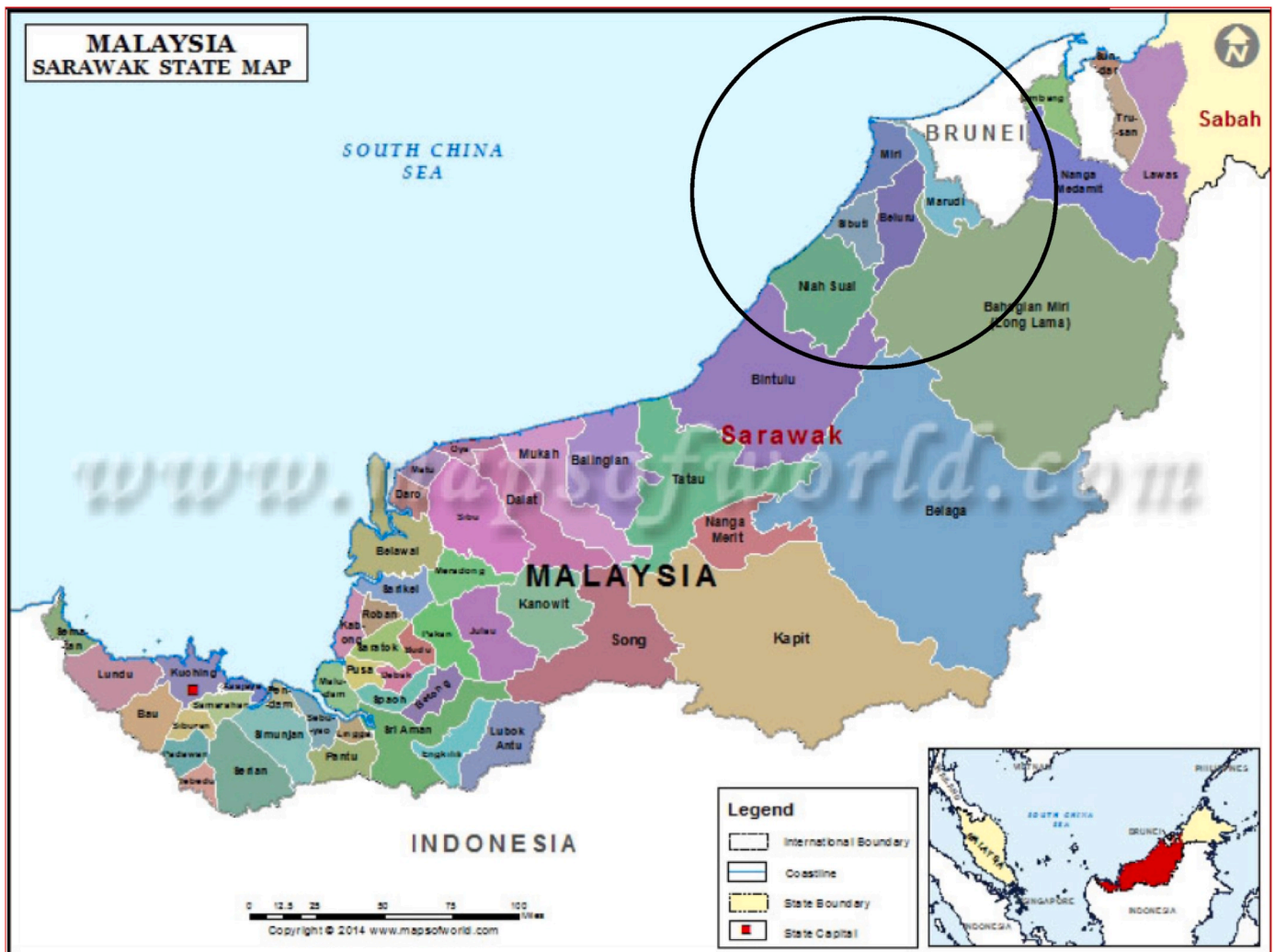


Fig. 1. Sarawak state map. Retrieved at: <https://www.mapsofworld.com/malaysia/states/sarawak-map.html>. Administrative divisions of Sarawak are shown. The circle shown contains the approximate area of interest, excluding the double-enclave of politically independent Brunei, which appears in white.

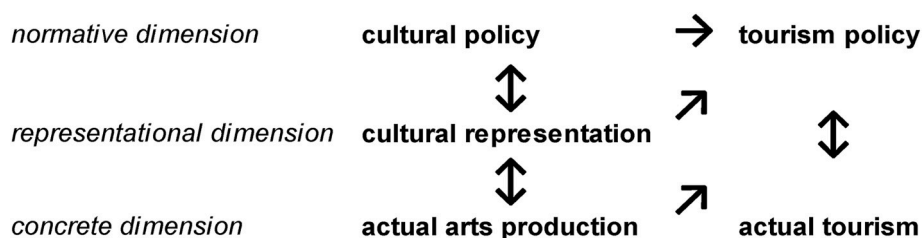


Fig. 2. Research approach.

driven strategies to displace rival regional cities for tourism dollars and to address problems such as neglected urban areas and social exclusion, while places such as Singapore, and Burkina Faso in Africa, have treated the proliferation of their crafts and arts as markers of their economic development and status (De Beukelaer, 2015). Knowledge of ways that tourism and cultural policies can articulate with local economic conditions is not helped, however, by the quality of evidence on development and cultural projects. Nor is understanding facilitated by the pervasive use of assessment techniques borrowed from unrelated fields (Evans, 2005). That relative absence of knowledge is exacerbated by operational risks existing in places which seek to enter the global economy. Places that become more closely linked to the global economy than to their local economies are likely to promote only that which they consider 'export-grade' (Sassen, 2002), leading to a distinct possibility that localized artists and performers that play no part in national aspirations will be abandoned. It is not so surprising, then, that research on combination of tourism, development and cultural policy-planning is marked by its relegation to the outskirts of each of those fields (Sidaway, 2013; Miles, 2005; Yea, 2003).

The next section is used to define important definitional concepts, describe the theoretical orientation, and outline the design of the fieldwork.

3. Approach

3.1. Definitional concepts and theoretical orientation

Cultural policy has been understood as a process of social change whereby a population is enabled to participate in artistic production and consumption of its cultural heritage preserved in museums, libraries and archives, maintained in botanic gardens and national parks and reserves, and expressed in the visual, literary and performing arts. While the scope of cultural policy might extend to activities usually thought of as popular entertainments such as folklore, "country" music, folk dancing, and crafts (Mulcahy, 2006), artforms such as popular music and movies that cannot be meaningfully associated with cultural value/s are, in the usual case, excluded (UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development, 2016). In a world given to creating material wealth rather than cultural value, attention also needs to be directed to policy conceptions that mask systematic differences in access to educational, administrative and financial resources. Cultural policy is understood in this paper, then, to refer to

a process of social change involving a heterogeneous set of individuals and organizations engaged in the education, production, presentation, distribution, preservation and consumption of heritage objects, creative arts, and associated activities and products, within the political, economic and social institutions that might foster or marginalize such activities.

The scope of this definition includes complexities such as training and education, management expertise, attendant cultural infrastructure (Miles, 2005), distinct sets of 'interests' vested in projects, and - critically - the distance between policy setters and policy objects.

For its theoretical orientation, this paper relies on Theodor Adorno's

insights into the interrelations of art and society, if extended to the interrelations of tourism, artistic culture and economic development. When Adorno wrote on the twentieth-century 'culture industry', he argued that the import of art - if crudely put, the significance or subjective value that viewers place on their enjoyment of art - is enmeshed with the economic activity that typically surrounds art. This is what Adorno understood as art's social function (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002:94). While this does not mean that we need the Frankfurt School to understand how tourism policy gets made, Adorno's concepts of import and function offer a useful schematic model and a way of situating policy planning within a larger context of meaning. Following Paddison (1993: 317), the term 'schematic model' is used here in the general sense of representing a methodology such that it becomes possible to identify the terms and map the relations between them. The aim of any such approach is to reveal patterns through limiting the scope of the investigation at any particular stage.

Adorno argued that to understand artworks, import (*Gehalt*), which refers to art's significance, and *Funktion*, which refers to art's social function, need to be understood in terms of each other. Justification, for Adorno, is empirical observation that society arranges creative activity and economic activity in such a way that both require the other. Cultural tourism, like art, gives rise to subjective experiences that are delivered by a set of commercial activities. Tourists might believe that they are enjoying art for its own sake as they experience a beautiful musical performance in a distant place, yet that experience is mediated by a sequence of prior commercial transactions and social activities. The quality of the performance, too, did not simply arrive but was produced by the acquisition of technical skills and a "handed-down, historically changing set of [...] conventions, now social property" (Paddison, 1993: 185). The significance of cultural tourism, in short, reflects its social function.

This speculative line of thinking finds parallels in Putnam (2015), who argues that research on policy needs to identify the connections between the representational dimension (or what is given as policy) and the concrete dimension (what is delivered as policy), an argument which this paper accepts as sensible. In situated research on messy practices such as tourism and cultural activity, it would also seem sensible to parse the representational dimension between the normative (what is said that *should* happen) and what is *represented* as happening. Accordingly, this paper adopts a normative/represented/concrete structure as the basis for a taxonomy used to identify, in a specific region of Southeast Asia, the interactions between tourism policy, cultural policy, and development priorities.

Figure 2 below schematizes the approach. The arrow-headed lines in Fig. 2 denote the broadest (but not the only) interactions of interest. Relevant power relations in Sarawak's political economy are identified by observing the differentials between public discourse and privately expressed discourse. Investigation includes effort to identify the presence of what Michel Foucault (1979: 135ff.) called a 'superdiscourse' - a way of understanding, representing and doing things which has become normalized across a population.

3.2. Fieldwork and other research activities

The fieldwork was enabled by the fact that the researcher worked for a period in a university in Malaysian Borneo, which afforded convenient access to all areas of the region and an available network of research contacts. One of the activities undertaken during this period was a twelve-month period of research motivated by public discussions that had been held in the city of Miri, in northern Sarawak, concerning the lack of an all-weather venue that could be used to exhibit art and crafts and stage cultural performances.

The fieldwork consists of a series of interviews and site visits. A referral method of informant selection was used, beginning with hotel operators, tour operators and event organizers in Miri, some of whom referred the researcher to local, regional and international artists, as well as to members of the city's chamber of commerce and the city council. In Kuching, the state's capital, the researcher approached the city council directly and was granted access to two of its archivists. Twenty-seven informants were accessed in four regions: northern and southern Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur (the Malaysian capital) and Singapore. Repeat interviews were made on four occasions. Of the twenty-seven informants, eighteen are female. Informants' demographic profiles at the time of fieldwork ranged from school-leavers employed as occasional musicians and dancers and full-time hotel workers, recent art school graduates, other performers and artists ranging between twenty-five and fifty years of age at the time of fieldwork, and late-career presidents of city chambers of commerce and cultural outreach officers attached to local councils.

Audio recordings were made and transcribed wherever informants granted permission, and notes taken during and immediately following fieldwork were recorded in journals that are kept by the researcher. A period of ten months was used to collect the primary data. The fieldwork is augmented by accessing the archives of the daily English-language newspapers *The Borneo Post* and *New Sarawak Tribune*, used to search for available records and histories of the visited sites, while desk research and direct inquiry were used to identify Sarawak's tourism practices, tourism policy, cultural policy and recent arts production.

Site visits were made to two tourist destinations in gazetted parks of northern Sarawak as well as twenty-one social history museums in Malaysia, Singapore and England, selection of which was made on a basis that their collections include items from northern Sarawak.

Relevant organizations and activities with which the informants were associated are mentioned in Table 1 below.

The next section is used to present the findings. Five subsections are used for the purpose: respectively, description of the local tourism economy; assessment of relevant tourism and cultural policy-making; interview data; a survey of local cultural arts production; and attempt to sketch the specifications for a permanent arts venue.

4. Findings

4.1. The tourism economy

Historical and more recent material that has issued from Sarawak's Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports, the Malaysian agency charged with tourism policy in that state, contains claims that tourism policy is directed to economic uplift to economic activity and that cultural proliferation is an essential part of tourism policy.¹ Economic diversification certainly has never been more important for Sarawak, currently suffering from a protracted slump in the extractive industries on which its economy depends. Northern Sarawak (consisting

¹ Retrieved at: <https://mtacys.sarawak.gov.my/page-0-269-52-vision-mission.html>, and <https://web.archive.org/web/20151231053701/http://www.newsarawaktribune.com/news/13258/preserve-traditional-culture-for-prosperity-ibans-urged>.

Table 1

Sites – England
Brunei Gallery, London (9) ^a
Horniman Gardens, London (2)
Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge (1)
Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (3)
Sites – Singapore
Asian Civilisations Museum (3)
Colonial Heritage Garden (1)
National Gallery Singapore (4)
National Museum of Singapore (2)
Singapore Botanic Gardens Museum (2)
The Arts House (2)
Sites – Malaysia
Badan Warisan Malaysia (heritage collective), Kuala Lumpur (3)
Chinese History Museum, Kuching (1)
Islamic Arts Museum of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur (2)
National Museum of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur (1)
National Visual Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur (1)
Niah National Park Museum, Sarawak (1)
Petroleum Science Museum Sarawak, Miri (3)
Sarawak Cultural Village (1)
Sarawak Museum of Ethnology, Kuching (2)
National Textile Museum, Kuala Lumpur (2)
Textile Museum Sarawak, Kuching (2)
Informants
Performing musicians and dancers, artists and art administrators based in Miri (northern Sarawak), Kuching (southern Sarawak), Kuala Lumpur and Singapore
Hotel and tourism operators in Miri and Mulu (latter a World Heritage tourist destination in northern Sarawak)
Officers in Miri City Council Local Agenda 21 (sustainability) and public relations sections, and the then-president of Miri Chamber of Commerce
Organizers of Bario & Kelabit Highlands Food & Cultural Festival, Asia Music Festival, and Miri Country Music Fest, all staged regularly in northern Sarawak

^a Numbers in parentheses indicate number of visits by the researcher.

of Miri and Limbang Divisions), a linguistically, ethnically, and religiously diverse area the size of Belgium, holds nearly one-fifth of Sarawak's 2.4 million population (2010 population, 451,132).² The pattern of tourist visits to northern Sarawak suggests that any effort to promote tourism by way of its heritage and creative arts should be directed at nearby Brunei and at western Malaysia lying across the South China (see Fig. 1 above). The northern parts of Sarawak receive a substantial proportion of incoming tourism from the rest of Malaysia and neighbouring Brunei, and a minority of the region's population is engaged in a small hospitality sector.³ Sarawak's Ministry of Tourism records 4.5 million inbound visits to the whole of Sarawak in 2015, representing a slight decrease from 2005. If assuming that visitors from The Philippines and Indonesia are not tourists (most arrivals from those places are associated with the oil and gas industries), the number of tourist arrivals in 2015 was just under 3.9 million. Just over two million of those visits arrived from elsewhere in Malaysia, and a further 1.85 million visits can be attributed to a weekly exodus of visitors from Brunei.⁴ Hotel and hospitality operators in the city of Miri would be very familiar with the weekend influx of Bruneians and expatriates making the short road trip

² Retrieved at: <https://www.sarawak.gov.my>.

³ Northern Sarawak is engaged in the main in four economic activities: swidden agriculture, plantation agriculture, oil and gas extraction, and the timber industry, currently being phased out and replaced by urban property development.

⁴ Retrieved at: http://www.mtac.sarawak.gov.my/upload/file_folder/2005.pdf (2005 figures), and http://www.mtac.sarawak.gov.my/upload/file_folder/va2015.pdf (2015 figures). Visitors arriving from other countries rarely fly directly into Miri due to a long-standing arrangement that Sarawak's southern capital of Kuching receive all international visitors to the state.

in order to enjoy the relaxed licensing laws of Malaysia.

4.2. Tourism policy and cultural policy

In Sarawak, as in most parts of Malaysia outside its capital, policy direction for the arts remains in a state of flux (Weiss and Puyok, 2017: 12). Claims from Sarawak's government that cultural tourism can generate desirable forms of economic activity can be assessed against a backdrop that the performing arts have been reserved for remote, relatively inaccessible areas, sanitized cultural camps placed near urban areas, and temporary venues in cities and towns used to stage music and craft festivals.⁵ A swathe of policies, including those of tourism, culture and development, is shaped by the pattern of land titling in Sarawak. The Native Customary Land category created by the felling of primary forest in Sarawak did not lead, as had been expected, to the replacement of Sarawak's former subsistence economy by the plantation sector.⁶ The importation of cheap labour from neighbouring Philippines and Indonesia in order to remove primary forest was disastrous, with rural areas experiencing sudden homelessness and high levels of unemployment (Ngidang, 2003), and with many of those of working age forced to leave, often with their families, in search of employment in distant places.

A further aspect of land-titling bearing on heritage and artistic activity is the long-held right of political office in Sarawak to allocate and reserve the use of land for the most productive purposes. In the execution of this right, the government has passively encouraged artistic activity from rural community longhouses to the extent that it is seen as posing no threat to the definition and disposition of land and forest (Bulan, 2008), while directing tourism revenues to the enjoyment of biodiversity and the 'great outdoors'. Although instances do exist in Sarawak of successful tourism-related exploitation of heritage (Harris, 2009; Yea, 2003), land-titling has wrought deleterious effects on music and oral traditions (Hai, 2013) without redress from either the state or developers (in Sarawak, the two are often not far apart).

That substantial funding for development outside of Malaysia's capital cities has not occurred is plainly evident in Sarawak.⁷ In its southern capital of Kuching, only one permanent indoor performing arts facility has ever existed and at the time of writing is not used for purpose. A desk survey of marketing material from 2015 to 2018 confirms Hon's (1989) finding from thirty years ago that the state's rulers have preferred to emphasize the anthropological aspects of Sarawak's heritage arts over their artistic values. Preference for anthropological aspects is reflected performatively, linguistically and visually throughout Sarawak. Examples of each are given here.

- i) Sarawak Cultural Village, the cultural theme park located in the extreme south of Sarawak, stages scheduled dance and music events loosely based on the heritage arts of various original communities (including the Malay and the Chinese). The dominant discourse in 'the Village' is one of exoticization. Performative illustration is supplied by the routine use of *Orang Ulu* ('outside peoples') masks in mock-rituals and celebrations. The lack of variation in the daily

performance schedule of the Village, the use of actors to perform some of the stagings, and the routine prevention of opportunity for meaningful interaction between tourists and performers are performative aspects of the "public heritage discourse" that Smith (2006: 29) sees as naturalizing the status of the indigenous as outsider.

- ii) An exoticization discourse can be found in the government-issued document *The Guide to Sarawak: Essential Information for Business and Pleasure in the Heart of South-East Asia 2015*.² Three extracts are selected as illustration:

'Age-old dances are as exotic and as colourful as the costumes the dancers wear. [...]

Sarawak is fortunate to possess an amazing treasure trove of artists. [...]

The Rainforest World Crafts Bazaar offers a colourful feast for the eye.'

- iii) A further illustration of exoticization is supplied in visual form. Sarawak Tourism Board, the marketing arm of the Ministry of Tourism, makes its annual guides freely available at outlets across the state's cities and towns. Recent issues have used an identical cover. The cover of Sarawak Visitor's Guide 2015 appears as Fig. 3 below. The reader is invited to reflect on the possible significance of contiguous head shots of a proboscis monkey and an elder Sarawakian citizen in ceremonial dress. One might easily

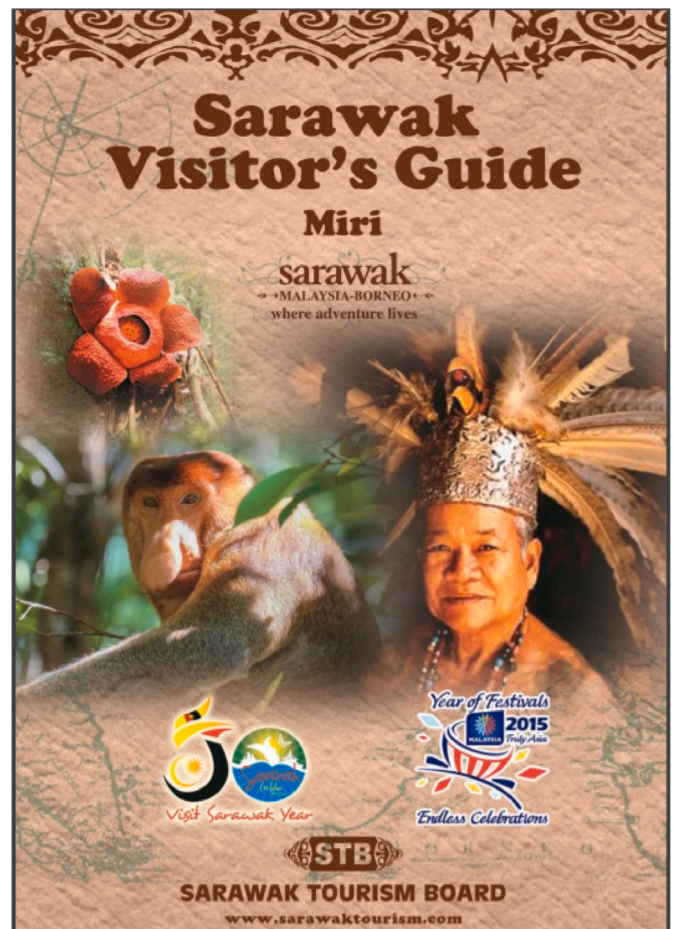


Fig. 3. Sarawak's exoticized public image. Retrieved at: sarawaktourism.com/v2/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/sarawak-visitor-guide-miri.pdf.

⁵ Retrieved at: <https://mtacys.sarawak.gov.my/page-0-269-52-vision-mission.html>. For other instances, see, footnote 4 above.

⁶ Sarawak Land Code 1958, clauses 5(1) and (2) (retrieved at: <https://landportal.org>) dispenses with the previous 'native' customary rights of ownership, possession and use.

⁷ Although Malaysia has included heritage and creative arts development as a priority area of its Economic Transformation Programme to 2020, the main facilities that exist in Malaysia for supporting the arts (Tourism Development Infrastructure Fund, Special Tourism Fund, Culture Assistance and Arts Guidance Schemes) are not intended for economic development. Retrieved at: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/malaysia_prime_minister_shares_development_vision.

understand both images as connoting Sarawak's wonderful biodiversity (sic).

If Sakai (2010) is accurate in arguing that designation of 'traditional' performers as *exotica* represents attempt to circumscribe the opportunities for unmanaged collective sentiment in the politically unruly state of Sarawak, it is likely that Sarawak's tourism policy – sanitized, spectacularized – can be accurately characterized as a 'superdiscourse'. This can be put to the test.

Foucault (1970: *passim*) characterizes a superdiscourse as *the presence of two or more mutually supportive discourses, each entangled so as to be not easily identifiable on its own, that work to benefit some groups and not others*. The three types of discourse supplied above – performative, linguistic and visual – contain overlapping connotations of exoticization and ethno-centrism. Such material can be read as a celebration of the dominant economic/political power bloc in Sarawak and the mechanisms by which it has sought to control communities in the state (Muzaini, 2017; Ngu, 2017). The first part of the definition of a superdiscourse, then, appears to be satisfied.

In other part, differential access to resources is characteristic of non-Malay groups in Sarawak relative to the close-knit oligopoly of political and economic interests that has governed Sarawak since its cession in 1963 from post-war British colonial rule (Hai, 2013). The second part of Foucault's definition of a superdiscourse, then, also appears to be satisfied. On this basis, it can be concluded that Sarawak's tourism policy constitutes a superdiscourse. The point of this analytical effort is to show that the state's rulers, by promoting indigenous communities as spectacle while not directing funds to capital projects, have constrained the capacities of their communities to meet tourism supply on their own terms.

4.3. Informants' views on Sarawak's cultural policy

A sense of having been marginalized and abandoned by policy makers is discernable in the interview data obtained. An artist based in Sarawak's northern city of Miri was asked if and how the city council, the state government or the local chamber of commerce had provided resources to local artists. The informant, who had exhibited his paintings on the walls of a late-closing restaurant (constituting his principal economic activity) located off the highway that leads out of Miri to Brunei, expressed in urgent terms that he and other artists in his "community" needed people to advocate on their behalf, even pointing to the researcher in that regard. The following extract indicates his sense of abandonment.

*You are Western [pointing at the researcher] and you live here. You can speak to the Tun about an art gallery in Miri. We have spoken to the Tun already but he will listen to you. He will understand, he is an artist himself, his background is in art. Go and talk to the Tun in Kuching.*⁸

Another informant worked in a luxury hotel located close by a national park and popular tourist destination in northern Sarawak. The daughter of a village headman from the nearby uplands, she had been trained in the ceremonial music traditions and heritage crafts of her longhouse-based community. She described her assessment of her employment prospects.

All my brothers went into the oil and gas sector and have done alright, so I had to try really hard to convince my parents that I wanted to work in hospitality. I love our music and traditions of course but there's no work in music. No one wants to do that.

⁸ The honorific title Tun is used in Malaysia to designate those holding the highest office of state. The reference in point is to Sarawak's then-chief minister.

It is hardly surprising that the informant giving the extract immediately above had overlooked the arts as her choice of career. There are no educational facilities on the island of Borneo that offer programmes in the performing arts. Nor has there been organization of teaching programmes on Sarawak's music and oral traditions.

Some informants were frustrated that opportunities to exhibit and perform to a continuing stream of visitors had not been utilized. A tour organizer operating from leased premises in Miri's largest hotel explained the local tourist scene.

People that come here have to be taken straight away to other places – Niah, Mulu [nearby gazetted national parks] or Brunei – before they disappear to places like Bario [a homestay site in rural uplands northern Sarawak, accessible by air from Miri]. There's nothing to keep people here when they visit. People [locals] can't perform in tourist shops.

Miri's designated community arts centre (under redevelopment at the time this research was conducted) is a converted hall offering a small café and a series of retail stalls stocked with wood carvings, beadwork and other items intended for the tourist market. On enquiry of the building management, a large stage in the hall had never been used for music or oral performance.

An artist selling his work from a leased shop in the nearby grounds of Miri City Library expressed resignation in regard to his prospects.

I'm lucky. I've been here a long time and I could apply for this space from the Council. But I can never do anything else, and I don't have the space to exhibit other artists. This is it. If you like my pictures, you can buy some and tell people to send me an email when you go back home.

Informants recognized but resisted an exoticization/ethno-centric discourse operative in places like Sarawak Cultural Village (discussed already in a section above) and semi-regular music festivals dotted around the state. Such resistance is identified in comments such as

"I'm creative not a relic",

in the words of a working artist (self-described) based in Kuching, and

"We know what we want to do, we want to be out there", from another artist living in Miri. On probing, the latter informant was referring to a hoped-for civic space in which he and others might pursue and exhibit their work.

A certain level of pessimism – identified in interview data from informants in northern Sarawak – contrasts with upbeat, albeit cautious, attitudes of informants based in Kuching, the state's southern capital. One informant showed the researcher around an array of artists' stalls and studios ranged inside a converted courthouse in Kuching, commenting as follows:

We don't know how long we can continue here. There's no real rent [charged for the premises]. If a developer comes, and it's happened in other places we've been in, we might have to go. This is the best place we've been in. We can show lots of art. There's a café. There's space. We had an artist here visiting from Australia. He made a whole series of paintings on cats when he was here. But it might not always be like this.

The informant's apprehension came to be realized. Following the date of fieldwork, it was noted that the artists' studios referred to immediately above had been dismantled following a city council decision to use the space as a conference and tourist facility. Despite such setbacks, Kuching's art scene has attracted attention in this part of the world. For instance, the administrators of an artists' collective in Singapore, visited by the researcher following the date of the Kuching fieldwork, were aware of and curious as to the activities of artists in Kuching.

A finding common to the informants is a view that generating income from artistic activity, for so long as one is confined to Sarawak, is

precarious and difficult. An instance is illustrative. One informant worked independently on Kuching's Waterfront Bazaar on the Sarawak River, singing and playing traditional songs on his *sape'* (a form of lute original to the island of Borneo) for tourists boarding river cruises, and attiring himself for the purpose in skimpy ritual clothing. This young man, a trained musician and warrior in his longhouse community, had travelled 800 kilometres south to Kuching on a promise of participation in an international cultural festival in Australia (which because of unspecified funding problems had not been realized). Since arriving in Kuching, the informant had supported himself by busking in what was to him distressing competition with the amplified pop music that routinely floods over Kuching's main tourist area. Saddened at how his prospects had panned out, he consoled himself by wiring money occasionally to his family back in his longhouse community.

The next section is used to assess the ways in which cultural policy operative in Sarawak has been reflected in artistic activity in the state.

4.4. Arts production in Sarawak

The artistic output of communities in Sarawak has been successful in international competitions and has attracted the attention of expert scholarly institutions in Europe and America. Notable examples are Sarawak's entries in the "World Eco Fiber & Textile Art Exhibition", 2013, which showcased Malaysian textiles traditions and contemporary work, and the prizewinning Sarawak entry in the "World Ikat Textiles ... ties that bind" exhibition, 2016. An image of Sarawak's Ibanic *pua kumbu* textile was used to advertise the latter exhibition and is given as Fig. 4 below.⁹

As well as being responsible for much of Sarawak's textile production, northern Sarawak hosts the music, dance and oral traditions of communities such as the Berawan, Bisaya, Iban, Lun Bawang, Kayan, Kelabit, Kenyah and P'nan, with significant contributions from the Chinese and Malay parts of the population. Notable examples are the aforementioned *sape'* (lute), the *agung* (gong) and the 36-member *lun ngiup suling* (flute and bass drum band) belonging to the Lun Bawang. While melodic singing or chanting can be present in some configurations, costumed dance tradition is a feature of most. *Tekná* (Kayanic ritual poetry) and various other oral traditions also persist in a few places. Northern Sarawak also has a rich history of anthropological photography beginning, perhaps, with District Officer Charles Hose's Victorian-era romantic photographic records of the region's original communities, extending today to Dennis Lau's ongoing visual chronicle of communities threatened by economic development in the interior parts. It is not reported if Sarawak's photographic production has ever been displayed to the public, although indications are that it has not (Chiarelli & Guntarik, 2013).

The prospects for continuance of such traditions are precarious. While isolated, now dated attempts have been made to notate the music traditions of a few communities¹⁰, comprehensive survey studies of northern Sarawak's music and oral traditions have not emerged, and given the current rate with which its art forms are disappearing (Wan et al., 2018), may never emerge. Current arrangements affording permanent, all-weather access to the performing and material arts in Sarawak consist of Sarawak Cultural Village established in Santubong, in

the extreme south of the state (discussed already above). Other than the Village, people may participate in the cultural arts by attending scheduled regional festivals of music and food, usually held outdoors, in the state's coastal cities and towns and a few far-flung rural areas accessible by small plane. Visitors have also arrived for international conferences on 'sustainable tourism' and 'adventure tourism' (see, as examples, World Tourism Organization, 2017, 2016, 2013).

A survey was made for this paper of Sarawak's heritage and creative arts events staged or exhibited to the public between 2008 and 2016. A summary appears below as Table 2.

The haphazard pattern of stagings suggested by Table 2 indicates that the exigencies demanded of a vibrant cultural tourism sector are not present in Sarawak. Stagings are not assured due to the absence of permanent for-purpose venues coupling with fickle environmental patterns, public health events, and political machinations in the state. The next section discusses the likely specifications for a permanent arts venue in Sarawak and models the expected level of associated continuing revenues.

4.5. Specifications for a permanent arts venue

Specifications were produced for a notional (hoped-for), permanent arts venue located in the city of Miri, Sarawak, in northwestern Borneo. Two main sources were used for the purpose: one, informants, who were asked for their 'ideal yet feasible' suggestions for a permanent arts venue; two, selected heritage centres, art galleries and museums in Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and England were visited in person by the researcher. The sites were selected on a basis that all held items from or relating to northern Sarawak. Details were recorded of the features of buildings and grounds, and provision of guided tours, curated exhibitions, programmed performances, education, children's areas, shops, restaurants and other facilities. (Also see, (De Beukelaer, 2015), (Grodach, 2010), (Pillai, 2014), (Harris, 2009), (Rowland, 2014).)

Specifications emerging from this exercise are for a covered, all-weather space located in or near the city's principal entertainment precinct, with drive-up road access and parking for cars and tourist coaches, containing at the minimum three spaces: i) a museum space, ii) another space used for static and temporary exhibitions and for hands-on activities such as the playing of musical instruments, and iii) a further seated, configurable space for use as cinema, rehearsal room, performance space and provision of planned education programmes, equipped with audio-visual production and screening facilities.

Additional ideal specifications are living quarters for conferred artists-in-residence charged with promoting the objectives of the centre during their stays, a specialist bookshop combining with a research library, a children's play area, and a restaurant whose menu reflects, in part, local food customs that relate to the showcased arts. One informant suggested provision of unpaid internships to local school children and school-leavers who would be supervised by conferred artists-in-residence.

Financial modelling effort is restricted to the continuing revenues that could be expected from such a venue. No attempt has been made to estimate the full cost as adjustments can be expected if discounted rates for any element were to become available.

If using an estimate based on data submitted by Miri's largest hotels to Sarawak's Ministry of Tourism in August 2016 (obtained by the researcher), a ticketed footfall of six hundred for a single weekend performance in Miri would seem immediately possible. If the individual charge for a single performance were thirty Malaysian ringgit, an estimate based on the full-price charge for a music performance event staged by the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra in September 2016, annualized revenues for such an enterprise could reach two million ringgit (approximately USD 500,000). These projections are given support by the size of receipts from individual tourist visits to Miri, averaging at 700 USD according to industry return data (2017) obtained for this research.

⁹ Both exhibitions were held at the Brunei Gallery, University of London. The Iban accounts for about a third of the state's population (records are not always accurate). *Ikat*, a dyeing technique applied to pattern textiles that employs a resist-dyeing process, similar to tie-dye, is practiced in places throughout Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas, where the textiles produced are recognized as symbols of prestige and status.

¹⁰ A literature review revealed Lin et al., 1998, Department of Sabah Museum and State Archives, 1992, Matusky & Hussein, 1991, and Rubenstein, 1973. Folklore and scraps of music notation also appear in the accounts of District Officers before 1939 and the pages of Sarawak Museum Journal.



Fig. 4. Bunge Embol pua kumbu. Retrieved at: soas.ac.uk/gallery/previous/world-ikat-textiles.

Table 2
Arts production in Sarawak 2008–2016

ART FORM	EVENT/ACT	VENUE
Craftwork	Occasional non-ticketed public events World Eco-Fibre and Textile Forum (biennial)	Retail outlets attached to various museums Sarawak Cultural Village, Kuching Society Atelier Sarawak (established 1986), Kuching
Body tattooing	International Tattoo Convention (annual since 2011)	Borneo Convention Centre, Kuching
Heritage music & dance	Borneo Cultural Festival (annual) Teochew Chinese Orchestra Pesta Babulung and Buffalo Race, Lawas (annual) Bisayah Gong Orchestra Rainforest World Music Festival (annual) Dayak Artistes and Musicians Association P. Ramlee Annual Singing Competition	Jong San Si Temple, Kuching Outdoor markets, town squares, shopping malls Sarawak Cultural Village, Santubong Shangyin Music Centre, Kuching Temporary stages in tourist hotels for private events Tua Pek Kong Temple, Kuching Auditorium P Ramlee, Kuching
Classical music	Radio and Television Sarawak Sarawak Music Society Simfoni Orkestra Negeri Sarawak	Public library, Kuching Television studios
Country & jazz music	Borneo Jazz Festival (annual since 2005) Country Music Fest (annual since 2002) Kuching Waterfront Jazz Festival	Hotel grounds, Miri
Contemporary art	Static and temporary non-commissioned exhibitions	Artists' premises, restaurants, shopping malls Sarawak Museum, Kuching The Old Court House, Kuching
Photography	Borneo International Salon of Photography (annual)	Sarawak Photo Arts Society (Facebook webpage)
Spoken word	Various cultural ceremonies	Private venues

Sources: *The Guide to Sarawak*, Sarawak Ministry of Tourism (2015); *The Borneo Post*; *New Sarawak Tribune*; informants.

If factoring in likely associated tourist revenues from meals and transportation, such an enterprise, offering only weekend performances but active during other times, might generate an increment of five to ten per cent of gross tourism revenues (2017) in Sarawak.¹¹

5. Discussion

The findings presented in the immediately preceding section suggest that the interaction of political will in Sarawak and strong affective connections maintained to communities in remote places have stymied cultural tourism activity in the state. This section uses two sub-sections to discuss the findings with respect to the interview data and operative policy models, respectively.

5.1. Informants' understandings of cultural policy

Informants understood Sarawak's cultural policy as restricting their abilities to co-ordinate among themselves, and as splitting a nascent cultural sector along ethnicity lines. The meaning (*Gehalt*) of cultural policy was understood as serving political ends (*Funktion*) that work against the proliferation of cultural tourism. This particular understanding had led to feelings of isolation, exasperation and resentment.

While all informants looked for more support from the state, it was observed that informants based in Kuching were quietly confident and appeared, relative to those based in the northern parts of the state, more 'in control' (with one exception, which might be explained by the location of that informant's original community in northern Sarawak). Perhaps this finding can be attributed to an observation that some artists in Kuching had formed open communities used to seek ways to increase their participation in arts management, enhancing the significance (*Gehalt*) of their artistic production in their own terms. Art communities in Kuching appear to perform an important support role. The importance of affective (roughly, emotional) community for artists can be witnessed, in places such as Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, in the form of arts collectives that have leased physical premises, appointed administrators and gone on to design and stage various projects and public performances. Plainly, affective infrastructure is needed as much as physical spaces in which artists can work and display and perform their work.

Informants based outside Sarawak's capital city or whose home communities are located in rural regions had internalized their frustrations by caricaturing themselves, by producing cheap 'commercial' art

¹¹ Data retrieved at: <http://www.mtac.sarawak.gov.my>.

for the domestic tourist market or by turning to available sources of employment such as the hospitality sector. Such sublimated/repressed reactions to social realities highlight the oppositional character of cultural tourism. Adorno argued that aesthetic forces may temporarily dominate economic forces.

There are times when aesthetic forces of production are given completely free rein because the material ones, hemmed in as they are by existing relations of production, cannot be unleashed. (Adorno, 1997: 48)

It is equally likely that there are times when aesthetic forces are constrained by economic priorities.

There are historical moments in which forces of production emancipated in art represent a real emancipation that is impeded by the [material] relations of production. (Adorno, 1997: 42)

It is the latter situation, where economic priorities are given full rein, that conforms most closely to the sentiments and behaviours of the artists and performers who participated in this research.

All informants – Kelabit, Kayan, Visayan, Iban, Hakka Chinese and Malay – placed value on connections with their home communities. For some, such as hotel workers required by their employers to perform dances for commercial functions, authentic performance could only take place in their home communities. Heritage music and dance performed in urban areas constituted little more than an employment function for the performer and an economic function for the employer. In a region where in declared holiday periods hotels and offices are routinely evacuated of workers headed to their longhouses in rural areas, the force of connection to community presents a challenge for wider organized cultural activity.

At this point, political will for development of a self-sustaining heritage and creative arts sector deserves mention. The next section is used to discuss the ways that policy-building might proceed.

5.2. Policy-building models

The findings presented in a section above suggest variation between the significance and functions of policy planning. At the representative dimension (*Gehalt*), cultural arbiters in Sarawak have claimed that tourism policy is directed to economic diversification and seeks to promote cultural proliferation. The concrete dimension suggests a very different state of affairs. Sarawak's economy remains wedded to agriculture, resource extraction and ambit property development, and all-weather arts venues in the state are conspicuous by their absence. Most visitors to Sarawak seek no more than a short break from the working week, with a minority arriving for adventure holidays spent in national parks. Adorno wrote that “*all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly ... Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art*” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002: 94). Adorno's perception of mass culture would be shared by many today. The deep appeal of cultural tourism is surely an escape from mass culture to authentic experience (or seemingly authentic), which is unlikely to be found in cultural camps where city locals perform to recorded music. The *Funktion* of Sarawak's tourism policy, it would seem, currently resides in building capacity to secure World Heritage status for more of the state's national parks, music performance traditions and the like.

Two models of policy creation, often seen as binary alternatives, are proffered for consideration. The principal difference between the two models inheres in the ways policy is created in each.

A *top-down, centre-periphery model* would see policy set by parties who in the usual case can be distinguished from policy objects. A top-down model is used in Norway, a large, sparsely populated nation with its cultural institutions concentrated in Oslo, the capital and largest city. With public subsidies, these national institutions have extensive touring programs to bring symphonic music, opera, ballet, and theatre to

the remotest regions of the nation and to culturally under-served areas within cities (Mulcahy, 2006). A top-down model is used to direct the activities of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, Malaysia's leading cultural institution, which, according to the MPO's own records, visited regional Malaysia twenty times between 1998 and 2016. Of those visits, none took place in a dedicated, permanent arts venue. As it is only in the federal capital that the educational institutions required to support the full range of arts are to be found in Malaysia, a top-down model is unlikely to have much more success than already achieved; in a general sense, see, further, (Wang and Ap (2013)).

A *participatory policy model* offers opportunity exactly where its alternative does not. In a participatory model, there being “no curatorial hand or check at work assessing the importance or correctness of [members'] contributions” (Long & Collins, 2012: 155), policy is created and agreed by the policy objects themselves. The political economy of such as Sarawak, discussed already in several places above, suggests the potential of a participatory approach. Pillai (2014: 9-32) demonstrates that community-initiated capital works and artistic programmes can be successfully delivered in Malaysia. Precedent also exists from Sarawak's post-war colonial era. The effort of the Community Development Projects of 1953 to create cooperatives, training schemes and innovative forms of project financing transformed a series of longhouse communities for an entire decade (Ngidang et al., 2000: 23-25).

A participatory policy model is destined to impact artists and artists' communities. Derek Freeman (Freeman, 1975) underlined the importance of autochthony (the connection between physical place and the spiritual world) when he studied the *Iban Lemanak* in Sarawak's southern lowlands in the 1960s and 1970s. Autochthonous value in Sarawak's rural communities is maintained mundanely by the daily rice meal (Janowski, 2014), the interiors of longhouses of a morning where the community decides how to be guided by dreams (Janowski, 2007) and by church and mosque meetings. When the maintenance of a sense of self requires mobilization of such as dream communications, how can artists, once located in urban areas, be enabled to be productive on their own terms, and how can communities lend support to their artists? Consider too that artists based in urban environments in places like Sarawak face extended separation from their communities located in relatively inaccessible places. How then can music, dance, craft and oral tradition practices in such places be expected to survive?

These questions relate to the paper's second line of enquiry on the participation of artists and host communities in policy creation. Answers might be found in spaces reserved for producing and teaching arts and crafts (Wang and Ap, 2013). Artists and communities involved in city- and town-based projects might fruitfully use innovative forms of networking in order to avoid affective loss experienced by physical separation (as reported in a section above). Reserved space for artistic activity becomes reserved *networked* space, reflected in its ideal in collaborations, learning and teaching opportunities, the embrace of food, video hook-ups with longhouse communities, and innovative use of collaborative online tools. At the time of this research, such a space in the city of Miri consisted of a busy lunchtime restaurant serving uplands rice meals. Specifications for a prospective venue can be found in a section above. Artists and heritage custodians will need to mobilize among themselves if it is hoped that a participatory model can be used to channel the affective attachments and cultural antipathies of diverse communities. Support networks are likely to be valued as artists broker their artistic production and find their place in regional cultural circuits.

6. Concluding remarks

The research presented above has highlighted in a particular setting the interactions between cultural activity, tourism policy, and organized attempt to generate wider economic activity. This effort, in the author's modest estimation, can be considered novel and significant for several reasons. The case-based findings address an absence of evidence on tourism-associated re/generation in developing places, evidence which

is needed given the literature that argues for putative linkages between cultural activity, tourism and wider economic activity (Grodach, 2010). The findings also widen case-based research on relatively un(der) developed regions, which has been concerned in the main with social problems such as displacement, loss of communal values and relative access to education (Cramb & Sujang, 2013, among others).

The findings provide evidence needed to support Miles's (2005) argument that a development strategy predicated on cultural tourism requires parsing between urban and rural areas. Support networks for Sarawak's indigenous artists tend to be found only in rural areas, and development strategy may need to direct resources accordingly. In this respect, it is hoped that the paper advances the literature on the often-difficult balance in developing places like Malaysia between post-industrial career advancement and affective values placed on communal aspects such as kinship and cosmology (Janowski, 2014).

For policy makers, tour operators and cultural producers (artists, writers and performers), promotion of a participatory policy-building model may hold potential. One of possibly several caveats to a participatory policy model is that the political/business bloc holding sway in places like Sarawak is likely to be reluctant to support a policy that funnels economic returns directly into local communities, especially, in the case of Sarawak, non-Malay communities. It is harmony, not empowerment, that is sought in Sarawak's cultural policy. Capital funding sources are also not assured in Sarawak. It can be expected that longhouse communities (commonplace sites of heritage and creative art production in Sarawak) would be unwilling to expend precious financial resources on lengthy stays in distant places. In that regard, endowment funds, 'impact investments' (carrying requirement for return of funds), and tailored lines of credit made available to visiting artists might all be attempted.

In closing, tourism, artistic activity and development are complex, uncertain sets of activities prone to interruption, yet the scale of changes required for a population to increase the level of its participation in any of these areas requires that policy priorities and public support coalesce over a lengthy period of time. This observation justifies a call for further research that identifies the efforts of cultural producers to build coalitions with tourism operators, cultural arbiters, financiers and non-profit institutions, and that identifies the ways that artists and performers identify the success of their objectives. In this context, research in the same or similar locales might be attempted.

Contribution

Matthew Haigh is the sole author of this paper and is responsible for all aspects, including the methodological design, data collection and analysis.

Impact statement

This research seeks to confirm or disconfirm claims found in the literatures of tourism planning, urban studies and development studies that meaningful linkages exist between localized cultural activity, in-bound tourism and wider economic activity. A case is used to investigate if cultural activity can be organized so as to diversify local economies. Sarawak, a culturally rich state of Malaysia yet with an extremely narrow economic base, is currently trying to uplift its economy. It is found that a top-down policy model stymies the efforts of local communities to develop the cultural arts. A participatory policy is suggested as replacement. In line with the paper's aim to find ways to empower local communities, data are obtained from a wide range of stakeholders: tourism operators, artists, cultural brokers, financiers, and policy makers. The fieldwork design and mixed methods deployed provide a template for future research in similar locales.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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