

**STRUCTURED PLANNING:
PILOT STUDY ON CULTURE CONSERVATION PLAN
FOR THE KADAZANDUSUN IN A MODERNISING SOCIETY**



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5.3 Introduction

Sabah is located at the northeast corner of Borneo, and was always known in ancient times as the “Land Below The Wind” because of its geographic position below the typhoon belt. It is the second largest state in Malaysia with current population of 2,449,389 according to Housing Census of Malaysia. The population is mainly concentrated on coastal areas of which is divided into 32 officially recognized ethnic groups. of Sabah’s population. The largest indigenous ethnic group is the Kadazan- Dusun (roughly 25% of the total population); followed by the Bajau (15%), and the Murut (3%). The largest non-indigenous group are the Chinese, who make up for about 20% of Sabah’s population. The number of languages listed for Sabah is 54. Of those, all are living languages and Current literacy rate is at 58%.

Sabah’s economy used to be heavily dependent on timber export, but with the depletion of this natural resource and policies to save the rainforest in order to exploit it on a sustainable concentration is now on palm oil and the prosperous tourism industry. Other native products include rubber and cacao.

The largest indigenous group, the Kadazandusun live primarily on the west coast (closer to main city) and in the interior region. The tradition and cultures are the back bone of the tribe, contributing to 80% of the tourism industry and the life in Sabah. Traditionally cultivators of rice, their ritual celebrations revolved around the rice cycle. These rituals, including the most important event of the year, the Harvest Festival or Pesta Ka’amatan, are presided over by priestesses, generally known as bobohizan. These women conduct complex rituals complete with lengthy chants in an archaic language, passed down by word of mouth over generations. This is one of the rich traditions that are stil celebrated today but with one aspect less of the actual culture as the New Year comes. Many Kadazandusun (like Sabah’s other ethnic groups), can be found in all walks of life working in and abroad leaving behind the tradition to the elders. The rice/padi fields are left barren or substituted with buildings and development.

The impact on growing economy is very strong that no empty land within the city area is left undeveloped. As land prices increases, older generations are selling their land because the young have left them to seek work elsewhere. The impact on the culture in Sabah is slowly visible as new technology and modernization starts to dominate everyday life. The balance between preservation of culture and modernized lifestyle is highly imbalanced, leaning heavily towards the latter. The few organizations who are working hard to keep the culture rich and alive are all business driven, mainly private owners of tourism groups. The cultures that are kept alive are on surface level and mostly meant for show and is not preserved with goals for its longevity. At the fast pace of current life, more than half of the cultural roots today will deteriorate and lost before it is passed on to the next generation.