

Commentary Paper

Sarawak's Vision of Borneo's Legacy Capital for Business Events

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*Legacy-building, Sustainable Development Goals,
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Research Note

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the intricate idea of "legacy" within the context of business events, highlighting its importance not just for individual events, but also for the lasting influence of an organization. Drawing insights from a study by Schot et al., (2023), and more recent critical voices (Lancaster, 2023; Latham, 2023) it underscores the importance of aligning associations' missions with destinations' marketing strategies. The role of destinations as enablers in the legacy-building process is highlighted, with a call to prioritize legacy discussions within associations. The article further explores Sarawak's vision of becoming Borneo's Legacy capital for business events, detailing legacy impact approaches in Copenhagen and Vancouver. Business Events Sarawak's (BESarawak) commitment to fostering legacies is showcased through the BESLegacy framework, which aligns with Sarawak's key areas and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Instruments like the Anak Sarawak Award and the Legacy Ambassador Programme are highlighted as tangible tools for recognizing legacy impacts. The article concludes with case studies of significant conferences and the contributions of individuals emphasizing the broader impacts of business events in Sarawak.

KEYWORDS

Legacy-building, Sustainable Development Goals, Anak Sarawak Award, Legacy Ambassador

Introduction

The concept of “legacy” in the context of business events is multifaceted and often open to interpretation. In a thought-provoking article titled “How to Define (Your) Legacy?” by Schot et al., (2023), they intricately examine the underlying complexities that essentially define a legacy. They astutely point out that while events can act as potent instruments for instigating change and laying the groundwork for future triumphs, the essence of a genuine legacy is rooted in the organization itself. It is a profound distinction: events, regardless of their scale or the prestige of their venues, are not legacies in their own right. Instead, they are catalysts, amplifying the potential for an organization’s enduring impact.

This distinction is crucial. While immediate metrics and outcomes from events provide tangible and short-term results, they are not indicative of an organization’s lasting legacy. As Schot et al., (2023) articulate, legacy is the cumulative value that events contribute to an organisation’s overarching strategic objectives. It is a long game, and measuring it presents its own set of challenges.

However, recent discussions, as highlighted by Lancaster (2023) and Latham (2023), suggest a growing disconnect in the dialogue between associations and destinations. While destinations focus on marketing and competitive edge through impact, associations remain centred on their missions. As observed by Cortese, CEO of ESTRO (Latham, 2023), this divergence in perspectives leads to a lack of strategic overlap, potentially overshadowing the intrinsic value of meetings. Such a disconnect threatens to revert to the commoditization of destinations by member-centric associations.

Yet, the role of destinations and external stakeholders cannot be understated. They are the enablers, offering the vital resources, infrastructure, and backing that can make or break the legacy-building process. However, the heart and soul of any legacy initiative must emanate from the organization’s core objectives, typically established at the association level. Schot et al.’s (2023) concluding remarks serve as a clarion call for the industry: it is time to champion and facilitate legacy discussions within associations, rather than attempting to steer them.

As the topic of legacy is being explored, especially in the context of Sarawak’s vision of Borneo’s Legacy capital for business events, it is essential to keep the insights of Schot et al.’s at the forefront, while also considering the broader challenges and opportunities presented by voices like Lancaster (2023) and Latham (2023). The subsequent segments will explore how different locations, Sarawak included, are maneuvering through the legacy terrain, taking cues from and expanding on these fundamental concepts.

Legacy Impact Approaches: Copenhagen and Vancouver

Copenhagen Legacy Lab (2023) has initiated a strategic approach to using congresses and events to tackle societal challenges and drive positive impact. It is designed around key principles such as co-creation, inclusiveness, and leveraging design thinking techniques.

The strategy starts by identifying a “sweet spot” between a given association’s goals and Copenhagen’s as a destination. This could be linked to Sustainable Development Goals or national agenda and is typically a challenge or opportunity with the potential to drive economic growth or societal transformation.

Once a challenge or opportunity is identified, the Legacy Lab connects relevant stakeholders and designs activities, creating a legacy when a project or activity achieves societal impact that supports both the association’s overall purpose and strategic objectives, and societal needs.

The strategic process involves a 7-step model that includes planning before the event, execution during the event, and evaluation post-event. It follows principles from the ‘Theory of Change’ and the European Commission’s ‘Impact Social Measurement’ approach. These activities aim to create outputs (the direct result of an activity), outcomes (improvements or behavioural changes following outputs), impacts (societal benefits from outcomes), and legacies (long-lasting impacts that meet the project’s objectives).

Finally, the strategy underscores the importance of measurement and evaluation in monitoring the effects of events over time, helping to plan data collection and build transparency and common understanding which could make the legacy planning more effective and support the evaluation process.

In the business events sector, grasping the concrete and abstract effects of conferences is crucial. The study titled “Capilano University Conference Legacy Impact Study” led by Wahl et al., (2023) and their colleagues examines this specific topic, centering on select conferences that took place in Vancouver in 2022.

The research approach was carefully designed, taking cues from numerous literary sources that explore the legacy effects of meetings and conferences. Notably, frameworks provided by esteemed organizations such as BestCities Global Alliance, the Copenhagen Legacy Lab, MeetDenmark, and the Madrid Convention Bureau were adapted to suit the study’s needs. To ensure a holistic understanding of legacies and outcomes, the research also incorporated The UN SDGs Framework but followed the pragmatic five key legacy areas proposed by the BestCities Global Alliance: economic, environmental, political, sectoral, and social legacies.

Adopting a pragmatic paradigm, the study employed a mixed methods approach, ensuring flexibility in data collection to cater to varying commitment levels across different conferences. This comprehensive research journey was segmented into a sequential four-step process: Pre-conference data collection, During-conference data collection, Post-conference data collection, and Legacy measurement data collection. To ensure a multi-faceted perspective, data was meticulously gathered from a diverse range of stakeholders involved in the conference. The research arsenal comprised various qualitative and quantitative tools, including in-depth interviews, electronic surveys, and exhaustive desk research.

BE Sarawak's Approach to Fostering Legacies from Business Events

BESLegacy Framework

BESarawak stands as a testament to the Sarawak Government's commitment to elevating the region's global presence. The organization is instrumental in catalyzing transformative change within Sarawak's local communities. By championing legacies across diverse pillars—ranging from sectoral and social to political, environmental, and economic—BESarawak seamlessly translates ambitions into actionable partnerships and initiatives.

In its pursuit of lasting impact, BESarawak has unveiled the BESLegacy framework. This strategic blueprint, harmoniously aligned with both Sarawak's key priority areas and the UN SDGS, is designed to infuse enduring value and forward momentum into Sarawak via business events. At its core, the legacy impact creation process is a journey—from envisioning impact to its ultimate validation.

The BESLegacy framework delineates a clear pathway to legacy impact. It commences with the articulation of business event goals and the crafting of a resonant legacy vision. Integral to this process is the establishment of initiatives that resonate with these goals, coupled with the identification of key indicators that signal transformative success. Every business event under this framework is meticulously aligned with the Legacy Impact Pillars, the UN SDGs, and Sarawak's 13 Key Priority Areas. The culmination of this process is the sharing of tangible evidence, showcasing the lasting legacies these events have sown, and serving as a beacon of inspiration for others.

The BESLegacy framework is not merely a strategy—it is a revolution in how business events are perceived and executed. It challenges the status quo, transforming traditional business events into powerful catalysts for inspiration within the global business events arena. These events are envisioned to forge genuine connections to Sarawak, fostering cross-industry synergies, deepening community engagement, and driving impactful policy evolution. But the framework's brilliance lies in its ability to

transcend conventional convention ROI metrics. It equips event planners and collaborators with the tools and insights to amplify the value of their conventions, showcasing the nuanced “soft” power and legacy impacts they can engender.

Instruments for recognizing legacy impacts

While BE Sarawak’s overarching vision and framework lay the groundwork for fostering impactful legacies from business events, the tangible instruments they employ truly bring this vision to life. These tools not only celebrate the achievements of individuals and organizations but also serve as powerful examples, inspiring further legacy creation in the region. Some of these instrumental initiatives are:

1. **The Anak Sarawak Award:** A hallmark of excellence in the business events sector, the Anak Sarawak Award has introduced the Sarawak Legacy Award category in the year 2023. This addition emphasizes the significance of environmental, social, and governance agendas, highlighting the importance of creating enduring legacies that resonate beyond the event’s duration.
2. **The Anak Sarawak Outstanding Achievement Award:** Moving beyond the traditional scope of business events, this award is part of the Anak Sarawak Award and emphasizes the cultivation and enhancement of a destination’s intellectual capital (Milovanovic, 2023) among other highlights. It celebrates those who have significantly contributed to the knowledge ecosystem, reinforcing the idea that intellectual capital is pivotal for destination development.
3. **Business Events Sarawak Legacy Ambassador Programme:** This innovative initiative follows the example of several other convention bureaus worldwide (e.g. Aberdeen, Glasgow, Dubai, Sydney) and seeks to establish a community of influential advocates dedicated to promoting business events and legacy creation. These ambassadors, representing diverse sectors, champion Sarawak’s mission of driving socio-economic transformation through impactful legacies.

By examining the legacy impacts documented through these initiatives, from submissions of award winners, valuable insights are gained into the profound effects of today’s events on shaping a brighter, more impactful future for Sarawak.

The 10th Better Air Quality Conference 2018

The documentation of this conference (Yahaya, 2023) emphasizes the activities and the impact of MyCAS, an NGO working diligently towards improving air quality and raising a voice against air pollution in Malaysia. The guiding force behind this is Ts. Dr Hajah Noor Zaitun Yahaya, the Founder and President of MyCAS, who steers the policies and research initiatives. MyCAS successfully organized a noteworthy environmental conference in 2018 in Sarawak with significant participation and globally recognized contributions for which it was awarded the Sarawak Legacy Award 2023.

In line with the sectoral legacy pillar, the conference engaged different sectors including government departments, universities, and industrial entities, thus bridging the gap between various stakeholders. It provided a platform for these disparate groups to come together and exchange ideas, which is a stepping stone for interdisciplinary research collaboration and policy formulation. The conference also had a profound effect on community and social development in Sarawak. With the committee and volunteer members predominantly being women, it created opportunities for the local community to develop skills and play a meaningful role in society. This promotion and support of female leadership in the field also led to significant societal changes, reflecting the progressiveness of the organization.

The conference also reinforced the legacy pillar of trade, investment, and economic growth. The conference brought economic value to Sarawak, contributing to the local GDP by over RM2.5 million. This was derived from participant expenditures, tourism boost, spending in local businesses, and the direct and indirect job creation linked to the event, reinforcing Sarawak as a hub for business events.

From an environmental perspective, the conference raised awareness about the coexistence of business and environmental sustainability by presenting various viable strategies. This focus on environmental consciousness was a significant step towards achieving the environmental legacy by encouraging dialogue and measurable action on environmental concerns. Lastly, its influence was felt significantly in the political legacy pillar too, with the conference amplifying the importance of governmental support in these environmental initiatives. This extended reach was instrumental in interacting with decision-makers and policy formulators, thus emphasizing how well-planned business events can serve as catalysts for political advocacy and changes.

8th International Forum on Industrial Bioprocessing 2019

The award submission (Chin, 2023) documents the organization and outcomes of the International Forum on Industrial Bioprocesses 2019 held in Miri, Sarawak, which aimed to build international research collaboration in areas related to bioenergy or biofuels, food technology, and engineering, among others. It successfully achieved its immediate goals such as hosting the first-ever meeting of the International Bioprocessing Association in Malaysia, providing a platform for idea exchange, and creating a path to find alternative solutions for agricultural issues in Sarawak. The event furthered the involvement of research collaborations between international and national universities and industries, ultimately leading to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS and Curtin University Malaysia. Both universities as joint organizers were awarded the Convention of Excellence Award 2023.

Regarding the sectoral legacy, the event promised progress in the field of bioenergy, biotechnology, and other related sectors. It hosted discussions on new technologies related to biomass energy, concurrent with the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy which focuses on the palm oil industry. The conference aimed to deliver high-quality research for the development of these sectors and

opened various opportunities for discussion and sharing of ideas.

About the community & social pillar, the event organized several community and social programs. For instance, it cooperated with Chumbaka, a digital education organization, and for every survey form submitted by the conference attendants, a donation was made to this educational cause. Additionally, a complimentary booth was provided to the local Penan community to promote and sell their handicrafts. Notably, 30 local university students were invited for a site visit to the Sarawak Biovalley Pilot Plant for exposure to bioprocessing technology.

For trade & investment/economics, the convention fostered international and local trade engagements. The event helped Sarawak connect globally with international institutions promoting local research expertise in related areas of science, technology, and innovation.

Under the environmental pillar, the forum emphasized the importance of green initiatives in the agriculture industry towards environmental protection, alternative eco-friendly energy through utilization of agriculture waste, and reduction of greenhouse gases. No explicit mention was made regarding the political pillar legacy from the convention. However, it can be surmised that by fostering international collaborations, raising awareness about agricultural issues, and promoting sustainable energy initiatives, the event may have contributed towards advocacy and policy-making in these areas which is entirely in line with the current development goals of the Sarawak government (PCDS 2030) and the current Malaysian Plan in its 12th edition.

AsiaFlux 2022 — Sarawak Tropical Peat Research Institute (TROPI)

The AsiaFlux 2022 conference, organized by the Malaysian Peat Society, the Sarawak Tropical Peat Research Institute, and the AsiaFlux Science Steering Committee, was an exceptional platform for addressing sustainable development goals. With distinct keynote speeches, oral presentations, and poster presentations delivered, it was not just a conference but also an opportunity for hands-on research and guidance on Sarawak's conserved peat swamp ecosystem (Melling, 2023). The organizers were awarded with the Sarawak Legacy Award 2023 while the director of TROPI, Dato Dr Lulie Anak Joshua Melling, received the Outstanding Achievement Award.

In terms of legacy impacts, the conference made significant strides across five key pillars: Commercial Agriculture, Education & Human Capital, Forestry, Innovation, and Tourism. Regarding Commercial Agriculture, the conference connected researchers, industry professionals, and stakeholders. This enabled a dialogue for sustainable and commercially viable agricultural practices in maintaining and enhancing the value and vitality of Asia's ecosystems.

In the sphere of Education & Human Capital, the conference fostered an environment of learning with a diverse range of presentations and panel discussions. Participants gained invaluable insights, contributing to their knowledge and improving their understanding of vital environmental issues, and this undoubtedly adds value to human capital.

The Forestry pillar benefited immensely from the discussions and inputs of experts from various sectors. The conference emphasized the importance of sustainable forestry practices and provided a platform for potential sustainable policy frameworks. About Innovation, the conference acted as a catalyst for researchers, experts, and associated organizations. The knowledge and insights gained from this conference have the potential to stimulate new ideas, practices and technologies to further climate action and ecological preservation.

Tourism was another key pillar addressed by the conference. Showcasing Sarawak's impressive and preserved peat swamp ecosystem not only enlightened the participants but also showcased Sarawak as a unique ecotourism destination, which would stimulate local economies. In conclusion, AsiaFlux 2022 has left a significant legacy across these five pillars, promoting dialogue and action on vital environmental issues, driving innovation, and promoting sustainable tourism. It reinforced Sarawak's position as a potential host for future international events.

Intellectual capital as destinations' assets: Anak Sarawak Award 2023, while celebrating the broader impacts of business events, also places a spotlight on individuals whose work has left an indelible mark on the community. Two such personalities, who have not only made significant contributions in their respective fields but have also been instrumental in driving positive change, are Lucille Anak Awen Jon and Prof. Dr. Toh Teck Hock.

Lucille Anak Awen Jon: A beacon of empowerment, Lucille has been at the forefront of advocating for sustainable income avenues for women, with a particular emphasis on handicrafts. Recognizing the rich tapestry of skills and traditions that women possess, Lucille's initiatives have been pivotal in providing them with platforms to showcase their talents. By intertwining the threads of tradition with the loom of modern marketplaces, she has ensured that women not only preserve their cultural heritage but also carve out a sustainable and dignified livelihood for themselves. Her efforts resonate with the broader goals of the Anak Sarawak Award, emphasizing the creation of lasting socio-economic legacies.

Lucille Anak Awen Jon is a jewellery artisan and a Bidayuh traditional craft activist who is known for her work in preserving and promoting local and indigenous handicrafts. She is the founder and owner of Pungu Borneo Sdn Bhd/ Pangieh Ranee Enterprise. Lucille has participated in numerous workshops, training, and exhibitions, where she has demonstrated her skills and shared her knowledge in the field of jewellery making and traditional craft. This includes a ceramic Workshop, Pangiah Juli Workshop, a Product Knowledge Workshop, and various bead and earring-making workshops.

Lucille's work involves both practical and theoretical aspects from conducting workshops to make traditional Bidayuh jewellery like pangiah, participating in various exhibitions to promote local craftwork, to attending professional forums and symposiums to discuss and understand the intellectual rights of indigenous people and the protection of local culture. In addition, she has attended several webinars organized by the World Intellectual Property Organization on topics including copyright protection and geographical indication, signifying her commitment to protecting and promoting the artistic and cultural heritage of local communities. From managing the production/administration of her company to participating in various events and initiatives aimed at sharing knowledge, promoting innovation, and fostering skills in the field of traditional and indigenous craft-making, Lucille has played a key role in keeping these traditions alive and well-recognized. Lucille Anak Awen Jon is not only an artisan but also a custodian of these rich and varied cultural practices.

Prof. Dr. Toh Teck Hock: A stalwart in the realm of child welfare, Prof. Dr Toh Teck Hock's relentless efforts have been centred around enhancing support systems for children with special needs. Recognizing the unique challenges these children face, Prof. Dr. Toh has been instrumental in devising strategies, programs, and support mechanisms that cater to their specific requirements. His work goes beyond mere academic or clinical interventions; it is about creating an inclusive ecosystem where every child, irrespective of their needs, can thrive and reach their fullest potential. His nomination for the Anak Sarawak Award is a testament to the profound impact of his initiatives on the community.

Prof. Dr. Toh Teck Hock is a renowned pediatrician and researcher with notable work in the field of developmental-behavioural pediatrics and community child health. He is linked to several institutions including Duke University, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Universiti Malaya, universities in Serbia, Singapore, and the Netherlands. Dr. Toh also works as a Professor at SEGi University's Faculty of Medicine and is an Adjunct Professor at Sunway University's School of Science and Technology. His passion for Children with Special Needs and Inclusive Education is evident in his research work, which has been extensively published and cited.

The 2nd Sarawak Conference on Inclusive Early Childhood Education, which was an event in which Dr. Toh played a significant role, achieved valuable benchmarks aligned with the BE Sarawak legacy pillars;

1. **Sectoral:** Networks were established between educators, healthcare providers, and parents. Moreover, digital technology was employed to connect urban and rural communities and two studies were initiated regarding the perception and awareness of children with special needs and inclusive education.
2. **Environment:** The conference led to improved community understanding of creating resources for inclusive education and the commencement of the One Stop Early Intervention Centre in various locations.

3. **Political:** The conference led to increased awareness and initiation of inclusive education policies. A significant outcome was the collaboration with the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Education to continue the inclusive education agenda. In light of the conference's outcomes, political leaders started advocating for inclusive preschool education. Developments were initiated to include inclusive education in government-operated preschools' training curriculum.
4. **Education & Human Capital:** The conference led to an enhanced perception towards Early Childhood Intervention. Preschools began to admit children with special needs in a more integrated manner, indicating a shift towards more inclusive education.

Concluding remarks

The discourse surrounding the legacy of business events has evolved significantly over the years. While theoretical frameworks provide a comprehensive array of legacy pillars, the practical application of these frameworks by conference organizers often varies. The Anak Sarawak Award serves as a prime example of this discrepancy. Applicants for the award, in their zeal to showcase the impact of their events, often attempt to highlight a multitude of both minor and major legacy traces. This approach, while commendable in its thoroughness, may not always be the most effective.

The essence of creating a lasting legacy does not necessarily lie in addressing every conceivable impact pillar. Instead, it is about identifying the most pertinent and resonant pillars for a particular event and maximizing the leverage on those specific areas. By doing so, organizers can ensure that their efforts are not spread too thinly, leading to diluted impacts. Instead, they can channel their resources, collaborations, and strategies towards creating profound and lasting changes in the areas that matter most.

The Anak Sarawak Award submissions underscore this point. While some conferences touched upon multiple legacy pillars, their most significant impacts were often concentrated in specific areas. For instance, the 10th Better Air Quality Conference 2018 had a pronounced influence on the environmental and political legacy pillars, while the 8th International Forum on Industrial Bioprocessing 2019 made strides in the sectoral and research domains.

It is crucial for conference organizers to recognize that while theoretical frameworks provide a roadmap, the journey itself can be tailored. Instead of attempting to traverse every path, organizers can choose to delve deep into specific routes, ensuring that their journey leaves a lasting imprint. In the realm of business events, it is not about how many boxes are ticked, but the depth and resonance of the impact created.

In conclusion, while the theoretical frameworks of legacy impacts offer a comprehensive guide, it is the interpretation and application of these frameworks that truly determine the legacy of an event. As Sarawak continues its journey to become Borneo's Legacy capital for business events, it is imperative for organizers to prioritize depth over breadth, ensuring that their events not only leave a mark but also pave the way for transformative and lasting change.

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