

From Cultural Display to Cultural Reproduction: A Cultural Learning Cycle Framework for Tourism Events

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Abstract

Cultural tourism events are increasingly expected to perform functions that extend beyond heritage display, including cultural revitalization, community participation, identity negotiation, and intergenerational transmission. Yet existing scholarship tends to examine these processes separately, leaving insufficient explanation of how participation in tourism events may develop into cultural learning and, ultimately, sustained cultural reproduction. This article addresses this theoretical fragmentation by developing a Cultural Learning Cycle as an integrative process framework for understanding event-mediated cultural reconstruction. The study adopts an integrative conceptual review drawing on a Scopus-derived corpus of recent scholarship on cultural tourism, heritage, festivals, community participation, cultural learning, authenticity, and cultural revitalization, complemented by foundational theoretical works. Through comparative conceptual synthesis, the review identifies five interrelated processes: cultural recognition, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, value negotiation and internalization, and cultural reproduction. Reflection operates across the cycle as a recursive mechanism through which communities reassess cultural meanings and modify subsequent practices. The framework further recognizes that progression across these processes is neither automatic nor uniformly beneficial. Community agency, interpretive authority, inclusive governance, and intergenerational engagement can enable cultural continuity, whereas commodification, unequal participation, market-driven simplification, and contested authenticity may interrupt or redirect the cycle. The article contributes to cultural tourism and event studies by theorizing the mechanisms through which cultural events can shift from spaces of representation to arenas of negotiated learning and cultural reproduction. Rather than presenting cultural reconstruction as an empirically validated outcome, the Cultural Learning Cycle is advanced as a theoretically grounded framework for subsequent comparative and empirical testing.

Keywords: *cultural reconstruction; Cultural Learning Cycle; cultural tourism; tourism events; cultural learning; community agency; cultural reproduction.*

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization no longer operates as a binary tension between global cultural forces and bounded local traditions. Contemporary cultural practices are increasingly negotiated, adapted, mediated, and selectively reinterpreted as communities respond to shifting markets,

technologies, mobilities, and audience expectations while sustaining meaningful continuity. Recent scholarship illustrates this dynamic across diverse heritage contexts. Cultural symbols are reconstructed through ritual adaptation, innovation, commercialization, and digital circulation, simultaneously broadening cultural reach and risking symbolic alienation (Yin et al., 2025). Cultural adaptation likewise emerges from dialectical interactions among local beliefs, identity, market forces, and artisan agency rather than linear preservation paradigms (Jun & Sirivesmas, 2025). Digital infrastructures further reconfigure heritage inheritance, documentation, and glocalized circulation (Dai et al., 2026; Lucas, 2026). Within this shifting landscape, cultural tourism functions as a performative terrain where identity is enacted, interpreted, and hybridized across institutional narratives, community actors, intermediaries, and visitors (Abdellatif, 2026). In traditional settings, tourism transformation need not displace local culture; under supportive conditions, it reinforces collective memory, place attachment, and cultural identity while generating economic opportunities (Syafri et al., 2026). Consequently, cultural continuity cannot be conceptualized as the static preservation of an immutable past, but rather as the ongoing reconstruction of meanings that remain socially recognizable and transmissible across generations.

Tourism events provide a concentrated social setting to examine this process, bringing cultural representation, social participation, performance, learning, and consumption into active interaction. Festivals serve as contact zones where participants encounter unfamiliar cultural meanings, compare values, negotiate identities, and cultivate intercultural understanding through affective engagement (Noor & Marimuthu, 2026). Beyond visitor experience, community participation strengthens cultural stewardship and facilitates intergenerational value transmission when local actors exercise substantive governance and interpretive roles (Ha, 2025). Cultural engagement deepens through active exploration, reflective interpretation, storytelling, and experiential immersion rather than passive exposure (Liang et al., 2025). Community-based digital interventions similarly bridge fragmented cultural assets with collaborative meaning-making (Lee & Wang, 2026). Furthermore, cultural festivals support intergenerational knowledge transmission in educational contexts (Yatim et al., 2025) and sustain the long-term reproduction of living traditions (Özkan, 2025). Together, these studies demonstrate that the primary significance of cultural events lies not merely in displaying heritage, but in establishing event-mediated learning spaces through which cultural meanings are enacted, negotiated, and reproduced.

However, the progression from cultural representation to cultural reproduction is neither automatic nor inherently benign. Cultural tourism remains fraught with structural tensions regarding authenticity, ownership, power asymmetries, commercialization, and interpretive authority. Contemporary research rejects essentialist definitions of authenticity as an inherent, static attribute, reframing it as a relational construct co-created through place-based experience, social interaction, and power dynamics (Rickly et al., 2025). Authenticity is enacted and relational, emerging through mediation rather than replicating a singular authorized script (Abdellatif, 2026). Consequently, cultural reconstruction encompasses competing trajectories. While substantive community involvement bolsters self-representation, tokenistic participation marginalizes local epistemologies in favor of external institutional agendas (Abrahams & Tichaawa, 2025). Tourism growth can enhance conservation while simultaneously heightening commodification pressures, governance conflicts, and integrity risks (Papoutsaki, 2026). Festival development frequently encounters political instrumentalization and event-driven commercialization (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026), whereas digital mediation introduces challenges regarding symbolic ownership, cultural de-singularization, and representational control (Lucas, 2026). Even seemingly successful tourism transformations necessitate critical scrutiny over who retains cultural agency and who captures the resulting benefits (Syafri et al., 2026). Cultural

reconstruction must therefore be theorized as a contested process in which cultural continuity and cultural displacement remain concurrent possibilities.

Despite growing empirical depth, existing scholarship remains conceptually fragmented. Research on community engagement underscores co-creation, empowerment, and stewardship (Ha, 2025), while experiential tourism scholarship articulates individual learning mechanisms. Co-creation studies demonstrate how collaborative storytelling transforms memory into shared resources (Liang et al., 2025), and heritage studies emphasize narrative sovereignty and local voice (Abrahams & Tichaawa, 2025). Parallel streams address non-linear cultural adaptation (Jun & Sirivesmas, 2025), glocalized heritage innovation (Dai et al., 2026), authenticity and power (Rickly et al., 2025), community heritage sustainability (Syafri et al., 2026), cultural revitalization and livelihoods (Domnku & Kacmakovic, 2025), and digitally mediated intergenerational learning (Lee & Wang, 2026). While these streams clarify isolated components of cultural transformation, they leave their sequential and recursive relationships within tourism events undertheorized. In particular, a critical process question remains unresolved: How does cultural recognition translate into adaptive reinterpretation; under what conditions does reinterpretation foster meaningful participation; through what mechanisms does participation generate negotiated learning; and when does such learning yield sustained cultural reproduction rather than ephemeral event consumption? Without specifying these transitions, participation, learning, authenticity, and continuity risk being conflated as mutually reinforcing, despite empirical evidence highlighting their conditional and contested nature.

To address this theoretical gap, this article introduces the Cultural Learning Cycle (CLC) as an integrative conceptual framework explaining how tourism events mediate the reconstruction and continued reproduction of local culture. Rather than viewing events as static showcases, the framework conceptualizes them as communicative social interfaces where communities, custodians, organizers, intermediaries, tourists, and youth negotiate cultural meaning. Two research questions guide this study: 1) Through what interconnected processes do tourism-based cultural events facilitate cultural reconstruction and learning? 2) Under what enabling and disruptive conditions can event-mediated participation contribute to sustained cultural reproduction?

Drawing upon recent insights regarding community agency and participatory governance (Ha, 2025), experiential and reflective learning, collaborative meaning-making (Liang et al., 2025), intergenerational engagement (Lee & Wang, 2026), relational authenticity (Rickly et al., 2025), and adaptive transformation (Yin et al., 2025), the CLC specifies five interrelated processes: cultural recognition, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, value negotiation and internalization, and cultural reproduction. Reflection operates recursively across the cycle, enabled by community agency, interpretive authority, inclusive governance, and intergenerational engagement, while bounded by disruptive forces such as commodification, exclusion, tokenism, market-driven simplification, and contested authenticity. By shifting the analytical focus from whether tourism "preserves" culture to explaining how event-mediated interactions transform cultural display into negotiated learning and sustainable reproduction, the CLC provides a process-oriented theoretical framework for subsequent empirical inquiry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Reconstruction as Negotiated Continuity

Cultural reconstruction is conceptualized not as the static preservation of an immutable past, but as a recursive process through which communities selectively retain, reinterpret, adapt, and reproduce cultural meanings amid shifting social conditions. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that cultural continuity is sustained through adaptive transformation rather than rigid resistance to change. Traditional forms can be re-embedded within modern social and

spatial structures while maintaining coherent cultural logics (Mohammed Mashary Alnaim & Alnaim, 2026), and ritual practices adapt to modernization and tourism while actively reinforcing collective identity and social cohesion (Özkan, 2025). In intangible heritage domains, tourism provides new socioeconomic functions for customary practices, performing arts, oral traditions, and local languages (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025). Concurrently, digitally mediated practices establish evolving mechanisms for documentation, curation, interpretation, and inheritance rather than merely conserving inherited artifacts (Dai et al., 2026; Lucas, 2026). These insights establish a fundamental analytical boundary: while preservation seeks to safeguard static forms from loss, reconstruction entails socially negotiated reconfigurations that ensure cultural expressions remain vibrant and functional in altered environments.

This analytical distinction differentiates reconstruction from the related concepts of revitalization, adaptation, and re-actualization: Revitalization denotes the renewed activation of dormant or marginalized cultural practices, wherein ethnic and heritage tourism creates spaces for performance, language continuity, craft production, and community livelihoods (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025). Adaptation involves functional adjustments that enable cultural practices to operate under evolving institutional, technological, audience, and economic conditions (Özkan, 2025; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). Reactualization refers to the deliberate translation of culturally recognized meanings into contemporary communicative, performative, and experiential idioms. Reconstruction is broader than any of these individual mechanisms, encompassing the continuous negotiation among recognition, revitalization, adaptation, reactualization, and eventual reproduction.

Consequently, cultural reconstruction is an inherently political and contested process. Integrating living heritage into tourism economies enhances self-representation and visibility, but simultaneously exposes practices to commercialization, decontextualization, and external appropriation. In Indigenous festival branding, for example, adapting sacred symbols for tourism marketing risks semiotic reductionism (Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). Tourism-driven heritage development frequently generates structural friction between conservation, commercial exploitation, community priorities, and cultural integrity (Papoutsaki, 2026), while commercialization can subordinate festivals to political agendas and branding objectives (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026). However, commodification is not uniformly destructive; its cultural consequences depend on the degree of community agency, ownership, and participatory control (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025; Syafrini et al., 2026). Authenticity cannot function as a fixed index of fidelity to an original artifact; rather, it is relational and performative, negotiated through ongoing interactions among cultural actors, intermediaries, and audiences (Abdellatif, 2026), where local voices and lived epistemologies prevent external narratives from displacing community meanings (Abrahams & Tichaawa, 2025).

Accordingly, this study conceptualizes cultural reconstruction as negotiated continuity: a recursive process through which cultural actors determine what to retain, what to adapt, how to express meanings in contemporary settings, and which modifications remain culturally legitimate. This definition avoids equating continuity with immobility and prevents adaptation from being uncritically equated with cultural progress. While substantive community involvement fosters reinforced identity, broader transmission, and active stewardship (Mohammed Mashary Alnaim & Alnaim, 2026; Ha, 2025), market- or institutionally dominated transformations risk cultural dilution and symbolic alienation (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). Digitalization further complicates these dynamics by enabling cross-boundary circulation while reconfiguring who curates and interprets cultural content (Dai et al., 2026; Lucas, 2026). Cultural reproduction must therefore be treated as the conditional outcome of reconstruction rather than its equivalent: reconstruction entails negotiating and adapting cultural meaning in the present, whereas reproduction occurs when those reconfigured meanings achieve sufficient legitimacy, participation, and transmissibility to

be sustained in ongoing social practice. This distinction provides the conceptual foundation for analyzing tourism events not merely as display platforms, but as performative arenas where cultural continuity itself is actively negotiated.

Tourism Events as Arenas of Cultural Participation and Meaning-Making

Tourism events occupy a distinctive position within cultural tourism by temporarily concentrating cultural representation, social interaction, performance, interpretation, and consumption within a shared spatial and symbolic arena. Unlike static displays, festivals and cultural events require traditions to be enacted before heterogeneous audiences, establishing dynamic settings where meanings are communicated, negotiated, and reformulated. The transformation of the Yi Torch Festival illustrates that event-based adaptation entails not only preserving inherited symbols, but also navigating ritual simplification, cultural expansion, commercialization, and shifts in transmission agents (Yin et al., 2025). Evidence from highland festivals similarly shows that collective ritual participation sustains shared values and social cohesion amid modernization, migration, and tourism pressures (Özkan, 2025). Furthermore, historical analyses reveal that event narratives are continually reconstructed in response to shifting political, social, and institutional contexts rather than reproduced from fixed scripts (Bertran, 2025; Perkola, 2025; Shevchenko, 2025). Cultural events therefore operate as performative interfaces through which communities publicly enact identities while confronting external interpretations, visitor expectations, institutional agendas, and evolving consumption modes (Bâc et al., 2025; Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Jamhawi et al., 2025).

The participatory architecture of these events is critical because cultural meaning is shaped not merely by what is displayed, but by who participates, the depth of involvement, and whose interpretations achieve legitimacy. Community engagement scholarship indicates that emotional attachment to heritage fosters active participation in governance, empowering residents to safeguard and interpret intangible cultural expressions (Ha, 2025). Community-based tourism research similarly links cultural participation, heritage awareness, authentic experience, and community support as interdependent pillars of sustainable development (Tandamrong et al., 2026). Co-creation studies demonstrate that local narratives and collaborative activities directly shape visitor experiences, with local wisdom mediating the relationship between heritage identity and tourism consumption (Juliana et al., 2025). Analogous dynamics emerge in public art interventions, which bolster identity when residents identify with represented themes, whereas poor alignment and limited involvement weaken this potential (Ayuni et al., 2025). These findings challenge models that reduce participation to mere physical attendance. In cultural reconstruction, participation is more accurately conceptualized as a continuum spanning spectatorship --> consultation --> enactment --> interpretation --> co-creation --> cultural agency.

Consequently, events become fertile sites for meaning-making and value co-creation when participation facilitates multidirectional knowledge transfer across performers, residents, custodians, visitors, and younger cohorts. Digital and immersive heritage research reveals that interactive participation transforms cultural memory from a static representational asset into a collaboratively interpreted resource. For example, community-based alternate reality games integrate fragmented heritage assets through co-design, transmedia storytelling, and intergenerational learning, directly linking digital interaction with cultural revitalization (Lee & Wang, 2026). Similarly, digitally enabled co-creation activates implicit intergenerational memories through collaborative engagement (Liang et al., 2025), while augmented-reality narratives reconnect physical spaces, cultural symbols, and collective memory within regenerated heritage sites (Du & Yu, 2025). In educational domains, festivals such as the Sayyang Pattudu provide situated environments where schools and communities collaboratively sustain living traditions rather than reducing them to annual spectacles (Yatim et al., 2025). Interactive

preservation platforms further utilize adaptive storytelling, multimodal simulations, and participatory mechanisms to transition heritage engagement from passive reception toward active cultural learning (Tomer et al., 2026). Meaning-making in tourism events is thus inherently relational, acquiring contemporary relevance through interaction, embodiment, narration, reflection, and repeated social practice.

However, event-mediated participation does not inherently generate community-centered outcomes. Events remain contested arenas where interpretive authority is unevenly distributed across state institutions, event organizers, commercial businesses, intermediaries, residents, and visitors. Heritage mediation studies demonstrate that tour guides actively translate and hybridize official scripts, constructing authenticity relationally through performance and dialogue rather than conveying immutable cultural truths (Abdellatif, 2026). While such mediation broadens cultural intelligibility, it raises critical questions regarding narrative sovereignty and the extent to which external audiences reshape representable heritage. Authenticity is co-constructed across place, identity, visitor experience, and structural power dynamics rather than residing exclusively within original artifacts (Rickly et al., 2025). Moreover, event-driven development can stimulate socioeconomic regeneration while simultaneously exposing heritage to commercialization, political instrumentalization, visitor overcrowding, and institutional conflict (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Jamhawi et al., 2025). The Cultural Learning Cycle therefore conceptualizes tourism events as contested participatory interfaces. Their capacity to drive authentic cultural reconstruction depends fundamentally on how agency, interpretive authority, narrative ownership, and reflective opportunities are negotiated among participating actors.

Cultural Learning and Value Negotiation

Cultural learning in tourism settings operates as an experiential, socially situated process rather than the passive acquisition of factual heritage data. Deep cultural learning occurs when participants actively explore cultural environments, engage with contextual narratives, perform meaningful practices, and critically reflect on their experiences. In intangible heritage tourism, activity-based exploration, reflective multimedia, and immersive simulation enhance knowledge retention, comprehension, and experiential learning, although short-term interactions alone may not sustain durable behavioral change. In festival-based education, learning deepens when cultural activities are integrated before, during, and after an event through direct immersion in music, ritual, costume, and community life (Yatim et al., 2025). Embodied practices—such as traditional dance, games, and rituals—serve as pedagogical media transmitting ancestral memory, communal values, ecological ethics, and identity across generations (Dais-Mohadali, 2025). Traditional musical transmission similarly indicates that emotional engagement, symbolic coherence, and community-rooted social learning are more consequential for cultural memory retention than formal instruction (M. Gao et al., 2025). Interactive digital technologies further augment cultural knowledge and engagement when designed around situated exploration rather than passive interpretation (Chang et al., 2025; Kiourexidou et al., 2026; Mohapatra et al., 2025). Cultural learning thus integrates cognitive comprehension, embodied enactment, affective resonance, social interaction, and reflective interpretation.

Crucially, cultural learning cannot be reduced to the linear transmission of predetermined values from cultural authorities to passive recipients. Contemporary heritage settings engage diverse actors whose interpretations vary by generation, institutional position, lived experience, commercial interests, and epistemic authority. Intergenerational heritage initiatives demonstrate that learning is reciprocal: younger cohorts contribute digital competencies while elders provide situated cultural knowledge (Lee & Wang, 2026). Heritage interpretation gains cultural depth when lived experience and Indigenous epistemologies inform narratives and communities retain sovereign control over representation (Abrahams & Tichaawa, 2025). Furthermore, community empowerment fosters cultural stewardship and value transmission by positioning residents as

active agents rather than passive tourism beneficiaries (Ha, 2025). Concurrently, digital and tourism mediation broadens cultural visibility while exposing heritage to simplification, reinterpretation, and commodification (Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). The transition from participation to learning is therefore mediated by value negotiation—a process wherein actors interpret, interrogate, reaffirm, adapt, or resist meanings before incorporating them into personal or collective repertoires.

This distinction is central to the Cultural Learning Cycle because it positions internalization as a conditional outcome of negotiated learning rather than an automatic consequence of event participation. Internalization occurs when meanings are reinforced through repeated enactment, narrative immersion, affective attachment, social exchange, reflection, and integration with lived experience (M. Gao et al., 2025; Yatim et al., 2025). Interactive storytelling and digital media enhance emotional engagement, yet their efficacy depends on cultural authenticity, community involvement, and the capacity to transcend novelty into sustained commitment (Lee & Wang, 2026; Mohapatra et al., 2025). Cultural continuity persists amid spatial and institutional transformation when cultural experience serves as a recognizable organizing principle and tacit knowledge is continuously enacted socially (Tang & Li, 2026). Conversely, when local perspectives are marginalized, or external institutions dominate interpretation, participation generates superficial consumption rather than deep learning (Abrahams & Tichaawa, 2025). The CLC therefore conceptualizes value negotiation and internalization as the critical mediating bridge between participatory enactment and cultural reproduction: actors first encounter and enact cultural expressions, interpret them through cognitive, affective, and reflective mechanisms, and selectively internalize them into living identities and intergenerational practices.

Community Agency, Authenticity, and Power

Community agency constitutes a critical structural condition in cultural reconstruction because the sustainability of living heritage depends not merely on community presence, but on substantive local influence over representation, interpretation, participation, and benefit distribution. Recent scholarship increasingly distinguishes between symbolic involvement and substantive agency. In World Heritage environments, meaningful community engagement fosters heritage safeguarding, empowerment, cultural stewardship, and intergenerational transmission when residents actively shape decision-making rather than functioning as passive tourism beneficiaries (Ha, 2025). Strategic heritage-tourism research similarly identifies community agency as an independent evaluative dimension alongside economic viability, conservation, accessibility, and visitor experience, underscoring that sustainable outcomes involve strategic trade-offs rather than singular optimal models. In urban and cultural tourism contexts, local participation becomes impactful when directly connected to economic opportunities, heritage protection, and culturally grounded development rather than applied rhetorically in destination planning (M M Alnaim, 2026). At the interpretive level, non-participatory practices marginalize local voices, weakening both cultural authenticity and visitor engagement, whereas integrating lived experience and Indigenous knowledge reinforces narrative sovereignty and self-representation (Abrahams & Tichaawa, 2025). Community agency is therefore defined as the capacity of cultural actors to exercise meaningful authority over which cultural meanings are selected, how they are represented, who is authorized to interpret them, and how symbolic and economic value is distributed.

The question of agency is inextricably linked to authenticity because tourism authenticity is not generated independently of social power. Contemporary research conceptualizes authenticity as relational and negotiated rather than as a fixed correspondence to an idealized, immutable past. Cultural intermediaries, such as tour guides, actively mediate heritage through interpretation, performance, and dialogue, thereby shaping how audiences perceive authenticity and identity (Abdellatif, 2026). Authenticity is thus produced through ongoing interactions

among institutional frameworks, local knowledge, mediators, and visitor expectations rather than residing exclusively within static artifacts. Participatory interpretation embeds community epistemologies into meaning-making, whereas exclusionary approaches privilege authorized or commercialized narratives over lived realities (Abrahams & Tichaawa, 2025). Community involvement in public cultural representation similarly reinforces local identification when residents recognize their histories in presented expressions; conversely, weak participation yields representations that may be visually attractive yet culturally disconnected from local lived experience (Ayuni et al., 2025). Consequently, authenticity in cultural reconstruction functions as negotiated legitimacy: a cultural expression achieves authenticity not by remaining unchanged, but because relevant cultural actors validate its transformation as legitimate, intelligible, and historically grounded.

Power asymmetries become particularly visible when tourism generates competing incentives regarding which cultural meanings to retain, adapt, commercialize, or omit. While cultural tourism expands local visibility and economic opportunities, decision-making authority often remains skewed toward state institutions, event organizers, and commercial entities. Heritage-development scholarship demonstrates that economic growth, conservation mandates, visitor access, digital integration, and community interests frequently generate structural tensions rather than natural convergence (M M Alnaim, 2026). Community empowerment serves not only as a developmental objective, but as an essential safeguard preventing the displacement of local cultural authority by external tourism agendas (Yanying et al., 2026). In intangible heritage governance, contemporary frameworks increasingly position communities, individuals, and youth as rights-bearing actors rather than passive recipients of top-down policy (Aral, 2026). Within the Cultural Learning Cycle, agency, authenticity, and power operate as interdependent boundary conditions. Participatory enactment fosters authentic value negotiation and reproduction when communities hold interpretive authority, intergenerational voices are integrated, and governance is transparent. Conversely, when participation is tokenistic, interpretation is externally imposed, or market imperatives dominate, the cycle produces commodified representation, elite capture, symbolic displacement, or superficial learning that serves destination consumption rather than enduring community continuity.

Toward an Integrated Process Framework

Taken together, the synthesized literature demonstrates that event-mediated cultural reconstruction cannot be adequately explained through isolated constructs such as authenticity, participation, revitalization, experiential learning, or community empowerment. Rather, these concepts represent interdependent phases within a broader continuum of cultural continuity and change. While revitalization scholarship explains how tourism reactivates weakened traditions, generates visibility, and creates livelihood opportunities, it does not fully elucidate whether renewed practices retain meaningful community resonance (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025; Özkan, 2025; Syafrini et al., 2026). Cultural adaptation and digital mediation research illuminates how inherited forms are reinterpreted, hybridized, and circulated in contemporary spaces, yet such transformations can produce either legitimate innovation or symbolic alienation depending on who controls the process (Dai et al., 2026; Jun & Sirivesmas, 2025; Lucas, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Yin et al., 2025). Concurrently, participation scholarship demonstrates that empowerment, co-creation, and interpretive involvement foster stewardship (Ha, 2025; Juliana et al., 2025; Tandamrong et al., 2026), while experiential and digital heritage studies show that storytelling, embodiment, and reflection convert participation into deeper cultural understanding (Lee & Wang, 2026; Liang et al., 2025; Yatim et al., 2025). Treated independently, these streams remain analytically incomplete: revitalization accounts for renewed presence, adaptation explains contemporary modification, participation clarifies stakeholder

engagement, learning captures cognitive-affective shifts, and reproduction explains ongoing social persistence.

An integrated framework must also recognize that transitions among these processes are non-deterministic and conditional. Cultural recognition does not automatically yield legitimate adaptation; reactualization risks market-driven simplification when commercial demand supersedes community-defined values (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). Similarly, participation remains tokenistic when local actors lack decision-making power and interpretive authority (Ha, 2025). Even active participation does not guarantee deep learning without dedicated opportunities for embodiment, storytelling, emotional connection, and critical reflection (M. Gao et al., 2025; Lee & Wang, 2026; Yatim et al., 2025). Furthermore, authenticity is relational and negotiated across community actors, mediators, visitors, and institutions rather than residing in fixed forms (Abdellatif, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025). Power relations intersect every stage, dictating which expressions are highlighted, whose interpretations become authoritative, and how benefits are allocated (Aral, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026). The literature thus points toward an integrative process architecture where community agency, interpretive authority, inclusive governance, intergenerational engagement, and reflective capacity serve as essential enabling conditions, whereas commodification, tokenism, exclusion, and contested authenticity act as disruptive forces.

Building on this synthesis, this study formulates the Cultural Learning Cycle (CLC) as a recursive process framework comprising five distinct yet interconnected stages: Cultural Recognition, Reflexive Reactualization, Participatory Enactment, Value Negotiation and Internalization, and Cultural Reproduction. Cultural Recognition entails the collective identification and prioritization of cultural meanings deemed vital for continuity. Reflexive Reactualization involves adapting recognized meanings into contemporary, technologically enabled, and tourism-compatible expressions while maintaining community scrutiny (Dai et al., 2026; Jun & Sirivesmas, 2025; Yin et al., 2025). Participatory Enactment transitions reconstructed heritage into social practice through performance, co-creation, and shared interpretation (Abdellatif, 2026; Ha, 2025; Juliana et al., 2025; Liang et al., 2025). Value Negotiation and Internalization explains how enacted meanings are cognitively processed, affectively experienced, debated, and integrated into identity and practice (M. Gao et al., 2025; Lee & Wang, 2026; Yatim et al., 2025). Cultural Reproduction represents the conditional continuation and intergenerational transmission of reconfigured practices within community institutions (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025; Özkan, 2025; Syafrini et al., 2026). Crucially, reflection operates recursively throughout the entire cycle rather than as an isolated terminal phase, allowing stakeholders to evaluate authenticity, rectify emergent tensions, and recalibrate subsequent cycles of recognition and adaptation. The CLC thereby synthesizes previously fragmented bodies of scholarship into a coherent process model explaining how tourism events transform cultural display into negotiated learning and sustainable cultural reproduction, while explicitly accounting for failure pathways and contested outcomes.

METHODS

Review Design

This study adopts an integrative conceptual review to develop a process-oriented explanation of how tourism events may contribute to cultural reconstruction, learning, and reproduction. An integrative review is appropriate because the research problem spans several partially overlapping bodies of scholarship, including cultural tourism, heritage studies, event and festival research, community participation, cultural learning, authenticity, cultural revitalization, and cultural reproduction. Rather than testing a predetermined causal model, the review aims to identify conceptual connections, tensions, mechanisms, and boundary conditions across these

literatures and use them to construct a theoretically coherent framework. The approach therefore differs from a conventional descriptive literature review in two respects. First, studies are interpreted comparatively rather than summarized sequentially. Second, conceptual synthesis identifies how otherwise fragmented constructs may operate as parts of a recursive process linking cultural recognition, adaptation, participation, learning, and reproduction. The resulting Cultural Learning Cycle is consequently treated as a theory-building proposition derived from the synthesis of existing scholarship rather than as an empirically validated model.

Search Strategy and Literature Corpus

The contemporary literature base was derived from Scopus using combinations of terms representing the principal conceptual domains identified in the research problem. Searches incorporated terms related to cultural reconstruction, cultural revitalization, cultural regeneration, cultural reproduction, cultural continuity, cultural adaptation, cultural tourism, cultural events, festivals, event tourism, heritage tourism, community participation, community engagement, co-creation, experiential learning, cultural learning, authenticity, commodification, cultural appropriation, glocalization, and cultural sustainability. The exported corpus included 291 Scopus-indexed records published in 2025–2026: 153 from 2025 and 138 from 2026. The available records included authorship, publication year, Scopus link, abstract, author keywords, and index keywords. Because the review aims to develop concepts rather than measure bibliometrics, abstracts and keywords were used mainly to identify each study's theoretical function and relevance, not to calculate publication-performance indicators. We retained foundational works selectively where needed to anchor established concepts, while using the Scopus corpus to ensure the theoretical synthesis reflected current debates and emerging developments.

Literature was evaluated according to its substantive contribution to at least one of six analytical domains: (1) cultural reconstruction and adaptation; (2) tourism events and cultural representation; (3) community participation, agency, and co-creation; (4) experiential, social, or intergenerational cultural learning; (5) authenticity, commodification, power, and contested representation; and (6) cultural continuity, revitalization, and reproduction. Studies were not selected simply because they described cultural tourism. Greater analytical weight was assigned to sources that explained mechanisms, contradictions, actor relationships, or conditions affecting cultural transformation. Particular attention was given to research addressing both enabling and adverse outcomes, including community empowerment and cultural revitalization on the one hand, and commodification, symbolic displacement, unequal participation, external interpretive control, and contested authenticity on the other. This strategy was designed to minimize the affirmative bias that can arise when cultural events are treated primarily as instruments of preservation and tourism development.

Table 1. Integrative Review Protocol

Review Component	Procedure
Review orientation	Integrative conceptual review and theory-building synthesis
Primary database	Scopus
Contemporary corpus	291 records
Publication period	2025–2026
Records by year	153 (2025); 138 (2026)
Available fields	Authors, year, Scopus link, abstract, author keywords, index keywords
Core conceptual domains	Cultural reconstruction/adaptation; cultural events; community agency; cultural learning; authenticity/power; cultural reproduction
Relevance criterion	Direct theoretical or empirical contribution to mechanisms linking cultural representation, participation, learning, and continuity

Review Component	Procedure
Critical inclusion emphasis	Agency, power, authenticity, commodification, exclusion, cultural ownership, intergenerational engagement
Analytical objective	Identify mechanisms, transitions, boundary conditions, tensions, and feedback relationships.
Main output	Cultural Learning Cycle conceptual framework
Status of framework	Theoretical proposition requiring subsequent empirical validation

Source: Research data, 2026

Analytical Procedure and Framework Development

The analytical process proceeded through three interconnected stages. First, conceptual coding was conducted by identifying recurring constructs and mechanisms in abstracts and keywords. These included cultural recognition, revitalization, adaptation, reactualization, participation, enactment, co-creation, storytelling, experiential learning, reflection, authenticity, cultural agency, interpretive authority, intergenerational transmission, commodification, and cultural reproduction. Coding emphasized each construct's analytical role rather than how often particular terms appeared. Second, relational synthesis examined how the identified constructs were connected across studies. This stage focused especially on transitional questions: what enables cultural heritage to move from recognition to contemporary adaptation; how adaptation becomes enacted through participation; under what conditions participation becomes learning; and how learned meanings become socially reproducible. Contradictory findings were retained rather than resolved artificially, allowing commodification, contested authenticity, unequal participation, and market pressure to be interpreted as possible disruptions or boundary conditions within the process.

Third, process theorization organized the resulting mechanisms into a recursive framework. Concepts that performed similar theoretical functions were consolidated, while conceptually distinct mechanisms were maintained as separate stages. This procedure produced five processes: cultural recognition, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, value negotiation and internalization, and cultural reproduction. Reflection was treated as a cross-cutting, recursive mechanism rather than a terminal stage because evidence across cultural-learning and heritage studies suggests that interpretation and reassessment may occur throughout the cultural experience, not only after participation (Lee & Wang, 2026; Yatim et al., 2025). Community agency, interpretive authority, inclusive governance, and intergenerational engagement were subsequently conceptualized as enabling conditions, while commodification, tokenistic participation, contested authenticity, exclusion, and excessive market control were identified as disruptive forces (Ha, 2025; Papoutsaki, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025). The framework was then iteratively compared against the literature to assess whether its stages adequately captured both enabling and adverse pathways of cultural reconstruction.

Methodological Boundaries

Several methodological boundaries are deliberately acknowledged. The review does not claim systematic-review exhaustiveness, nor does it infer causal effects from the reviewed studies. The contemporary corpus is concentrated in 2025–2026 and was used primarily to capture recent theoretical and empirical debates rather than to reconstruct each concept's historical development. Moreover, the three cultural events previously discussed in the manuscript—Sekaten, the Lake Toba Festival, and the Baliem Valley Festival—are not treated as empirical case studies because the manuscript did not employ primary data or a systematic comparative case protocol. They may therefore be used only as illustrative contexts where appropriate. Most importantly, the Cultural Learning Cycle represents an analytically derived conceptual framework. Its stages, mechanisms, and boundary conditions require future validation through

comparative case studies, longitudinal research, participatory inquiry, expert assessment, and quantitative scale development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual Synthesis

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that contemporary scholarship has already identified most of the elements required to explain cultural reconstruction through tourism, but these elements remain distributed across partially disconnected theoretical streams. Cultural revitalization studies explain how tourism can reactivate weakened cultural practices, strengthen visibility, and generate new spaces for transmission and livelihood (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025; Özkan, 2025; Syafrini et al., 2026), while cultural adaptation research shows that inherited practices are continuously modified in response to modernization, tourism markets, digitalization, mobility, and changing audiences (Lucas, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Yin et al., 2025). Parallel work on community participation emphasizes empowerment, cultural stewardship, interpretive involvement, and local control over cultural representation (Ha, 2025). In contrast, cultural-learning studies foreground experiential engagement, storytelling, embodiment, reflection, and intergenerational transmission as mechanisms through which cultural meanings may become socially meaningful rather than merely observed (Lee & Wang, 2026; Liang et al., 2025; Yatim et al., 2025). Authenticity scholarship further complicates these processes by demonstrating that cultural legitimacy is relational and negotiated among communities, cultural intermediaries, institutions, and visitors rather than secured solely by reproducing an allegedly original cultural form (Abdellatif, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025). Taken separately, these streams provide increasingly sophisticated accounts of particular dimensions of cultural change; taken together, however, they suggest a more fundamental process problem concerning how cultural meanings move from recognition and reinterpretation toward participation, learning, and continued social reproduction.

A second pattern emerging from the synthesis is that the relationships among these dimensions are non-deterministic. Tourism can provide resources, audiences, infrastructures, and incentives for cultural revitalization, but increased visibility does not necessarily generate stronger cultural continuity (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025; Papoutsaki, 2026). Contemporary adaptation may help cultural practices remain intelligible to younger generations and external audiences, yet the same process may produce simplification, decontextualization, or commercialization when adaptations are primarily shaped by market expectations (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). Participation can strengthen stewardship and local cultural authority when communities influence decisions and interpretation (Ha, 2025), but nominal involvement may leave underlying asymmetries of representation and benefit distribution unchanged. Similarly, participation in cultural activities does not necessarily result in learning. Experiential evidence suggests that cultural understanding becomes deeper when interaction is accompanied by storytelling, emotional engagement, reflective interpretation, embodied activity, and repeated exposure (Lee & Wang, 2026; Liang et al., 2025; Yatim et al., 2025). These findings challenge the implicit linear assumption frequently underlying cultural-tourism discourse—namely that cultural presentation produces participation, participation generates learning, and learning automatically sustains cultural heritage.

A third cross-cutting finding concerns agency and interpretive authority. Across the reviewed literature, cultural outcomes appear to depend not only on the cultural form being represented but also on who controls its selection, adaptation, performance, and interpretation. Community engagement can strengthen cultural stewardship when residents remain active decision-makers and cultural knowledge holders rather than peripheral performers in externally designed tourism products (Ha, 2025). Heritage mediators, including guides, organizers, institutions, and digital

platforms, also influence how cultural narratives are translated and understood, making authenticity an enacted and relational achievement rather than an objective characteristic of cultural representation (Abdellatif, 2026; Lucas, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025). Tourism commercialization introduces an additional layer of power by affecting which symbols are emphasized, which narratives are marketable, and which practices are modified or omitted (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). Even cultural reproduction itself should therefore not be treated as a neutral continuation of tradition. What is reproduced may already reflect negotiated selections, generational reinterpretations, institutional priorities, market incentives, and changing relationships between communities and external audiences. Cultural continuity is thus more accurately conceptualized as socially authorized continuity through change, rather than as the uninterrupted transmission of culturally fixed forms.

These converging insights provide the basis for an integrated process logic. The reviewed evidence suggests five theoretically distinguishable transitions: cultural meanings must first be recognized and selected as significant; they are then reactualized so that they can operate within contemporary cultural and tourism settings; reactualized meanings must be socially enacted through meaningful participation; enactment may then become negotiated learning and internalization when participants interpret and reflect upon cultural meanings; and only under conditions that support continued practice, legitimacy, and intergenerational transmission can such learning contribute to cultural reproduction (Ha, 2025; Lee & Wang, 2026; Liang et al., 2025; Özkan, 2025; Yin et al., 2025). The synthesis also shows that each transition remains vulnerable to disruption through commodification, symbolic exclusion, tokenistic participation, contested authenticity, market-driven simplification, or unequal interpretive control (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025). The principal result of the conceptual synthesis is therefore not simply the identification of five cultural processes, but the recognition that cultural reconstruction operates as a conditional and recursive sequence of transitions whose outcomes depend on learning mechanisms, actor configurations, and power relations. This process logic provides the analytical foundation for the Cultural Learning Cycle developed in the following section.

Table 2. Conceptual Streams Underpinning the Cultural Learning Cycle

Literature Stream	Principal Contribution	Mechanism Identified	Limitation When Treated Independently	Function within the CLC
Cultural revitalization and continuity	Explains renewed visibility and continuation of weakened cultural practices	Reactivation, transmission, community livelihood, renewed cultural use	Does not fully explain how renewed cultural forms become learned or reproduced	Establishes the need for cultural recognition and continued reproduction
Cultural adaptation and reactualization	Explains transformation of inherited culture under contemporary conditions	Reinterpretation, redesign, hybridization, digital mediation	Adaptation can be assumed to be inherently beneficial	Grounds reflexive reactualization and distinguishes legitimate adaptation from market simplification
Community participation and agency	Explains local involvement, empowerment, stewardship, and cultural ownership	Decision-making, co-creation, interpretation, enactment	Participation is often treated as an outcome rather than as a	Grounds participatory enactment and introduces

Literature Stream	Principal Contribution	Mechanism Identified	Limitation When Treated Independently	Function within the CLC
			variable form of involvement	interpretive authority
Cultural and experiential learning	Explains how cultural experience develops into understanding and memory	Storytelling, embodiment, affect, interaction, reflection, repetition	Often centered on individual experience without explaining cultural continuity	Grounds value negotiation and internalization
Authenticity and heritage interpretation	Explains cultural legitimacy as relational, negotiated, and mediated	Interpretation, representation, mediation, recognition	Frequently treated separately from learning and reproduction	Functions as a boundary condition across all stages
Commodification and tourism development	Reveals market pressures, commercialization, political use, and unequal benefits	Selection, simplification, branding, economic incentives	Often framed only as a positive/negative impact dichotomy	Functions as a disruptive force capable of redirecting the cycle
Cultural reproduction and intergenerational transmission	Explains continuation of meanings and practices across time	Repeated practice, social transmission, institutionalization, identity reproduction	Often insufficiently connected to earlier processes of participation and learning	Represents the conditional outcome of the cycle
Integrated Cultural Learning Cycle	Connects representation, adaptation, participation, learning, and continuity	Recognition → reactualization → enactment → negotiated learning → reproduction	Requires empirical validation across different cultural and event contexts	Provides a recursive process explanation of cultural reconstruction

Source: Research data, 2026

The Five Stages of the Cultural Learning Cycle

The Cultural Learning Cycle (CLC) translates the conceptual synthesis into five analytically distinct but interconnected stages: cultural recognition, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, value negotiation and internalization, and cultural reproduction. These stages should not be interpreted as a deterministic sequence through which every cultural event necessarily progresses. Rather, they represent process domains through which cultural meanings may move as communities interact with changing social conditions, tourism markets, institutions, technologies, and audiences. The model therefore combines a directional logic—because recognition must precede meaningful reconstruction and learning must precede reproduction—with a recursive logic in which reflection, contestation, and emerging cultural conditions can redirect actors toward earlier stages. Evidence of cultural-symbol reconstruction, community agency, intergenerational learning, mediated authenticity, and tourism-driven cultural change supports this process interpretation (Abdellatif, 2026; Ha, 2025; Lee & Wang, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025).

Cultural Recognition

Cultural recognition constitutes the entry point of the cycle and refers to the collective identification, interpretation, and prioritization of cultural meanings considered significant

enough to be carried into contemporary practice. Recognition is more complex than inventorying tangible objects, rituals, performances, or traditions because cultural significance is neither evenly distributed nor universally agreed upon within communities. Heritage practices are embedded in collective memories, beliefs, identities, intergenerational relationships, and historically changing systems of meaning; consequently, decisions about what should be sustained are already interpretive and political acts. Research on the reconstruction of Yi Torch Festival symbols demonstrates that communities may simultaneously retain identity-bearing ritual elements while simplifying, expanding, or commercializing other components in response to modernization and tourism (Yin et al., 2025). Genealogical analysis of vernacular cultural forms similarly reveals that cultural development occurs through overlapping expressions shaped by beliefs, ethnic identity, artisan agency, commodification, and contemporary interpretation rather than through a single evolutionary trajectory (Jun & Sirivesmas, 2025). Studies of heritage interpretation further emphasize that lived experience and Indigenous knowledge can be marginalized when official narratives dominate decisions about what constitutes legitimate heritage. At the same time, community engagement strengthens cultural stewardship when local actors possess meaningful influence over cultural safeguarding and interpretation (Ha, 2025). Recognition in the CLC therefore requires cultural reflexivity: communities and other legitimate cultural actors must identify not only what exists, but what meanings remain socially significant, whose memories are represented, which practices are contested, and which elements require reinterpretation rather than uncritical preservation. Its principal output is a recognized cultural repertoire—a socially negotiated set of meanings, practices, symbols, and narratives that provides the cultural reference point for subsequent reactualization.

Reflexive Reactualization

Recognition alone does not secure cultural continuity because recognized cultural forms must remain intelligible and practicable under contemporary conditions. Reflexive reactualization refers to the deliberate reinterpretation and adaptation of recognized cultural meanings into forms capable of functioning within current social, technological, institutional, and tourism environments while remaining open to community scrutiny. Evidence increasingly shows that such adaptation is unavoidable rather than exceptional. The Yi Torch Festival has undergone ritual simplification, innovation, commercialization, and digital dissemination as cultural symbols are reconstructed under globalization and modernization (Yin et al., 2025). The evolution of vernacular cultural forms similarly demonstrates coexistence between inherited meanings and modern interpretations, with market forces and artisan agency shaping adaptation in non-linear ways (Jun & Sirivesmas, 2025). Digital environments expand this adaptive space further by creating new possibilities for documentation, interpretation, immersive presentation, transmedia storytelling, and intergenerational engagement (Lee & Wang, 2026; Liang et al., 2025). However, reactualization also constitutes one of the cycle's most vulnerable transitions. Tourism-oriented adaptation can improve cultural accessibility while simultaneously encouraging ritual simplification, symbolic alienation, aesthetic standardization, or the conversion of culturally embedded meanings into readily consumable representations (Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Yin et al., 2025). Digital mediation likewise changes not only the reach of cultural representation but also the authority to curate, encode, and circulate cultural meaning (C. Gao et al., 2026). The qualifier reflexive is therefore essential: adaptation becomes culturally productive when actors continually assess why a cultural form is being changed, for whom it is being changed, whose authority legitimizes the modification, and what meaning may be lost or generated through that transformation. The output is a contemporary cultural expression that remains recognizable to relevant cultural actors without being constrained to reproduce the past unchanged.

Participatory Enactment

The third stage, participatory enactment, shifts reconstructed culture from representation into social practice. Cultural meanings acquire experiential significance when they are performed, narrated, embodied, interpreted, shared, and contested through interaction. Tourism events are particularly important in this respect because they concentrate multiple forms of participation involving cultural custodians, performers, residents, young people, organizers, guides, tourism businesses, visitors, and increasingly digital intermediaries. Community engagement can reinforce heritage stewardship and intergenerational transmission when residents move beyond ceremonial inclusion toward meaningful involvement in decision-making and cultural interpretation (Ha, 2025). Participatory heritage interpretation similarly becomes more culturally grounded when lived experience and Indigenous knowledge inform the narratives communicated to visitors. In contrast, collaborative digital heritage practices demonstrate how co-design and transmedia interaction can transform fragmented cultural assets into shared community resources (Lee & Wang, 2026). Cultural co-creation can also make intergenerational memory socially accessible through collaborative storytelling and interactive engagement (Liang et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, participation varies substantially in depth. Attendance, observation, or performance within an externally designed event should not automatically be equated with agency. Community-based approaches perform more strongly when stakeholder participation is linked to distributed governance, cultural conservation, authenticity, and equitable benefits. The CLC therefore conceptualizes participatory enactment along a continuum from spectatorship → interaction → interpretation → co-creation → cultural agency. Movement toward the latter end of this continuum is more likely to produce socially meaningful cultural encounters because participants are not merely exposed to reconstructed culture but become involved in its enactment and interpretation. The output of this stage is socially enacted cultural meaning.

Value Negotiation and Internalization

Participation becomes culturally consequential only when enacted meanings are interpreted, evaluated, emotionally engaged with, and related to participants' existing identities and social experience. Value negotiation and internalization therefore constitute the principal learning mechanism of the CLC. It deliberately departs from transmission models that assume cultural values move intact from knowledgeable cultural authorities to passive recipients. Cultural learning research indicates that knowledge retention and deeper understanding are strengthened when participants actively explore cultural settings, interpret narratives, engage emotionally, and reflect on experience rather than merely encounter cultural information. Intergenerational heritage initiatives similarly demonstrate reciprocal forms of learning in which older participants contribute situated cultural memory while younger actors provide new technological competencies and modes of interpretation (Lee & Wang, 2026). Cultural co-creation can transform tacit memories into shared resources through interaction (Liang et al., 2025), while festival-based learning can connect schools, communities, ritual practices, music, costume, and cultural performance in ways that extend learning beyond the event itself (Yatim et al., 2025). Research on musical transmission further suggests that emotional engagement, symbolic coherence, and socially embedded learning environments influence the retention of cultural memory across generations (M. Gao et al., 2025). These findings imply that internalization requires multiple mechanisms—cognitive interpretation, affective engagement, embodied experience, interpersonal interaction, reflection, and repeated practice—and remains subject to negotiation. Participants may reaffirm, reinterpret, selectively adopt, or reject particular meanings. The outcome is therefore not cultural conformity but negotiated cultural understanding and identification, through which particular reconstructed meanings acquire sufficient personal or collective significance to influence subsequent cultural practice.

Cultural Reproduction

The final stage, cultural reproduction, occurs when negotiated cultural meanings extend beyond the temporary event experience and become incorporated into subsequent practices, relationships, institutions, representations, or intergenerational transmission. Reproduction is thus analytically different from preservation. What is reproduced is rarely an unchanged cultural form; rather, it is a culturally recognized and socially negotiated configuration that has already passed through processes of reactualization, enactment, and learning. Studies of cultural festivals demonstrate that adaptive ritual practices can continue to generate collective identity and social cohesion even amid migration, modernization, and tourism-related change (Özkan, 2025). Ethnic tourism can likewise support intangible heritage through renewed performance, language, craft, storytelling, and livelihood opportunities, although its sustainability depends on community participation and the management of commodification pressures (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025). Community engagement within heritage settings further contributes to cultural stewardship and intergenerational transmission when cultural actors retain substantive roles in safeguarding and interpretation (Ha, 2025). At the same time, the transformation of festival symbols from community-led inheritance toward tourism-driven symbolic reproduction demonstrates that continuity can occur while cultural authority is simultaneously displaced (Yin et al., 2025). Cultural reproduction must therefore be assessed not simply by asking whether a tradition continues to appear, but what meanings are reproduced, by whom, through which practices, under whose authority, and with what consequences for cultural ownership. Its output is continued but transformed cultural practice. Importantly, this output does not terminate the cycle: reproduced practices encounter new generations, technologies, political conditions, audiences, and tourism pressures, generating renewed questions about significance and legitimacy and thereby feeding back into cultural recognition.

Table 3. Analytical Architecture of the Cultural Learning Cycle

CLC Stage	Central Question	Dominant Mechanisms	Principal Actors	Immediate Output	Primary Risk
Cultural Recognition	What cultural meanings are significant enough to carry forward, and who determines their significance?	Identification, cultural memory, interpretation, selection, dialogue	Cultural custodians, elders, communities, youth, cultural institutions	Recognized cultural repertoire	Selective representation; exclusion; institutional domination
Reflexive Reactualization	How can recognized meanings operate within contemporary contexts without losing cultural legitimacy?	Reinterpretation, adaptation, redesign, digital mediation, glocalized expression	Communities, cultural practitioners, designers, organizers, institutions	Contemporary cultural expression	Market-driven simplification; symbolic alienation; decontextualization
Participatory Enactment	How are reconstructed meanings transformed from representation	Performance, storytelling, interaction, ritual, interpretation, co-creation	Communities, performers, youth, tourists, guides, organizers	Socially enacted cultural meaning	Tokenistic participation; unequal agency; spectacle without engagement

CLC Stage	Central Question	Dominant Mechanisms	Principal Actors	Immediate Output	Primary Risk
	into social practice?				
Value Negotiation and Internalization	Through what mechanisms does participation become culturally meaningful learning?	Cognitive interpretation, affect, embodiment, peer interaction, reflection, repetition	Community members, youth, tourists, educators, cultural mediators	Negotiated cultural understanding and identification	Passive consumption; superficial learning; rejection or misinterpretation
Cultural Reproduction	When do learned cultural meanings become sustained social practice?	Repeated enactment, intergenerational transmission, institutionalization, stewardship	Families, communities, cultural organizations, educational institutions, event networks	Continued but transformed cultural practice	Commodification, cultural displacement, loss of community authority

Source: Research data, 2026

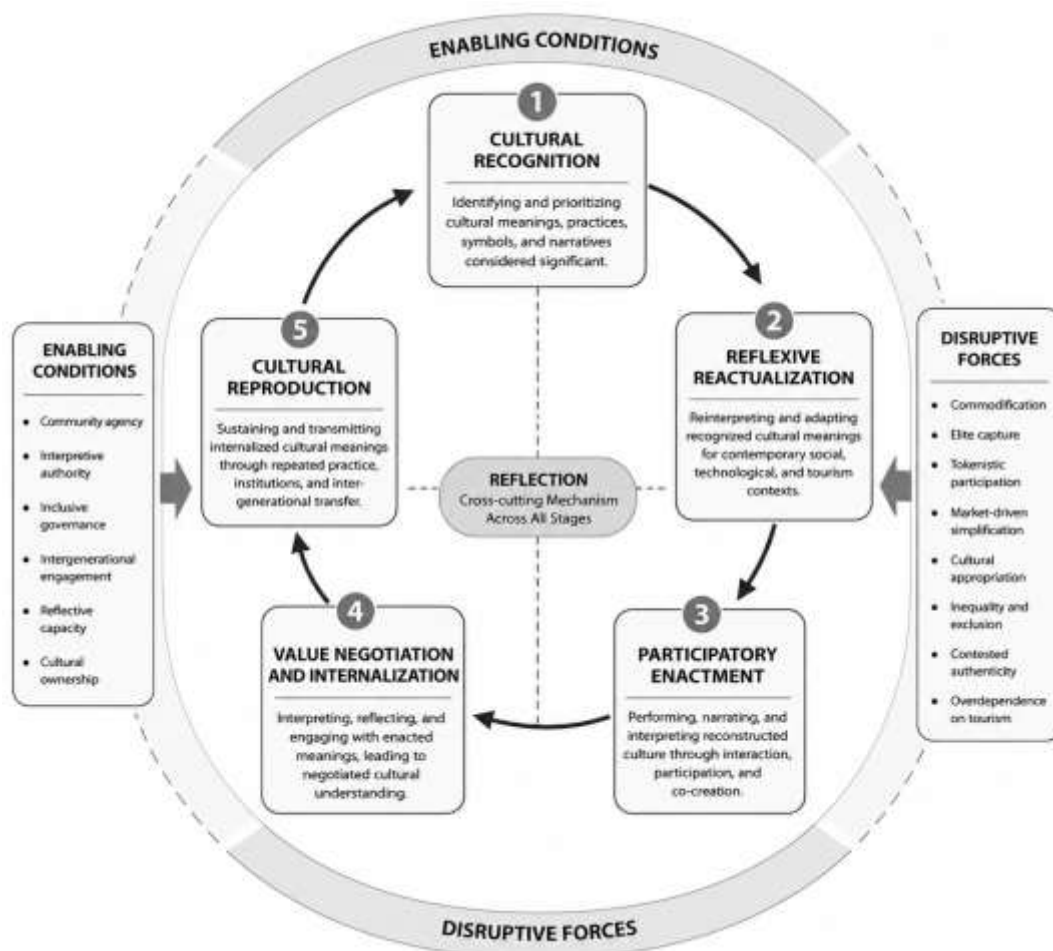


Figure 1. The Cultural Learning Cycle (CLC): A Recursive Process Model of Cultural Reconstruction through Tourism Events

Source: Research data, 2026

The five stages should therefore be interpreted as a conditional transition system rather than a closed developmental ladder. Cultural recognition provides the symbolic resources for reactualization; reactualization creates contemporary forms that can be enacted; enactment provides the experiential conditions for negotiated learning; and internalized meanings can contribute to reproduction when they are repeatedly practiced and socially supported. Yet failure at any transition can redirect the process. Recognition may privilege selective or politically authorized heritage; reactualization may become market simplification; participation may remain tokenistic; event experience may fail to produce deeper learning; and apparent reproduction may represent continued spectacle rather than community-controlled cultural continuity (Rickly et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025). This conditional structure distinguishes the CLC from normative models in which participation and cultural sustainability are assumed to be inherently reinforcing.

Recursive Feedback and Boundary Conditions

The Cultural Learning Cycle is recursive because cultural reproduction does not represent a terminal state. Once reconstructed meanings are reproduced through repeated practice, institutionalization, event participation, education, digital circulation, or intergenerational transmission, they enter new social conditions in which their relevance and legitimacy may again be questioned. Cultural practices are continually exposed to changing technologies, audience expectations, tourism markets, generational preferences, political agendas, and institutional arrangements, all of which can generate new rounds of cultural recognition and adaptation (Dai et al., 2026; Jun & Sirivesmas, 2025; Lucas, 2026; Yin et al., 2025). Evidence from festival transformation similarly shows that practices considered continuous may undergo repeated modification as communities respond to modernization, migration, commercialization, and tourism development (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Özkan, 2025). The feedback loop from cultural reproduction to renewed recognition therefore captures a fundamental characteristic of cultural continuity: what is reproduced today becomes the cultural repertoire that future actors must again interpret, evaluate, and potentially reconstruct. The CLC consequently departs from models in which learning culminates in a stable behavioral outcome. Instead, cultural learning generates provisional forms of continuity that remain open to further negotiation.

Reflection is the mechanism that enables this recursiveness. Rather than appearing as a discrete final stage, reflection operates throughout the cycle by allowing cultural actors to evaluate the legitimacy, meaning, inclusiveness, and consequences of emerging cultural practices. During recognition, reflection can expose differences over which cultural memories and identities are being privileged; during reactualization, it enables actors to assess whether adaptation remains culturally meaningful or has become primarily market driven; during participatory enactment, it creates opportunities to evaluate whose voices, knowledge, and interpretations are included; during value negotiation, it supports cognitive and affective interpretation of cultural experience; and during reproduction, it enables communities to reconsider whether the meanings being transmitted remain socially legitimate. Experiential and heritage-learning studies consistently emphasize reflective interpretation as a mechanism connecting participation with deeper cultural understanding (Lee & Wang, 2026; Yatim et al., 2025), while community-based heritage research indicates that ongoing dialogue and participation are important for sustaining local stewardship and intergenerational cultural transmission (Ha, 2025). Reflection therefore functions not merely as an individual learning activity but as a collective governance mechanism through which communities can reconsider cultural legitimacy and modify subsequent iterations of the cycle.

Progression through the CLC is further shaped by several enabling conditions. Community agency is fundamental because meaningful reconstruction requires cultural actors to influence decisions over representation, adaptation, interpretation, and benefit distribution (Ha, 2025). Interpretive authority determines whether cultural meaning remains grounded in lived

knowledge or becomes predominantly constructed through external institutional and tourism narratives (Abdellatif, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025). Inclusive governance broadens the range of actors able to participate in cultural decision-making and reduces the risk that heritage representation reflects only politically or economically dominant interests (Aral, 2026). Intergenerational engagement strengthens the likelihood that reconstructed meanings will move beyond temporary event participation toward continued transmission, particularly where younger and older participants contribute complementary knowledge and competencies (Lee & Wang, 2026; Yatim et al., 2025). Cultural ownership and reflective capacity further support the cycle by enabling communities to determine the limits of legitimate adaptation and reassess cultural transformations as circumstances change (Papoutsaki, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). These conditions do not guarantee cultural reproduction, but they increase the probability that transitions among stages remain culturally grounded rather than predominantly externally imposed.

Conversely, the cycle may be interrupted, weakened, or redirected by disruptive forces. Commodification can provide resources for revitalization while simultaneously encouraging the simplification of cultural meanings into commercially legible symbols (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). Elite capture or externally concentrated decision-making may allow particular institutions, businesses, or political actors to control which cultural narratives are displayed and which groups receive tourism benefits (Papoutsaki, 2026). Tokenistic participation may create the appearance of community involvement without redistributing interpretive authority, thereby weakening the transition from enactment to meaningful learning (Ha, 2025). Market-driven simplification and festival commercialization can alter ritual or symbolic content according to tourism demand rather than community-defined cultural priorities (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Yin et al., 2025). Cultural appropriation, unequal access, and contested authenticity may further reduce community recognition of reconstructed cultural forms and thereby interrupt subsequent internalization and reproduction (Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025). Tourism overdependence adds another vulnerability because cultural practices may become increasingly tied to visitor demand, event funding, or destination branding rather than maintained through broader community use. The CLC therefore allows for productive, stalled, redirected, and deteriorative pathways, making cultural reproduction a conditional outcome rather than an assumed consequence of event-based cultural participation.

Table 4. Enabling Conditions and Disruptive Forces within the Cultural Learning Cycle

Condition	Principal Effect on the Cycle	Stages Most Directly Affected	Possible Consequence
Community agency	Strengthens local influence over cultural selection, representation, and adaptation	Recognition; Reactualization; Enactment	Greater cultural legitimacy and ownership
Interpretive authority	Maintains community influence over cultural narratives and meanings	Recognition; Enactment; Internalization	More culturally grounded interpretation
Inclusive governance	Broadens participation in cultural decision-making and benefit distribution	All stages	Reduced exclusion and stronger procedural legitimacy
Intergenerational engagement	Connects cultural memory with new modes of participation and interpretation	Enactment; Internalization; Reproduction	Stronger transmission across generations

Condition	Principal Effect on the Cycle	Stages Most Directly Affected	Possible Consequence
Reflective capacity	Enables reassessment of meaning, legitimacy, and unintended outcomes	All stages	Adaptive feedback and renewed recognition
Cultural ownership	Establishes community-defined limits of legitimate adaptation and use	Recognition; Reactualization; Reproduction	Greater continuity of culturally recognized meanings
Commodification	Converts culturally embedded meanings into market-oriented representations	Reactualization; Enactment; Reproduction	Simplification or displacement of cultural meaning
Elite capture	Concentrates cultural and economic decision-making among limited actors	Recognition; Reactualization; Enactment	Unequal representation and benefit distribution
Tokenistic participation	Creates participation without substantive agency or interpretive influence	Enactment; Internalization	Spectacle without meaningful cultural learning
Market-driven simplification	Prioritizes visitor accessibility or commercial appeal over cultural complexity	Reactualization; Enactment	Decontextualization and reduced cultural legitimacy
Contested authenticity	Produces disagreement over the legitimacy of reconstructed cultural forms	Reactualization; Internalization; Reproduction	Rejection, conflict, or fragmented continuity
Cultural appropriation and exclusion	Weakens cultural ownership and marginalizes particular groups or meanings	Recognition; Enactment; Reproduction	Symbolic displacement and reduced community identification
Tourism overdependence	Makes cultural continuity dependent on event markets and visitor demand	Reactualization; Reproduction	Vulnerability to demand shifts and cultural instrumentalization

Source: Research data, 2026

The table reinforces an important theoretical implication of the CLC: the same tourism event can generate different cultural outcomes even when the five stages appear to be present. What determines the trajectory is not simply whether recognition, adaptation, participation, learning, and reproduction occur, but the institutional and cultural conditions governing transitions between them. The CLC should therefore be interpreted as a conditional recursive process model, in which feedback continuously reshapes cultural meaning and boundary conditions influence whether reconstructed culture becomes socially legitimate continuity, temporary tourism representation, or a source of new cultural contestation.

Actor Configuration and Power Relations

The Cultural Learning Cycle is not driven by an undifferentiated “community,” but by an actor configuration in which cultural custodians, residents, youth, performers, event organizers, guides, public institutions, tourism businesses, visitors, and digital intermediaries occupy different positions of knowledge, authority, visibility, and economic influence. This distinction matters because participation does not necessarily imply equivalent control over cultural meaning. Community engagement can strengthen stewardship, empowerment, and intergenerational transmission when residents participate substantively in heritage governance and interpretation (Ha, 2025). In contrast, tourism development may produce more ambiguous outcomes when institutional, conservation, commercial, and community interests compete over the same cultural resources (Papoutsaki, 2026). Heritage interpretation research similarly shows that local and

Indigenous knowledge can be marginalized when dominant institutional narratives define how culture is represented to visitors. In the CLC, actor configuration therefore concerns more than stakeholder inclusion: it refers to the distribution of interpretive authority, decision-making capacity, cultural legitimacy, and access to the symbolic and economic benefits generated by reconstructed culture.

Different actors perform distinct functions across the cycle. Cultural custodians, elders, knowledge holders, and long-term community members are particularly important during cultural recognition because they contribute historical memory, ritual knowledge, symbolic interpretation, and criteria of cultural legitimacy. Younger generations become critical when recognition moves toward reactualization and reproduction because they often mediate between inherited practices and changing technological, social, and audience environments. Intergenerational research shows that embodied cultural practices can transmit ancestral knowledge, social ethics, and cultural identity while simultaneously creating spaces in which younger participants reinterpret inherited meanings (Dais-Mohadali, 2025). Event organizers and cultural institutions exercise substantial influence during reactualization by selecting formats, narratives, performers, technologies, and market positioning, while tourism businesses and public agencies can shape which cultural expressions become economically viable or destination-visible (M M Alnaim, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026). Cultural intermediaries such as guides become especially influential during enactment and interpretation. Foreign tour guides in the UAE, for example, were found not merely to transmit authorized narratives but to actively mediate and hybridize heritage meanings, thereby shaping visitor perceptions of authenticity and national identity (Abdellatif, 2026). Tourists are likewise not passive endpoints of the process: their expectations, interpretations, emotional responses, and participation can influence which representations gain visibility and which forms of authenticity become performatively reinforced (Abdellatif, 2026; Jensen, 2025). Digital platforms and technological systems extend this configuration further by determining how cultural content is selected, encoded, circulated, and encountered beyond the physical event environment.

Power relations arise because these actor roles are not equally resourced or equally authoritative. The most consequential question is therefore not whether multiple actors are involved, but who possesses the capacity to define cultural significance, authorize adaptation, control representation, frame authenticity, and capture benefits. Heritage governance studies demonstrate that sustainable cultural tourism depends on balancing conservation, economic development, community interests, and stakeholder participation rather than assuming these goals naturally converge (M M Alnaim, 2026; Ha, 2025; Papoutsaki, 2026). Community agency can counterbalance institutional and market power by allowing local actors to shape heritage governance and cultural interpretation, but agency itself is unevenly distributed within communities according to generation, gender, status, cultural authority, and access to institutions (Aral, 2026; Ha, 2025). Authenticity is similarly power-laden because the narratives presented as culturally legitimate may reflect institutional scripts, mediator choices, community memories, or tourist expectations in different combinations (Abdellatif, 2026). Cultural tourism may therefore reproduce internal or external hierarchies even when participation appears broad. Within the CLC, power is treated as a cross-stage relational condition: it influences what enters the recognized cultural repertoire, what adaptations are authorized, who is able to enact culture publicly, whose interpretations shape learning, and which meanings ultimately become reproduced.

This actor-sensitive perspective also clarifies why the same cultural event can support cultural continuity in one context and generate symbolic displacement in another. A cycle dominated by community-defined recognition, negotiated adaptation, shared interpretation, and intergenerational participation is more likely to generate culturally legitimate reproduction. By contrast, a cycle in which external institutions determine heritage significance, commercial actors

dominate reactualization, communities are limited to performance roles, and tourists become the primary evaluative audience may reproduce culturally recognizable imagery while progressively weakening local authority over meaning. Evidence from community-centered heritage research supports the importance of local participation and empowerment for safeguarding and transmission (Ha, 2025), while studies of mediated authenticity demonstrate that external interpreters can substantially reshape cultural narratives even within formally authorized heritage environments (Abdellatif, 2026). Research on natural and cultural heritage governance further indicates that recognition and tourism growth may create conservation gains while simultaneously intensifying community tensions and commercialization pressures (Papoutsaki, 2026). Accordingly, the CLC conceptualizes cultural reproduction as an actor-contingent outcome: continuity depends not only on whether cultural meanings survive, but on whether communities continue to possess sufficient authority to recognize, reinterpret, enact, negotiate, and transmit those meanings on terms they regard as legitimate.

Table 5. Actor Roles and Power Positions within the Cultural Learning Cycle

Actor Group	Primary Role in the CLC	Stage(s) of Strongest Influence	Principal Resource Form or Power	Potential Positive Contribution	Principal Risk
Cultural custodians / elders / knowledge holders	Provide cultural memory, ritual knowledge, and legitimacy	Recognition; Reactualization ; Reproduction	Cultural authority and embodied knowledge	Safeguard meaning and intergenerational continuity	Gatekeeping; exclusion of or younger interpretations
Local community members	Participate in enactment, interpretation, governance, and benefit creation	All stages	Lived knowledge, collective legitimacy, social networks	Strengthen ownership, stewardship, and local relevance	Tokenistic participation or unequal internal representation
Youth / younger generations	Reinterpret inherited meanings and mediate contemporary forms	Reactualization ; Internalization; Reproduction	Technological fluency, new cultural repertoires, future transmission	Enable adaptation and intergenerational continuity	Generational conflict or detachment from inherited practices
Performers and cultural practitioners	Embody and publicly enact cultural meanings	Reactualization ; Enactment	Performative expertise and cultural visibility	Translate cultural knowledge into experiential forms	Reduction of culture to spectacle
Event organizers and cultural institutions	Curate themes, formats, narratives, and participation structures	Reactualization ; Enactment	Organizational and curatorial authority	Coordinate cultural expression and facilitate participation	Over-curation, standardization, or market prioritization
Government and public agencies	Regulate, fund, authorize, and promote cultural events	Recognition; Reactualization ; Reproduction	Policy, financial, and institutional authority	Protect heritage and enable long-term support	Political instrumentalization and authorized heritage dominance
Tourism businesses and sponsors	Connect cultural events to markets, visitors, and commercial resources	Reactualization ; Enactment	Financial and market power	Provide resources, visibility, and livelihood opportunities	Commodification and market-driven simplification

Actor Group	Primary Role in the CLC	Stage(s) of Strongest Influence	Principal Resource Form or of Power	Potential Positive Contribution	Principal Risk
Cultural intermediaries / tour guides	Translate and interpret cultural meanings for external audiences	Enactment; Internalization	Narrative and interpretive authority	Facilitate intercultural understanding and negotiated authenticity	Misrepresentation or displacement of local narratives
Tourists/visitors	Interpret, evaluate, participate in, and circulate cultural experiences	Enactment; Internalization	Attention, demand, evaluative influence	Support cultural exchange and experiential learning	Tourist expectations reshaping cultural representation
Digital platforms and technology providers	Mediate cultural visibility, circulation, documentation, and interaction	Reactualization ; Enactment; Reproduction	Algorithmic, technological, and distributional power	Extend access and enable new modes of transmission	Decontextualization , platform dependency, loss of representational control

Source: Research data, 2026

Table 5 reinforces a central proposition of the model: actor diversity should not be confused with power equality. The analytical value of the CLC lies partly in making visible where authority changes hands across the cycle. Cultural custodians may dominate recognition, organizers and institutions may gain influence during reactualization, performers and intermediaries may shape enactment, participants and visitors influence interpretation, and educational or community institutions may determine whether cultural meanings are subsequently reproduced. The stability and legitimacy of the cycle therefore depend on whether shifts in authority remain negotiated and accountable or gradually displace community control. This actor configuration provides the necessary foundation for Section 4.5, where the CLC is differentiated from adjacent frameworks and translated into explicit theoretical propositions.

Model Differentiation and Theoretical Propositions

The Cultural Learning Cycle differs from adjacent frameworks because it is designed specifically to explain how cultural meanings move through a sequence of recognition, adaptation, enactment, negotiated learning, and reproduction within tourism-event contexts. Existing approaches illuminate important parts of this process but generally stop at one analytical level. Experiential-learning models emphasize experience, reflection, and learning but do not usually address cultural ownership, authenticity, or intergenerational reproduction. Community-based tourism frameworks foreground participation, empowerment, and benefit distribution, yet they often provide limited explanation of how participation becomes cultural learning. Event co-creation research focuses on interaction and shared experience production but tends to prioritize visitor experience and value creation rather than cultural continuity. Cultural revitalization research explains renewal and adaptive continuity, while glocalization explains local-global adaptation, but neither consistently specifies the learning mechanisms through which reconstructed meanings become socially internalized and reproduced. Recent work on participatory heritage, cultural learning, mediated authenticity, and digital cultural transmission reinforces the need for a framework that connects these otherwise fragmented mechanisms (Abdellatif, 2026; Ha, 2025; Lee & Wang, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025).

Table 6. Differentiation of the Cultural Learning Cycle from Adjacent Frameworks

Framework	Primary Focus	Key Strength	Main Limitation	Distinctive Position Relative to CLC
Experiential learning	Transformation of experience into learning	Strong reflection and learning mechanism	Limited attention to cultural authority and reproduction	CLC extends learning toward cultural legitimacy and intergenerational reproduction
Community-based tourism	Participation, empowerment, and local benefits	Strong community agency and governance orientation	Limited explanation of how participation becomes learning	CLC connects participation with negotiated learning and reproduction
Event co-creation	Joint production of event experience	Strong interaction and co-creation	Usually focused on experience and value creation	CLC links co-creation to cultural learning and continuity
Cultural revitalization	Renewal of weakened cultural practices	Strong emphasis on revival and adaptation	Weak specification of learning mechanisms	CLC explains how revitalized culture may become enacted, learned, and reproduced
Glocalization / cultural adaptation	Local adaptation under external change	Strong explanation of cultural transformation	Limited attention to participation and learning	CLC integrates adaptation with enactment and internalization
Authenticity frameworks	Legitimacy of cultural representation and experience	Strong attention to negotiated meaning and power	Does not explain the complete reconstruction process	CLC positions authenticity as a boundary condition across stages
Cultural Learning Cycle	Event-mediated cultural reconstruction and continuity	Integrates adaptation, participation, learning, agency, and reproduction	Requires empirical validation	Provides a recursive process architecture linking recognition to reproduction

Source: Research data, 2026

The key contribution of the CLC is therefore not the introduction of entirely new constructs, but the reorganization of established constructs into a process theory with explicit transitions, actor conditions, feedback, and failure pathways. Cultural recognition specifies what enters the reconstruction process; reflexive reactualization explains how meanings are made contemporary; participatory enactment identifies the social mechanism through which reconstructed culture becomes experience; value negotiation and internalization specify how experience may become learning; and cultural reproduction explains when learned meanings persist through subsequent practice. Community agency, interpretive authority, inclusion, and intergenerational engagement influence these transitions, while commodification, tokenism, market simplification, and contested authenticity may disrupt them (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Ha, 2025; Papoutsaki, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026). In this sense, the CLC is not simply a cyclical diagram but a conditional process architecture.

Based on this process logic, six theoretical propositions are advanced—proposition 1 (P1): Cultural recognition and interpretive authority. Cultural recognition is more likely to initiate culturally legitimate reconstruction when communities and culturally authorized actors retain meaningful influence over which meanings, practices, symbols, and narratives are selected for representation. Where recognition is externally defined, subsequent stages are more likely to reproduce institutional or market priorities rather than community-defined cultural significance (Ha, 2025). Proposition 2 (P2): Reactualization and negotiated adaptation. Reflexive reactualization is more likely to support cultural continuity when adaptation is negotiated

through culturally grounded interpretation rather than primarily driven by commercial accessibility, destination branding, or external audience expectations. Market-dominated adaptation increases the likelihood of simplification, decontextualization, or symbolic displacement (Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Yin et al., 2025).

Proposition 3 (P3): Enactment and depth of participation. Participatory enactment is more likely to generate culturally meaningful engagement when participants move beyond spectatorship toward interaction, storytelling, interpretation, embodied practice, and co-creation. Tokenistic participation may increase visibility without generating equivalent cultural agency or learning (Ha, 2025; Lee & Wang, 2026; Liang et al., 2025). Proposition 4 (P4): Negotiation and internalization. Cultural participation is more likely to result in value internalization when participants cognitively interpret, affectively engage with, socially discuss, and reflect upon enacted cultural meanings. Exposure or attendance alone is insufficient to produce deeper cultural learning (M. Gao et al., 2025; Yatim et al., 2025).

Proposition 5 (P5): Internalization and cultural reproduction. Negotiated cultural meanings are more likely to become reproduced when they are supported by repeated practice, intergenerational engagement, community stewardship, institutional reinforcement, and continued cultural legitimacy. Without these conditions, event-based learning may remain temporary and fail to influence subsequent cultural practice (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025; Ha, 2025; Özkan, 2025). Proposition 6 (P6): Boundary conditions and cycle disruption. Commodification, elite capture, exclusion, market-driven simplification, contested authenticity, and tourism overdependence weaken or redirect transitions within the Cultural Learning Cycle by reducing cultural legitimacy, agency, or continuity. Their effects may occur at multiple stages rather than at a single point in the process (Papoutsaki, 2026; Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025).

These propositions position the CLC as a testable theoretical framework rather than a descriptive model. Future empirical work can examine whether the proposed transitions occur consistently across different types of festivals, cultural communities, governance arrangements, and tourism intensities; whether particular enabling conditions strengthen specific transitions; and whether disruptive forces produce identifiable failure pathways. Comparative case research could test how actor configurations alter the progression from recognition to reproduction, while longitudinal designs could assess whether event-mediated learning persists beyond the event itself. Quantitative research could subsequently operationalize constructs such as interpretive authority, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, negotiated internalization, and cultural reproduction and examine their relationships empirically. The value of the CLC therefore lies in converting a previously fragmented literature into a set of explicit relational claims that can be scrutinized, refined, rejected, or extended through subsequent research.

Discussion

From Cultural Preservation to Recursive Cultural Reconstruction

The findings reposition cultural continuity from a preservation-oriented logic toward recursive cultural reconstruction. Recent studies increasingly show that cultural practices do not persist through unchanged preservation, but through repeated processes of selection, reinterpretation, adaptation, and transmission under changing social, technological, and tourism conditions (Jun & Sirivesmas, 2025; Lucas, 2026; Özkan, 2025; Yin et al., 2025). The CLC extends this literature by specifying how continuity is produced through cultural recognition, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, value negotiation, and reproduction.

This perspective also challenges the assumption that either preservation or adaptation is inherently desirable. Tourism may revitalize cultural practices and increase visibility, while simultaneously encouraging simplification, commercialization, or selective representation (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025; Garcia-Ruiz, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026). Cultural sustainability

should therefore be understood as adaptive continuity, in which change remains culturally legitimate to relevant actors. Reproduction is not an endpoint, because reproduced meanings become the cultural material that future generations again recognize, reinterpret, and renegotiate.

Participation Is Not Learning

A central contribution of the CLC is the distinction between participation and cultural learning. Community participation is widely associated with empowerment, stewardship, and sustainable cultural tourism (Ha, 2025), yet participation alone does not explain how cultural meanings become internalized. The CLC proposes a more explicit mechanism: participation → interpretation → reflection → negotiation → internalization → reproduction.

Experiential and intergenerational learning studies suggest that deeper cultural understanding depends on storytelling, emotional engagement, embodied experience, social interaction, and reflection (Lee & Wang, 2026; Liang et al., 2025; Yatim et al., 2025). Participation therefore creates an opportunity for learning but is neither synonymous with agency nor sufficient for cultural continuity. The CLC extends co-creation and participatory tourism research by identifying learning as the mediating mechanism between enactment and reproduction.

Cultural Reconstruction as a Power-Dependent Process

The findings further demonstrate that cultural reconstruction is inherently shaped by power. Cultural continuity depends not only on which practices remain visible, but also on who determines their meaning, authorizes adaptation, controls representation, and benefits from their reproduction (Abdellatif, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025). This leads to an important distinction: Continuity of cultural performance is not equivalent to continuity of cultural authority. A cultural event may remain highly visible while interpretive authority gradually shifts from communities toward institutions, organizers, markets, or external intermediaries. Community participation can likewise coexist with limited decision-making power when local actors function primarily as performers rather than interpreters or cultural decision-makers (Ha, 2025). The CLC therefore treats community agency and interpretive authority as conditions shaping all stages of reconstruction. Cultural sustainability requires not only continued performance, but also the continued capacity of cultural actors to influence what is recognized, adapted, interpreted, and transmitted.

Theoretical Advancement of the Cultural Learning Cycle

The CLC contributes theoretically in four ways. First, it provides a process contribution by integrating previously fragmented concepts of cultural adaptation, participation, learning, authenticity, agency, and reproduction into a recursive sequence. Second, it provides a learning contribution by explaining how participatory experience can become negotiated cultural understanding and subsequent practice. Third, it provides an agency and power contribution by positioning interpretive authority and cultural ownership as mechanisms that determine whether reconstruction remains culturally legitimate. Fourth, it offers a contribution to conditionality by rejecting the assumption that tourism events inherently generate cultural sustainability. Commodification, exclusion, contested authenticity, and market-driven simplification may redirect or weaken the cycle (Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025). Overall, the CLC reframes tourism events as contested learning infrastructures rather than merely temporary platforms for cultural display. Cultural sustainability emerges when culturally meaningful practices are recognized, reflexively adapted, substantively enacted, negotiated through learning, and reproduced while sufficient community agency and interpretive authority are maintained.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes four interrelated theoretical contributions to the literature on cultural tourism, event studies, and cultural sustainability. First, it advances a process-based explanation of cultural reconstruction. Previous research has examined cultural revitalization, adaptation, participation, authenticity, experiential learning, and cultural transmission as important but often separate phenomena (Ha, 2025; Lee & Wang, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025). The Cultural Learning Cycle (CLC) integrates these constructs into a recursive process comprising cultural recognition, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, value negotiation and internalization, and cultural reproduction. Its theoretical value therefore lies not in introducing entirely new constructs, but in specifying how previously fragmented mechanisms are connected over time.

Second, the CLC identifies cultural learning as the missing mechanism between participation and cultural reproduction. Participatory and community-based tourism literature has established the importance of involvement, empowerment, and co-creation, but participation is frequently treated as if it naturally leads to cultural sustainability (Abrahams & Tichaawa, 2025; Ha, 2025). The present framework challenges this assumption by distinguishing participation from internalization. It proposes that cultural enactment contributes to reproduction only when experience is accompanied by interpretation, affective engagement, reflection, social negotiation, and repeated practice (Liang et al., 2025; Yatim et al., 2025). This extends experiential-learning theory from predominantly individual learning outcomes toward collective and intergenerational cultural reproduction.

Third, the framework introduces a power-sensitive explanation of cultural continuity. Community agency, interpretive authority, and cultural ownership are conceptualized not simply as desirable governance attributes but as conditions that influence transitions throughout the cycle. This distinction allows the framework to separate the persistence of visible cultural forms from the persistence of community authority over those forms. Cultural performances may continue while decisions concerning their meaning, adaptation, and representation increasingly shift toward governments, tourism businesses, organizers, or cultural intermediaries (Abdellatif, 2026; Papoutsaki, 2026). The CLC therefore advances the proposition that continuity of cultural performance does not necessarily constitute continuity of cultural authority, connecting debates on authenticity and commodification more directly with cultural-learning and reproduction processes.

Fourth, the study contributes a conditional and recursive conception of cultural sustainability. Rather than assuming that tourism events inherently revitalize culture, the CLC specifies enabling conditions and disruptive forces that may strengthen, interrupt, or redirect cultural reconstruction. Community agency, inclusive governance, intergenerational engagement, and interpretive authority can facilitate movement through the cycle, whereas commodification, tokenistic participation, exclusion, contested authenticity, and market-driven simplification may produce stalled or deteriorative trajectories (Pathaw & Dharmalingam, 2026; Rickly et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025). Cultural sustainability is consequently theorized as adaptive and repeatedly negotiated continuity, rather than the preservation of an unchanged cultural form.

Taken together, these contributions reposition tourism events from temporary sites of cultural display toward contested learning infrastructures through which cultural meanings are selected, adapted, enacted, negotiated, and potentially reproduced. The CLC consequently provides a theoretical bridge between cultural reconstruction, participatory tourism, experiential learning, heritage governance, and cultural sustainability, while generating explicit propositions that can be examined through comparative, longitudinal, and quantitative empirical research.

Managerial Implications

The Cultural Learning Cycle (CLC) offers a practical basis for designing cultural tourism events as learning and cultural-reproduction systems rather than one-off showcases. For destination managers, event organizers, heritage institutions, and local governments, the first implication is that cultural programming should begin with community-led cultural recognition. Decisions about which traditions, narratives, symbols, and practices are represented should involve cultural custodians, local communities, younger generations, and relevant cultural institutions. This reduces the risk that cultural content is selected primarily for marketability while culturally significant but less visible meanings are excluded.

Second, event design should move beyond presentation toward participatory enactment and guided learning. Cultural performances, rituals, crafts, storytelling, gastronomy, and other heritage expressions should be accompanied by opportunities for interpretation, interaction, reflection, and where appropriate, co-creation. Participation should therefore be assessed not only through attendance or visitor engagement, but through the depth of cultural interaction and the extent to which participants understand the meanings underlying the activity. Guides, performers, educators, and cultural intermediaries become central in connecting experience with cultural interpretation.

Third, managers should treat adaptation as a negotiated process. Contemporary formats, digital technologies, new performance styles, and tourism-oriented presentation can strengthen accessibility and intergenerational relevance, but such changes should be periodically reviewed with cultural actors to ensure that adaptation does not result in excessive simplification or decontextualization. In practice, this requires cultural review mechanisms through which communities can evaluate how their heritage is being represented, transformed, and circulated before and after an event.

Fourth, governance arrangements should protect community agency and interpretive authority. Local participation should extend beyond performance roles to include decisions about event themes, narrative framing, acceptable forms of adaptation, commercial partnerships, and benefit distribution. Managers should therefore distinguish between visible participation and substantive cultural control. Clear mechanisms for consultation, representation of different community groups, and transparent allocation of economic benefits can reduce elite capture and tokenistic participation while strengthening the legitimacy of cultural reconstruction.

Fifth, cultural-event evaluation should extend beyond conventional indicators such as visitor numbers, satisfaction, media exposure, or economic impact. The CLC suggests additional indicators including the extent of intergenerational participation, perceived cultural legitimacy, depth of visitor learning, community influence over interpretation, repeated cultural practice after the event, and the continuation of cultural knowledge beyond event settings. Such indicators enable managers to assess whether an event merely generates cultural visibility or contributes to longer-term cultural reproduction.

Finally, the recursive nature of the CLC implies that cultural-event management should incorporate post-event reflection and feedback. Community debriefings, participant feedback, cultural-content reviews, and documentation of emerging interpretations can inform subsequent editions of the event. Rather than repeating a fixed format annually, managers can use this feedback to identify which practices should be retained, adapted, discontinued, or reinterpreted. In this way, cultural tourism events can function as adaptive platforms through which cultural meaning, community agency, visitor learning, and cultural continuity are managed together over time.

CONCLUSION

This study developed the Cultural Learning Cycle (CLC) as a conceptual framework for explaining how tourism events may contribute to cultural reconstruction and continuity. Drawing on an integrative synthesis of recent literature, the framework identifies five interconnected stages: cultural recognition, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, value negotiation and internalization, and cultural reproduction. These stages are linked recursively rather than linearly, with reflection operating across the cycle and with outcomes shaped by community agency, interpretive authority, inclusive governance, intergenerational engagement, and other contextual conditions.

The study shows that cultural sustainability cannot be inferred simply from the continued existence of festivals, performances, or tourism-related cultural activities. Cultural forms may remain visible while their meanings, authority, or ownership shift substantially. The CLC therefore distinguishes cultural performance from cultural authority and emphasizes that participation only contributes to long-term cultural continuity when it is accompanied by interpretation, reflection, negotiation, and opportunities for subsequent practice. Cultural reconstruction is consequently understood as a conditional process in which adaptation can support continuity but can also generate simplification, commodification, exclusion, or contested authenticity.

The principal contribution of the framework lies in connecting cultural adaptation, participation, experiential learning, community agency, authenticity, and cultural reproduction within a single process architecture. Tourism events are thereby reframed from temporary sites of cultural display into contested learning infrastructures through which cultural meanings are selected, adapted, enacted, interpreted, and potentially transmitted across generations. This perspective shifts attention from whether tourism preserves culture toward the more analytically useful question of how, by whom, and under what conditions cultural meanings are reconstructed and reproduced.

As a conceptual proposition, however, the CLC should not yet be interpreted as an empirically validated causal model. Its five stages, proposed transitions, enabling conditions, and disruptive forces require examination across different cultural settings, event forms, and governance contexts. Comparative and longitudinal research would be particularly valuable for determining whether cultural learning persists beyond individual events and whether community interpretive authority is maintained as tourism development intensifies. Subject to such empirical testing, the CLC offers a foundation for advancing theory and practice toward a more process-oriented, learning-centered, and power-sensitive understanding of cultural sustainability in tourism.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the Cultural Learning Cycle (CLC). First, the framework was developed through an integrative conceptual review, not through primary empirical investigation. The five stages and their proposed relationships therefore represent theoretically derived process propositions rather than empirically established causal pathways. Although the reviewed literature provides support for the individual mechanisms incorporated into the model, the sequence from cultural recognition to cultural reproduction has not yet been tested as an integrated process.

Second, the literature corpus was concentrated on publications from 2025–2026, which strengthens the contemporary relevance of the synthesis but narrows its historical coverage. Foundational theories of experiential learning, authenticity, heritage interpretation, cultural reproduction, and community-based tourism were therefore not systematically re-examined within the same review protocol. Future research should broaden the temporal scope and incorporate foundational as well as contemporary scholarship to assess whether the CLC remains theoretically robust across different intellectual traditions and periods.

Third, the framework integrates cultural reconstruction across diverse tourism and heritage settings, but cultural meanings, governance arrangements, and community structures vary substantially across destinations. Concepts such as authenticity, cultural ownership, participation, and legitimate adaptation are likely to operate differently across Indigenous, rural, urban, religious, ethnic, and festival contexts. The CLC should therefore not be assumed to function identically across settings. Comparative research is needed to examine which stages are context-dependent and whether different actor configurations produce alternative trajectories through the cycle.

Future research should prioritize empirical validation and refinement of the framework. Qualitative longitudinal studies could examine how cultural meanings evolve before, during, and after tourism events, while comparative case studies could assess how different governance arrangements influence transitions between stages. Quantitative research could subsequently operationalize constructs such as cultural recognition, reflexive reactualization, participatory enactment, value negotiation, interpretive authority, and cultural reproduction, and test their relationships using mediation, moderation, or longitudinal models.

A further research priority concerns the boundary conditions and failure pathways proposed by the CLC. Future studies should examine when commodification, elite capture, tokenistic participation, market-driven simplification, contested authenticity, or tourism overdependence interrupt or redirect the cycle. Particular attention should also be given to whether apparently successful cultural reproduction can coexist with declining community authority over cultural meaning. This would allow researchers to distinguish between cultural continuity, symbolic reproduction, and tourism-driven cultural display.

Finally, future research should investigate the temporal persistence of cultural learning beyond the event itself. Post-event and intergenerational designs are particularly important for determining whether participation produces lasting changes in cultural understanding, practice, identity, and stewardship. Testing these mechanisms across multiple cultural settings would enable the CLC to evolve from a conceptual process framework into a more empirically grounded theory of cultural reconstruction and sustainability in tourism.

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