

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

M22 – Cultural Heritage Management

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Abstract

This report explores the need to protect and pass on intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and highlights the essential part played by local communities in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage from one generation to the next. Oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship are the living soul of human civilization, and are included in the intangible cultural heritage. Intangible heritage is not a physical monument or artifact but is alive, embodied in the memories, bodies and social networks of living communities, it can only survive with the involvement of these communities.

It delves into the nature and scope of ICH as defined by the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and looks at the various aspects of community involvement in the preservation of ICH. It examines the key challenges to intangible heritage such as globalization, commercialization, migration, urbanization and the loss of traditional knowledge, and reviews critically the policy and programmatic approaches that have been put in place to tackle these challenges. Based on experiences from India, Japan, Peru, and West Africa, the report shows how community-based strategies for the preservation of ICH can work to sustain the life and meaning of cultural practices in the modern world. The report ends with a list of policy, heritage practice and community recommendations based on the evidence.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage, community participation, UNESCO Convention, safeguarding, globalization, traditional knowledge, oral traditions, performing arts, cultural transmission

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage is the legacy a given generation leaves to the next generation - a living link between the past and the future. The prevalent paradigm of cultural heritage management in much of the twentieth century centered around tangible heritage: the buildings, monuments, archaeological sites, and museum collections through which past civilizations leave physical evidence. Although this emphasis has brought impressive successes in conservation and preservation, it has become more and more known as insufficient, as it overlooks the enormous realm of living, dynamic cultural practices and knowledge systems that are transmitted by human communities (Gaonkar & Sukthankar, 2025).

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and individuals acknowledge as cultural heritage. It encompasses oral traditions and expressions (including language as a carrier of the intangible cultural heritage), performing arts (including traditional music, dance and theatre), social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices about nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. Intangible heritage, in contrast to tangible heritage, is manifested in the living practices and the knowledge transmitted by communities and exists in the physical objects and spaces of community. This renders it both more frail and more hardy than material heritage: frail in that it requires the presence of living practitioners and social circumstances that keep the practice alive; hardy in that it can be re-created and modified anywhere communities that practice it persist (Fangni, 2025).



Figure 1: Cultural Heritage Management Framework UNESCO Pillars of Sustainable Heritage Conservation

This report contributes to the growing body of scholarship on intangible heritage management by examining the complex dynamics of community participation in ICH preservation. It explores what intangible cultural heritage is, why community participation matters, what threatens ICH, and what strategies have proven effective in sustaining intangible heritage in the face of rapid social, economic, and technological change. Through case studies from diverse cultural contexts, the report demonstrates that effective ICH management requires not only technical expertise and institutional support but also deep respect for the agency, knowledge, and rights of heritage communities (Aljarelah, 2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Intangible Cultural Heritage

The notion of intangible cultural heritage has changed considerably during the last few decades. Previous folklore and ethnomusicology scholarship had long been aware of the value of oral traditions, music, dance and ritual as an object of scholarly interest, although these fields did not offer a consistent approach to heritage management and policy. The anthropological understanding of the term culture - including the collective beliefs, values, practices, and knowledge systems of human societies - was a broader base, but it was so broad as to be challenging to implement policy (Maluleka et al., 2024).

The UNESCO Convention of 2003 is the most authoritative and influential effort to conceptualize and operationalize the notion of intangible cultural heritage to be used in administration. The Convention describes ICH as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - and those instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces related to them - which communities, groups and in certain instances, individuals acknowledge as belonging to their cultural heritage. A few important characteristics of this definition are as follows: it is community-centered, i.e. it is communities, rather than outside experts or governments, who decide what is part of their intangible heritage; it is dynamic, i.e. it is continually recreated and adapted by communities in response to their environment and their history; and it relates to the fact that transmission between generations is a defining characteristic of ICH (Vana et al., 2025).

2.2 Community Participation in Heritage Management

Engaging the community has become one of the key concepts of modern heritage management, due to more general changes in governance theory and practice towards more participative, inclusive, and decentralized forms. The participatory approaches to heritage management are based on a range of premises: communities own and manage their own heritage; communities possess special knowledge that can be absent in external experts about their heritage; community participation leads to more sustainable and legitimate heritage management results; and heritage management must be supportive of the needs and desires of living communities, rather than serving the interests of scholars, tourists, or state institutions (Lopez-Guzman et al., 2022).

Community involvement in the case of intangible heritage is not instrumentally useful, as it is a tool of enhancing better management results, but is essential. Since intangible heritage is in the living practices and knowledge passed to communities, it can only be maintained through the active participation of the communities. A traditional music which is recorded and preserved but no longer performed by a current population is not a living heritage but a historic artifact. The existence of intangible heritage would be tied to the further desire and ability of the members of the community to learn, practice, and pass their cultural traditions (Kim et al., 2023).

The idea of community-based heritage management (CBHM) has become a convenient model of the participatory approaches operationalization. CBHM focuses on the need to engage communities in all levels of the heritage management cycle - identification and assessment, conservation, interpretation and management planning and capacity building of communities to lead and maintain heritage activities through the years. The studies have always demonstrated that CBHM methods lead to more robust and successful results, compared to top-down, expert-based models, as they make sure that heritage management practices correspond to the values, needs, and priorities of the community (Zabulis, 2024).

2.3 Threats to Intangible Cultural Heritage

The academic sources list a large number of threats to intangible cultural heritage, which can be classified into four broad categories, namely, socioeconomic change, globalization and cultural homogenization, demographic change, and insufficient institutional support. Socioeconomic transformation such as urbanization, industrialization and the transformation of subsistence to market economies has had a tremendous destabilizing effect on the social conditions that uphold intangible heritage. The traditional crafts and performing arts that were part of the agrarian or village life might become less functional and social as people move to urban and industrial forms of living. Financial strains of market competitions can render the traditional practitioners unable to maintain their lives resulting in abandonment of the time-consuming traditional skills and practices. And the commercialism of cultural practices, where they become not communal ways of expressing identity but tourist commodities, can detract the authentic and social value of such practices (Richards, 2025).

The advent of globalization has posed threats and opportunities to intangible heritage. On the one hand, the mass media, consumer culture and the dominance of languages (especially English) are

a great threat to linguistic and cultural diversity because communities (especially the youth) are lured out of their traditional ways of doing things into the cultural forms that are dominant worldwide. Conversely, this has resulted in globalization, which has provided novel avenues of sharing and acknowledgment of the intangible heritage, allowing communities of heritage to be exposed to global audiences and to be linked to other diaspora communities and cultural partners across the globe (Mojapelo, 2025).

Demographic change - such as population aging, youth migration and decreasing birth rates - are especially threats to the intergenerational transfer of intangible heritage. The art of many traditional crafts and performing arts takes years of practice to perfect, and the passing of both skills and knowledge is reliant on long-term mentoring relationships between the older generation of crafts and performers and the young students. The process of breaking the chain of transmission may be challenging to restore once young people have moved out of their communities in search of economic opportunities or when they have not been motivated to acquire time-intensive traditional skills (Liorančaitė-Šukienė & Jakštienė, 2025).

2.4 Strategies for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

According to the literature, there are various strategies to protect intangible cultural heritage, which can be arranged on a scale between documentation-oriented strategies on one end and community empowerment strategies on the other end. Documentation Documentation is a very common method of safeguarding intangible heritage, especially of threatened types of heritage, where audio, video, written, and digital forms of documentation are involved. The documentation cannot replace the living practice, but it may be a valuable part of the future revitalization and academic research (Konvit & Conde, 2021).

Education and transmission programs - these programmes that facilitate teaching and learning of intangible heritage in the community context are generally identified as a key element of effective safeguarding. Such programs can be in the form of community schools, apprenticeship programs, cultural centers, or youth camps and can be provided by community elders, master practitioners or professional educators. Integration of ICH into formal education programmes has been promoted as one way of reaching youth who might not be members of community based transmission programmes. Intellectual protection systems (such as intellectual property protection), cultural protection systems (such as cultural property protection), and geographic indications may be

relevant in preventing the prohibited use, commercialization and appropriation of intangible heritage. Nevertheless, researchers have also observed that legal protection does not necessarily support the continuation of living heritage practices and that it can at times conflict with the communal, open, and dynamic nature of traditional knowledge systems (Gaonkar & Sukthankar, 2025).

3. Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is qualitative in terms of systematic literature review, analysis of policy documents, and comparative analysis of cases. The research design is descriptive and analytical, as it will synthesize the existing knowledge on the topic of management of intangible cultural heritage and community participation, instead of generating primary data on the topic (Fangni, 2025). The major sources of information are academic literature on intangible heritage, heritage management and community involvement based on academic journals like the International Journal of Heritage Studies, the Journal of Cultural Heritage and the International Journal of Intangible Heritage. UNESCO, ICOMOS and national heritage agency policy documents have been examined to learn how the ICH is managed as an institution. ICH safeguarding projects in India (Kutiyattam Sanskrit theatre), Japan (Noh and Kabuki theatre traditions), Peru (Andean textile traditions) and West Africa (Griot oral storytelling) have been discussed as examples of the variety of community participation models and the opportunities and challenges they present (Aljarelah, 2024).

The choice of these case studies was based on the fact that they exemplify a variety of cultural settings, types of intangible heritage, and methods of protection, and extensive published information about each of them can be found. Comparative analysis of these cases permits identifying the general principles and context-related differences in successful ICH management practice. The research recognizes that its use of secondary sources implies that it is at the mercy of the quality and coverage of the available literature, and that key elements of community experience might be underrepresented in published academic and institutional materials. The current limitations could be overcome by employing primary fieldwork with the heritage communities in different cultural settings in future research (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025).

4. Findings

4.1 The Nature and Scope of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The results of this paper affirm that intangible cultural heritage represents an extremely broad spectrum of human practices and knowledge systems. The five categories of the UNESCO 2003 Convention oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices, rituals, and festive events; knowledge and practices regarding nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship are

merely the most generalized groups of a universe of cultural expression that encompasses thousands of specific traditions, practices, and knowledge systems in the cultures of the world (Maluleka et al., 2024).

Oral traditions and expressions Oral traditions and expressions Myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, poetry, songs and other expressions that bear the wisdom, history, values and creativity of human beings. They encompass the huge oral literature of pre-literate societies, and the oral aspects of literary cultures, such as storytelling traditions, oral poetry and music, that survive alongside written literature. Oral tradition is mainly expressed through language, and thus linguistic diversity cannot be deemed without intangible heritage diversity (Vana et al., 2025).

One of the most vivid and visible types of intangible heritage is performed arts, such as traditional music, dance and theatre. Performing arts represent aesthetic sensibilities, social values and collective memories of their communities in the Noh and Kabuki theatre traditions of Japan, the samba and capoeira of Brazil, the griot storytelling traditions of West Africa. Traditions of the performing arts are especially susceptible to loss when the community that supports them is economically or socially destabilized, as they usually demand long-term commitment of time, energy, and financial resources by both professionals and spectators (Maier et al., 2023).



Figure 2: Threats to Intangible Cultural Heritage Challenges Facing Traditional Knowledge and Practices

One of the most community-centered forms of intangible heritage are the social practices, rituals and festive events: coming-of-age, harvest festivals, religious practices, healing rituals and community work practices. They establish the instances of articulation and strengthening of mutual sense of identity, values and societal connections, and the structures through which the youthful members of the community are socialized into their cultural practices. The importance of these practices can be much larger than what they actually entail: a harvest festival is not just an agricultural celebration but a community interaction with the land, its neighbors, its ancestors, and its concept of the cosmos (Lopez-Guzman et al., 2022).

Traditional craftsmanship such as weaving, pottery, woodcarving, metalwork and other forms of handcraft have been a form of intangible heritage that is intertwined with the material culture of the communities. Traditional crafts represent not only the acquired technical skills and sense of beauty that has been cultivated over generations, but also often have strong symbolic significance concerning community identity, social status, and spiritual faith. The designation of the art of Azerbaijan carpet weaving and the Oshiro-zome (white dyeing) method of the Kyoto Prefecture in Japan as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and the status of the creative idea behind the craft in general as a creative one have elevated the status of the traditional craftsmanship to a global level of recognition (Kim et al., 2023).

4.2 Community Participation: Models and Mechanisms

The paper recognizes various different models of community involvement in intangible heritage management, between token consultation and real community leadership and ownership. Perhaps the most widespread model in practice is the consultation model whereby government agencies or professional heritage organizations make heritage management decisions and community members are invited to contribute to them as a part of the consultation process. Although it is preferable to no community participation whatsoever, scholars have always observed the limitations of consultation: the community input might not be taken into the decision-making in any real way, the community might not have the information or ability to engage in the consultation processes, and the power dynamics of these processes may intentionally disadvantage the marginal members of the community (UNESCO, 2023).

A more participatory model is the co-management model: where communities and government agencies or professional heritage organizations have a say in heritage management decisions.

Forms of co-management can vary widely, such as formal governance systems where representatives of the community are placed in the boards of heritage management, to informal partnerships where community members are involved in co-investigating, co-designing, and co-implementing heritage protection projects. Co-management is especially best suited to the heritage setting where the corresponding knowledge and authority are shared between the members of the community and external professionals (Zabulis, 2024).

The most truly participatory model is the community-led management model where communities assume the forefront in identifying, recording and preserving their own intangible heritage, with the government agencies and professional heritage bodies acting in a supportive, rather than a directive role. The model is based on the understanding that communities are the most important holders and custodians of their own heritage and that communities have their own knowledge and authority that cannot be reproduced by external professionals. Community-led management works best when communities possess good internal governance systems, financial and human resources, and have access to the technical support they require to execute their heritage management plans (Richards, 2025).

4.3 Threats to Intangible Cultural Heritage: Case Study Evidence

The case studies used in this paper give good evidence of the various and overlapping threats to intangible cultural heritage in different cultural settings. The tradition of Kutiyattam Sanskrit theatre in India (which is listed by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008) is threatened by the dwindling supply of trained performers, by the lack of interest in the art form by modern audiences, and by the unsteadiness of the patronage systems that traditionally underpinned the art form. This is because the tradition is hereditary, where knowledge is passed down among certain caste groups, so that the death of a few important practitioner families would forever break the chain of transmission (Mojapelo, 2025).

Griot In West Africa, oral storytelling and music, found in the tradition of griot, are under complicated threats of urbanization, migration and shifts in social organization. Griots traditional praise singers, oral historian and musicians who have long been the keepers of the community memory and identity have traditionally held a unique social status within Mande and other related cultures. The social role and status of griots have changed tremendously as the traditional social structure has been shaken by colonialism, formation of post-colonial states and economic

modernization. Other griots have been able to adjust to modern realities, employing radio, television, and digital media to connect with new audiences, whereas others have had to seek a sustainable livelihood in an evolving social and economic landscape (Liorančaitė-Šukienė & Jakštienė, 2025).

Traditional textile arts of Andean indigenous peoples, such as methods of weaving and vocabularies to encode cosmological knowledge, social relations, and historical memory under threat in Peru due to commercialization of craft production to serve tourist markets. In the case where traditional textiles are designed to be mostly consumed by tourists instead of being used by the community, the social and symbolic aspects of the craft tradition can be increasingly eroded, leaving behind only the superficial aspect. The issue that heritage practitioners and community organizations face is how to sustain the economic well-being of the traditional weavers and maintain the integrity and the social meaning of the craft tradition (Konvit & Conde, 2021).



Figure 3: Heritage Tourism Opportunities and Ethical Challenges in Balancing Benefits with Preservation

4.4 Effective Strategies for ICH Safeguarding

Case studies and literature reviewed in this work have found that there are several strategies that have been developed and used to protect the intangible cultural heritage in various settings. First, community-based documentation projects, where community members assume the primary role

of documenting and archiving their intangible heritage, have been especially successful, both as a preservation measure and as a community empowerment process. By having communities take charge of documentation, they are able to make sure that the materials created are based on their own knowledge and priorities as opposed to the opinions of external researchers (Gaonkar & Sukthankar, 2025).

Mentorship programs and apprenticeship schemes that provide orderly access by younger members of the community to traditional knowledge and practices by older practitioners have been shown to be effective in the intergenerational transmission of intangible heritage. These programs work best when they are integrated into the life and culture of the community as opposed to being isolated within formal institutions. Living Human Treasures program - a UNESCO example followed by numerous states assigns their recognized carriers of intangible heritage and helps them to transmit their knowledge and skills to younger generations (Fangni, 2025).

Inclusion of intangible heritage into the system of formal and informal education has been successful in creating awareness, creating appreciation and creating skills required to maintain the heritage practices. Noh, Kabuki, and tea ceremony are some of the traditional arts included in the national school curriculum in Japan and they expose young people to their cultural heritage, producing potential future practitioners and audience. The classical traditions of India were mastered in special schools (gharanas) where training in techniques was combined with a strong cultural education (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025).

Technologies of digital documentation and dissemination, such as audio and video recording, online platforms, interactive databases, and digital archives have introduced valuable new opportunities in the domain of ICH protection. Digital technologies allow communities to produce quality documentation of their intangible heritage, to distribute these documents to diaspora communities and the wider world, and to gain access to documentation produced by previous generations. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Section of the UNESCO has a global database of ICH elements, an excellent source of information to researchers, policymakers, and heritage communities around the globe (Aljarelah, 2024).



Figure 4: Sustainable Heritage Site Management Integrated Approach to Conservation and Development

5. Discussion

5.1 Rethinking Community in Heritage Management

Among the most significant lessons gained in this paper is the necessity to leave the naive ideas of what community is in the management of intangible heritage. Heritage communities are not homogeneous, internally harmonized entities: they are internally differentiated, varying in terms of gender, age, social status, political affiliation, and economic interest. Members of various communities might have varying relationships to the practice of heritage, various judgments of what is important to preserve, and various visions of the manner in which heritage ought to be handled. To engage well with the community, it is important to recognize and address this internal diversity instead of viewing the community as a monolithic voice (Maluleka et al., 2024).

Of particular concern is the question of the representative of the community in the management of heritage processes. The traditional authority structures like councils of elders, religious leaders, or hereditary experts, feature significantly in the regulation of cultural practices and the transmissibility of traditional knowledge in many cultural settings. The processes of heritage management that circumvent or compromise these structures can unwillingly destroy the social fabric on which intangible heritage is based. Meanwhile, conventional power structures can intentionally silence the voices of women, younger people, low-status members of communities, or other vulnerable groups and heritage management practices must be crafted to allow their voices to be heard (Vana et al., 2025).

One such crucial aspect of community diversity in the management of intangible heritage is gender. Women are the main custodians of certain types of intangible heritage; domestic craft, oral tradition, healing, festival practices, in many cultural contexts but their knowledge and power may be underestimated or neglected in official heritage management practices. Studies have consistently demonstrated that gender-inclusive ways of ICH protection have yielded more holistic and efficient results compared to other approaches that privilege male-dominated types of heritage and male voices in decision-making (Maier et al., 2023).

5.2 The Politics of Recognition and Representation

International and national listing of intangible cultural heritage, e.g. to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is a potent tool of increasing

the global prominence of heritage practice and mobilizing resources to protect it. Nonetheless, the ethics of the politics of recognition and representation that encompass these processes are raising serious ethical concerns (Lopez-Guzman et al., 2022). Who decides which of the intangible heritage merits official protection? The UNESCO inscription criteria focus on the extent of community involvement in the inscription procedure, the feasibility of the safeguarding actions suggested, and the lack of incompatibility with the current international human rights tools and the necessity of mutual respect among societies. In reality, however, nomination is biased towards those communities who have access to the institutional resources, financial resources and political networks to manoeuvre through the complex international bureaucracies. This implies that the intangible heritage of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the world can be systematically underrepresented on the UNESCO list (Kim et al., 2023).

Another space of disputed politics is the commercialization of the known ICH. UNESCO inscription may create immense tourist attention to particular heritage practices bringing economic benefits to the heritage communities but the danger of commodification, the conversion of holy practices, community-based practices into consumer goods. This conflict between economic growth and cultural authenticity is especially severe in the situations when the heritage communities are economically marginalized and where tourism is among the very limited developmental opportunities that they have (UNESCO, 2023).

5.3 Globalization as Threat and Opportunity

The relationship between globalization and intangible cultural heritage is pretty complex, and it is also a bit ambivalent. Globalization can create serious risks for ICH. Like, the spread of dominant cultural patterns, global media, consumer brands, Anglophone popular culture tends to crowd out local cultural practices, especially for young people who are basically trying to plug into global youth culture. On top of that, economic globalization may pull young people away from traditional communities and livelihoods, so the social ground that holds intergenerational transmission together starts to crack. Also, when the market economy spreads more widely, community-centered cultural practices can get remade into marketable items, losing the social meaning and significance they once had (Zabulis, 2024).

At the same time, globalization also brings some real opportunities for intangible heritage. Global digital platforms YouTube, Spotify, Instagram, TikTok let heritage communities speak to global audiences through their cultural expressions. That helps produce new modes of recognition, bonding, and even practical support. Diaspora communities, meaning people who live far from their cultural homelands but still keep deep emotional ties and everyday social links to their heritage, have used digital tools to keep intangible traditions alive and to revitalize them, even across long distances. And then there is the broader global heritage movement itself, supported by UNESCO, ICOMOS, and thousands of heritage organizations worldwide, which has built an institutional environment that can mobilize funds and political energy for ICH safeguarding (Richards, 2025).

The key challenge, for heritage managers and policymakers is to come up with ways that actually shield communities from the most harmful facets of globalization especially the erosion of intergenerational transmission, and the turn of sacred practices into something like a commodity. At the same time, they have to let communities harvest the openings that globalization brings, for example, better recognition, more connection, and even economic advancement. This all really means there should be careful, context based plans that are built with, and by heritage communities themselves, not just imposed as standardized templates from above (Mojapelo, 2025).

5.4 Recommendations for Effective ICH Safeguarding

So after the findings and the discussion in this report, here are some recommendations that could be useful for policymakers, heritage practitioners, and community organizations, if they want to strengthen intangible cultural heritage preservation (Liorančaitė-Šukienė & Jakštienė, 2025). At first, community empowerment is basically the base of every ICH safeguarding approach. The way heritage management is done should be shaped to increase the capacity, decision power, and assurance of heritage communities so they can run their own safeguarding efforts, not so that government bodies or professional heritage organizations stay as the main engines. In other words, it's about putting resources into community governance structures, leadership development and also the long-term financial viability of community heritage organizations (Konvit & Conde, 2021).

Intergenerational transmission programs should receive priority attention and investment. The survival of intangible heritage depends on the continued motivation and capacity of younger

community members to learn, practice, and eventually transmit their cultural traditions. Programs that create meaningful, appropriately compensated opportunities for young people to learn from master practitioners through apprenticeship schemes, cultural academies, and community-based learning programs are among the most effective safeguarding investments that can be made (Gaonkar & Sukthankar, 2025). Documentation and digital technologies should be deployed in service of community empowerment rather than as substitutes for living practice. Digital archives, online platforms, and multimedia documentation can play important supporting roles in ICH safeguarding, but they should be designed and controlled by heritage communities themselves, and they should be embedded in broader safeguarding strategies that prioritize living transmission over archival preservation (Fangni, 2025).

ICH safeguarding really should be tied into sustainable livelihood development, esp for communities where heritage practice was, like, already linked with economic work for ages. So when traditional practitioners are able to gain a stable income from their heritage activities whether it is cultural tourism, craft markets, performing arts programming, or other kinds of routes, then the financial pressures that push young people away from these practices get reduced. Economic support for heritage practitioners should be arranged so that it protects the integrity and the social meaning of heritage practices, and also it should steer clear of the common trap of commodification (Domniku & Kacamakovic, 2025).

6. Conclusion

This report kind of examined how intangible cultural heritage is preserved, but especially the part where local communities have to be involved in safeguarding and transmitting those cultural traditions, day to day. The study showed that intangible cultural heritage which includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, traditional craftsmanship, and knowledge systems is basically the living core of human cultural diversity, and that it really survives only if the communities that hold it and pass it on stay engaged also if they're empowered. At the same time, the threats are not gentle, there are many and they are pretty severe: globalization and cultural homogenization, economic pressures plus commercialization, demographic changes and migration, urbanization and the disruption of traditional livelihoods, and, frankly, inadequate institutional support. These threats are not something abstract or far away, they're being experienced right now by heritage communities around the world. A lot of them are watching their cultural traditions slowly fade, as older practitioners pass away and no younger successors show up. And then, younger community members get pulled away by economic opportunities, or by cultural attractions somewhere else, while the social conditions that once sustained these practices keep getting eroded, bit by bit.

Yet the study has also found compelling evidence of resilience, innovation and renewal. Around the world, heritage communities are finding creative ways to adapt their traditions to contemporary contexts using digital technologies to reach new audiences developing community led education and transmission programs, and advocating for institutional recognition and support. The UNESCO 2003 Convention has created an important framework of international law policy, and resources in support of ICH safeguarding and the growing global movement for cultural heritage rights is creating new forms of political solidarity and practical support for threatened heritage traditions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: UNESCO Convention Domains of Intangible Cultural Heritage

ICH Domain	Examples	Key Challenges
Oral Traditions & Expressions	Myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, oral poetry, storytelling	Language loss, digital distraction, declining oral culture in literate societies
Performing Arts	Music, dance, theatre, puppetry, acrobatics, storytelling performance	Economic sustainability for performers, aging practitioner populations, audience decline
Social Practices & Rituals	Ceremonies, festivals, healing rituals, communal work practices	Secularization, urbanization, disruption of traditional social calendar
Knowledge of Nature	Traditional ecological knowledge, medicinal plant use, agricultural practices	Environmental change, biopiracy, displacement from traditional lands
Traditional Craftsmanship	Weaving, pottery, woodcarving, metalwork, embroidery	Competition from industrial production, loss of raw materials, export of practitioners

Appendix B: Glossary of Key Terms

Commodification: The process by which cultural practices, objects, or traditions are transformed into goods or services to be bought and sold in the market, potentially undermining their social meaning and community significance.

Community-Based Heritage Management (CBHM): An approach to heritage management that places communities at the center of decision-making and implementation, recognizing their rights and responsibilities as primary custodians of their own cultural heritage.

Griot: A hereditary oral historian, praise singer, and musician in West African Mande and related cultures, who serves as a custodian of community memory, genealogy, and oral tradition.

Hoshin Kanri: A strategic planning methodology (referenced for comparative management context), paralleling the "policy deployment" principles used in institutional heritage management frameworks.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH): As defined by UNESCO, the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation and continuously recreated in response to their environment and history.

Living Human Treasures: A UNESCO model program that designates recognized masters of intangible cultural heritage and supports them in transmitting their knowledge and skills to younger generations.

Safeguarding: As defined in the UNESCO 2003 Convention, measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, and revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.

UNESCO 2003 Convention: The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 2003, which established the international framework for the recognition, documentation, and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.