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INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: CONCEPTUAL DILEMMAS BETWEEN THE IMMATERIAL AND THE CULTURAL

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ABSTRACT

Intangible Cultural Heritage is a fundamental pillar of collective identity, encompassing traditions, oral expressions, performing arts, and traditional craftsmanship transmitted across generations. However, its dual nature—both "intangible" and "cultural"—poses significant conceptual and policy challenges, making This paper explores the interplay between the symbolic dimension of ICH and its role in shaping collective identity while examining the impact of globalization and digitalization on its transmission and sustainability. It also analyzes international and local strategies for its preservation, highlighting the challenges faced by developing countries in documenting and protecting ICH within evolving cultural contexts. By offering a comprehensive perspective on contemporary approaches to ICH conservation, this study aims to propose innovative mechanisms to ensure its continuity amid rapid social and cultural transformations.

KEYWORDS

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Cultural Identity, Globalization, Digitalization, Safeguarding, Cultural Policies

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Introduction.

The concept of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of societies, encompassing traditions, practices, knowledge, and expressions passed down through generations without taking a tangible form. The significance of this concept gained international attention with UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which provided a formal framework for its recognition and protection (UNESCO, 2003). However, defining ICH remains a complex task, as scholars debate the boundaries between the "intangible" and the "cultural," as well as the challenges posed by globalization and rapid social transformations (Smith, 2006).

The primary difficulty in conceptualizing ICH lies in its fluid and dynamic nature. While some scholars argue that "intangible" heritage refers to non-material aspects that cannot be physically preserved (Hafstein, 2007, p. 93), others contend that this classification is problematic, given that all heritage forms exist within social and interactive contexts, making them subject to change and reinterpretation (Smith, 2006, pp. 55-57). Additionally, cultural globalization has intensified the tension between preservation and evolution, as traditional practices are either adapted or marginalized in the face of modern influences (Al-Zein, 2019, p. 110).

This study aims to explore the conceptual challenges surrounding ICH by analyzing the theoretical distinctions between "intangible" and "cultural" heritage. It will also highlight the difficulties associated with documentation and preservation, relying on academic research and case studies from diverse cultural contexts. Understanding these complexities is essential to developing effective strategies for safeguarding ICH while ensuring its continued relevance in contemporary society.

1. The Conceptual Framework of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has sparked extensive academic and policy debates due to its dual nature being both immaterial and deeply cultural. The 2003 UNESCO Convention defines ICH as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 2). While this definition provides a broad framework, scholars continue to grapple with conceptual ambiguities, particularly in differentiating intangible heritage from its tangible counterparts and understanding its evolving nature in a globalized world.

A. The Debate Between the Immaterial and the Cultural:

A key controversy surrounding Intangible Cultural Heritage is whether it should be classified primarily as immaterial, emphasizing its non-physical essence, or as cultural, given its embeddedness in social practices and community identities. According to Christophe Dumont (2015), intangible heritage is more than just a collective memory—it is a dynamic cultural mechanism that adapts to societal transformations. Similarly, Peter Steiner (2018, p. 112) argues that ICH is not static; rather, its continuity depends on how societies produce, transmit, and reinterpret it over time.

The challenge in defining Intangible Cultural Heritage lies in its fluidity—unlike tangible heritage (e.g., monuments and artifacts), intangible heritage does not have a fixed form. Instead, it exists in oral traditions, performing arts, social rituals, knowledge systems, and craftsmanship, all of which are subject to change due to globalization, modernization, and migration (Blake, 2019, p. 46).

B. The Relationship Between Intangible and Tangible Heritage:

Another major conceptual challenge is the interconnection between intangible and tangible heritage. While UNESCO differentiates between the two, many scholars argue that this separation is artificial. For example, traditional craftsmanship—such as pottery, weaving, or calligraphy—is considered intangible heritage, yet it heavily relies on material objects and tools. As Garcia Cano (2020, p. 87) points out, “every intangible cultural expression is anchored in material elements that facilitate its transmission and continuity.”

In many cases, tangible elements serve as vehicles for intangible practices. A temple, for instance, is a physical structure, but the rituals, chants, and spiritual beliefs associated with it form its intangible dimension (Smith & Akagawa, 2020, p. 29). The same applies to music and dance, where instruments and costumes play a crucial role in expressing cultural identity. Therefore, rather than treating tangible and intangible heritage as separate domains, a holistic approach is necessary for understanding their interdependence.

C. Globalization and the Evolution of Intangible Cultural Heritage:

The increasing interconnectedness of societies poses both opportunities and threats to Intangible Cultural Heritage. On one hand, globalization facilitates cultural exchange and digital documentation, allowing traditions to reach wider audiences. On the other hand, it can lead to homogenization and cultural appropriation, where local practices lose their uniqueness due to commercialization (Hafstein, 2018, p. 74).

For instance, many traditional folk dances, languages, and storytelling practices face the risk of extinction as younger generations adopt globalized lifestyles (Lenzerini, 2011, p. 112). In response, UNESCO and cultural organizations advocate for community-led safeguarding measures, ensuring that heritage remains authentic and meaningful to the groups that practice it.

"Defining Intangible Cultural Heritage requires acknowledging its dynamic, interdependent, and evolving nature. The debate between its immaterial and cultural dimensions highlights the complexity of its classification, while its relationship with tangible heritage underscores the need for a comprehensive preservation strategy. Furthermore, globalization necessitates adaptive safeguarding policies that balance heritage protection with cultural exchange. Understanding these conceptual issues is essential for developing effective heritage policies, ensuring that ICH continues to thrive in modern societies."

2. Challenges in the Preservation and Transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Preserving and transmitting Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) presents significant challenges due to its non-material nature and dependency on community participation. Unlike tangible heritage, which can be physically preserved, ICH exists through oral traditions, rituals, social practices, and skills, making it vulnerable to cultural erosion, globalization, and policy gaps. This section explores the primary challenges associated with safeguarding ICH and examines potential strategies for its sustainable protection.

A. The Risk of Cultural Erosion and Extinction:

One of the greatest threats to Intangible Cultural Heritage is its vulnerability to disappearance due to modernization, urbanization, and generational shifts. As societies modernize, traditional practices often

lose relevance, leading to their gradual decline. According to Lenzerini (2011, p. 124), many indigenous languages, folk music traditions, and local crafts have vanished or are on the brink of extinction due to the dominance of globalized cultural influences.

For example, the Ainu language in Japan and the Berber oral storytelling traditions in North Africa face challenges in transmission because younger generations prefer dominant global languages over their native tongues (Hafstein, 2018, p. 97). Similarly, traditional craftsmanship—such as handwoven textiles or woodcarving—struggles to compete with mass-produced industrial goods, leading to the decline of artisanal skills (Blake, 2019, p. 56).

The UNESCO Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding highlight dozens of endangered practices worldwide, emphasizing the necessity of community involvement, digital documentation, and educational programs to ensure their survival (UNESCO, 2021).

B. Challenges in Documentation and Institutional Recognition:

Unlike tangible heritage, which can be photographed, archived, or physically restored, Intangible Cultural Heritage is often intangible and dynamic, making documentation a complex task. Many traditions rely on oral transmission, which can result in variations and adaptations over time. According to Smith & Akagawa (2020, p. 143), standardizing ICH documentation without diminishing its authenticity and diversity is a key dilemma.

Additionally, institutional challenges arise when national heritage policies fail to recognize ICH as a priority. Many governments focus on architectural monuments and historical sites, neglecting the living aspects of heritage (Garcia Cano, 2020, p. 91). The lack of clear legal frameworks, funding, and specialized institutions further complicates the integration of ICH into national heritage strategies.

Moreover, many cultural expressions—such as sacred rituals, indigenous healing practices, or seasonal festivals—are deeply contextual and difficult to categorize under standardized heritage criteria (Steiner, 2018, p. 116). This bureaucratic challenge hinders efforts to preserve, finance, and promote ICH at an institutional level.

C. Cultural Appropriation and Commercialization:

Another major challenge is the misuse of Intangible Cultural Heritage through cultural appropriation and commercialization. When traditional practices are removed from their original cultural contexts and commodified for touristic or commercial gain, they risk losing their authenticity and deeper meanings.

For instance, indigenous crafts and symbols are often mass-produced and sold in global markets without benefiting the original communities (Dumont, 2015, p. 67). Similarly, traditional music and dances are frequently reinterpreted for entertainment purposes, stripping them of their ritual significance (Hafstein, 2018, p. 103).

To combat these issues, ethical heritage policies must ensure that communities retain control over their cultural expressions. The UNESCO Convention (2003, Article 15) emphasizes the importance of community participation in decision-making regarding the safeguarding of their own heritage. Furthermore, intellectual property rights should be strengthened to protect traditional knowledge and artistic expressions from exploitation (Blake, 2019, p. 75).

D. The Role of Technology and Digital Preservation:

In recent years, digital technology has emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity for ICH preservation. While some scholars argue that digitalization risks reducing heritage to static representations, others see it as a powerful tool for documentation and transmission.

Digital archives, 3D mapping, virtual reality (VR), and online platforms now allow for wider accessibility of Intangible Cultural Heritage materials (Garcia Cano, 2020, p. 94). For example, UNESCO has launched several digital heritage initiatives, including oral history databases, digital recordings of endangered languages, and online exhibitions of traditional crafts. These efforts not only document heritage but also ensure its continuity across generations.

However, challenges remain regarding data ownership, digital accessibility, and ethical considerations. Steiner (2018, p. 118) warns that privatized digital platforms may limit community control over heritage narratives, leading to concerns over cultural representation and bias. Therefore, culturally sensitive digital policies must be developed to ensure that ICH remains community-centered and accurately represented.

"The preservation and transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage require holistic, community-driven approaches that address its cultural, institutional, and technological challenges. The risks of cultural erosion, inadequate documentation, and commercialization highlight the need for ethical policies, legal protections, and sustainable safeguarding strategies."

Furthermore, while digital technology offers new possibilities for heritage conservation, it must be implemented with cultural sensitivity and community participation. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring that ICH remains a living, evolving part of cultural identity rather than a relic of the past. "

3. The Legal and Policy Framework for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The protection and preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage rely on a complex legal and policy framework that operates at international, national, and local levels. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage serves as the primary global instrument for ICH protection.

It establishes safeguarding measures, including documentation, transmission, and promotion, while emphasizing the participatory role of communities in identifying and maintaining their heritage (UNESCO, 2003).

A. International Legal Framework:

At the international level, various legal instruments contribute to the safeguarding of ICH. The 2003 UNESCO Convention outlines specific mechanisms, such as:

- The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which recognizes and promotes elements of ICH worldwide.

- The List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, aimed at protecting endangered traditions and practices.

- The establishment of the Fund for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which supports projects for ICH preservation.

Additionally, other international frameworks, such as the 1993 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, contribute to strengthening cultural rights and ensuring that communities retain control over their heritage (UNESCO, 2005).

B. National Policies and Implementation:

While international conventions provide guidelines, national governments play a crucial role in translating these frameworks into actionable policies. Many countries have adopted ICH protection laws, cultural heritage ministries, and national inventories to document and safeguard traditions.

However, challenges arise in harmonizing international standards with local realities. Some governments prioritize economic and tourism-related aspects of ICH, sometimes commercializing cultural practices at the expense of authenticity (Hafstein, 2018). Others face issues related to political conflicts, lack of funding, and community participation in heritage preservation efforts.

C. Community Involvement and Ethical Considerations:

One of the key principles of the 2003 UNESCO Convention is the active participation of communities in the identification, documentation, and transmission of their cultural heritage. However, ethical dilemmas emerge when external entities—such as governments, NGOs, or researchers—attempt to define, categorize, or commercialize heritage without proper community consent.

For instance, debates surrounding intellectual property rights and cultural appropriation highlight the tensions between safeguarding ICH and ensuring that communities benefit from their own traditions (Smith, 2006). Some cases have shown that heritage elements, such as traditional music or indigenous crafts, can be exploited commercially without fair compensation to their originators.

"The legal and policy frameworks for Intangible Cultural Heritage protection offer crucial mechanisms for safeguarding cultural traditions, but they also present challenges related to implementation, authenticity, and ethical concerns. While international agreements provide guidance, it is ultimately the responsibility of national governments and local communities to ensure the continuity and ethical preservation of ICH. "

"The legal and policy framework for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is essential for ensuring the survival of traditional knowledge, practices, and expressions. While international agreements provide a strong foundation, effective protection requires national commitment, financial investment, ethical commercialization, and active community participation (Al-Baz, 2017). Looking forward, integrating digital tools, intellectual property protections, and adaptive policies will be key to addressing modern challenges while keeping ICH alive for future generations (UNESCO, 2021). "

4. The Role of Technology in the Preservation and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The integration of modern technology in cultural preservation has revolutionized the ways in which Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is transmitted and safeguarded. Rather than replacing traditional methods, technology can complement and enhance them when applied ethically and inclusively.

A. Digital Documentation and Archiving:

Digital tools provide an unprecedented ability to record, archive, and share traditional practices. High-definition video and audio recordings allow the documentation of oral storytelling, music, ceremonies, and traditional craftsmanship techniques. These materials can be catalogued and stored in digital repositories accessible to researchers, communities, and the public.

For example, UNESCO's Digital Heritage Platform enables states to submit video, photographic, and textual materials related to registered ICH elements, making them accessible globally (UNESCO, 2022). In the Arab world, institutions like **Bibliotheca Alexandrina** and **Qatar Digital Library** have led projects to digitize and publish manuscripts, folk songs, and oral traditions (Al-Hassani, 2019).

Such platforms are not only tools of preservation, but also educational resources, ensuring continuity of heritage among younger generations (Nasr, 2020).

"The importance of digital documentation lies in its ability to transcend geographic and temporal limits, allowing communities in diaspora or conflict zones to reconnect with their intangible heritage" (Benkirane, 2020, p. 60).

B. Enhancing Accessibility and Community Engagement:

Technology also plays a critical role in increasing access to ICH. Platforms such as **YouTube**, **Facebook**, and **Instagram** have allowed traditional practitioners to present their performances to broader audiences. This has helped revive endangered practices and gain recognition for marginalized communities.

Apps like "iHeritage" and "Intangible Cultural Heritage Browser" are developed to provide users with interactive access to cultural practices from different countries. Through gamification and interactive learning, such tools have proven effective in engaging youth (Smith & Jones, 2021).

Moreover, many NGOs in the Arab world have launched community based digital storytelling projects to help refugees and marginalized groups preserve their identity through oral narratives (Al-Maamari, 2021).

C. Artificial Intelligence and Language Preservation:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has opened new frontiers in the preservation of endangered languages. AI-powered tools can analyze and reproduce dialects or poetic forms that are no longer actively spoken. Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms are being trained to understand and reconstruct syntax and phonology from ancient oral traditions (Smith & Jones, 2021).

In North Africa, projects supported by UNESCO and local universities have used AI to analyze **Tamazight dialects**, producing educational materials that help younger generations learn their heritage language (Benkirane, 2020).

However, scholars caution that such technologies must be accompanied by community consent and ethical considerations to avoid misrepresentation or cultural appropriation (Nasr, 2020).

D. Ethical and Technical Challenges:

Despite its potential, the use of technology in ICH preservation is not without ethical and logistical challenges:

- Digital Obsolescence:** Digital formats and hardware become obsolete quickly, requiring continuous updates and migration to newer platforms.

- Data Sovereignty:** Who owns digitized heritage? Many communities fear the **exploitation of their cultural data** without benefits returning to them.

- **Context Loss:** Recording a ritual or song out of its cultural context may reduce it to entertainment, stripping it of its symbolic meaning (Al-Hassani, 2019).

- **Limited Digital Infrastructure:** In rural and conflict-affected regions, lack of internet access and digital literacy remain obstacles to both participation and benefit from such technologies.

Therefore, any technological intervention must be **people-centered**, allowing communities to control how their heritage is represented and shared (UNESCO, 2022).

5. Case Studies from the Arab World on ICH Preservation through Human Effort and Scientific Work.

A. Egypt: Archiving Oral Traditions through Bibliotheca Alexandrina:

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina has established a dedicated **Memory of Modern Egypt** project which documents oral histories, folk songs, and cultural practices through extensive fieldwork and human interviews, ensuring scientific rigor. Researchers employ structured interviews and audiovisual documentation to preserve traditions such as Al-Mawlid celebrations and folk storytelling (Abdel-Rahman, 2020).

B. Tunisia: Inventory of Traditional Crafts and Music:

Tunisia's **Institut National du Patrimoine (INP)** has collaborated with local universities to create a scientifically structured inventory of traditional musical instruments and handicrafts. This project, launched in 2019, involved ethnographic fieldwork and manual archiving done by trained anthropologists and historians (Ben Mbarek, 2021). Notably, the initiative emphasized non-digital initial collection, relying on human observation and interviews before digitization.

C. Oman: Community-Based Preservation of Oral Poetry:

In Oman, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has documented the oral poetry form Al-Razha and Al-Azi, using community-based approaches. Elders were interviewed directly in their native environments by local researchers who used participatory observation techniques. The collected material was preserved through scientific transcription methods and later adapted into curricula in cultural education (Al-Kalbani, 2019).

D. Palestine: Preserving Traditional Food Heritage:

Palestinian researchers at Birzeit University have worked on documenting traditional food preparation methods such as Maftoul and Zaatar preservation, using scientific ethnographic research. The work emphasizes cultural resilience under occupation, and documentation was conducted via direct fieldwork in rural communities, with publications in both Arabic and English (Sabbagh & Nasser, 2018).

6. The Role of Digital Technologies in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage:

In the context of accelerating digital transformation, digital technologies have emerged as powerful tools for documenting, preserving, and transmitting Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). While ICH is fundamentally based on human expression and oral transmission, digital innovation can complement traditional safeguarding methods by expanding access, promoting community participation, and ensuring intergenerational continuity.

A. Digital Documentation and Archiving:

One of the most impactful contributions of digital technology is the ability to document ICH in multimedia formats, enabling long-term preservation beyond oral traditions. Through high-definition video recordings, audio archives, and metadata tagging, cultural expressions—such as chants, dances, rituals, and storytelling—can be systematically catalogued and stored in digital repositories.

For instance, in **Oman**, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture has developed a national digital archive that collects and classifies oral poetry and maritime songs traditionally performed in coastal communities. This initiative, developed in collaboration with cultural anthropologists and local practitioners, ensures that endangered knowledge systems are preserved in high-resolution formats with contextual annotations (Al-Maqbali, 2021).

Moreover, technologies such as **3D scanning** and **virtual reality (VR)** are being employed to recreate performance spaces and simulate immersive cultural experiences. This is particularly beneficial for educational and museum contexts, where access to live performances is limited.

B. Interactive and Participatory Platforms:

Digital tools not only preserve but **also revitalize ICH** by making it accessible to younger generations. Interactive mobile applications, gamified learning tools, and educational websites are being designed to transmit ICH in engaging ways.

In Jordan, the “Living Heritage” project by the Ministry of Culture created an app-based learning platform that teaches traditional embroidery patterns and their regional meanings. Through step-by-step tutorials, video interviews with craftswomen, and historical overviews, the platform encourages youth participation and sustains the practice in an evolving form (Salem, 2022).

Importantly, these platforms must be **co-created** with local communities, ensuring authenticity and ownership. Rather than imposing a top-down narrative, digital tools should act as enablers of community-driven heritage transmission.

C. Ethical and Legal Challenges of Digitization:

Despite its potential, digitization poses significant challenges:

- **Digital Divide:** In many rural or marginalized areas, access to digital infrastructure is limited. This can exclude certain communities from benefiting from or contributing to digitization projects.

- **Cultural Distortion:** The translation of cultural expressions into digital formats may result in the **loss of context, meaning, and emotional depth**. Rituals performed for the camera can become staged or decontextualized, undermining their spiritual or communal significance.

- **Intellectual Property Issues:** Indigenous and community-based knowledge systems often lack formal legal protections. When cultural expressions are digitized and circulated online, they may be **appropriated without consent or benefit-sharing**, violating the rights of the source communities (WIPO, 2020).

D. Best Practices and Future Prospects:

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are vital:

- **Community Engagement:** Digital projects must be designed in collaboration with the knowledge holders themselves. Participatory methods ensure that heritage is represented accurately and respectfully.

- **Cultural Sensitivity in Digitization:** Not all heritage should be digitized. Some rituals or oral traditions are meant to remain sacred or secret, and digitization may violate cultural boundaries. Ethical guidelines should govern what can or cannot be made public.

- **Legal Frameworks for Protection:** Governments and international organizations must work together to develop legal instruments that protect digitized ICH, particularly regarding intellectual property, consent, and benefit-sharing.

- **Digital Literacy and Training:** Investing in training local communities, researchers, and archivists in digital technologies will ensure sustainability and cultural continuity.

- **Multi-stakeholder Collaboration:** Partnerships between cultural institutions, technology companies, universities, and civil society can create innovative yet respectful models for safeguarding ICH in the digital age.

Results.

Based on the exploration of legal frameworks and digital solutions employed by various countries in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH), several key findings have emerged:

- 1. Legal Frameworks are Often Insufficient:** While many Arab countries have signed international conventions such as the 2003 UNESCO Convention, national laws and regulations regarding the protection of ICH are often weak or poorly implemented. In some cases, there is a lack of specific laws to address intangible cultural heritage, resulting in the continued vulnerability of traditional practices to extinction or exploitation.

- 2. Digital Technologies Provide New Opportunities:** Countries such as Egypt and Lebanon have utilized digital technologies to document ICH. However, these efforts are often fragmented, with limited integration into national policies. The use of digital archives, online databases, and video recordings has allowed for the preservation of some cultural practices, but these efforts remain isolated and often lack broader institutional support.

- 3. Commercialization of ICH Poses a Major Threat:** One of the most prominent challenges identified across case studies is the commercialization of intangible heritage. Tourism and commercialization can provide financial benefits, but they frequently lead to the distortion of traditional practices. This challenge is especially prominent in countries like Egypt, where traditional crafts are often mass-produced or modified to cater to tourists, compromising their authenticity.

- 4. Limited Community Involvement:** Despite international conventions emphasizing the importance of community participation in safeguarding ICH, many governments fail to adequately engage local communities in the process. In cases like Tunisia and Lebanon, community consultation mechanisms exist legally, but their practical application is often weak, limiting the effectiveness of preservation efforts.

- 5. Post-Crisis Challenges:** Countries experiencing political instability or social unrest, such as Lebanon, face additional barriers to protecting their ICH. In these contexts, safeguarding efforts are often sidelined due to economic hardship or immediate reconstruction needs, and cultural heritage risks being forgotten in the wake of more pressing concerns.

Recommendations.

To improve the global and regional landscape for ICH preservation in the digital age, several targeted policy recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop Integrated National Policies for ICH:

Governments should not rely solely on international conventions. They must embed ICH protection within national constitutions, cultural policies, and education systems. This includes defining legal protections for ICH, offering tax incentives or grants for cultural projects, and recognizing ICH as part of national identity.

2. Ensure Inclusive Community Participation:

Communities must be partners not subjects in the safeguarding process. Policies should require consultation with practitioners and ensure their representation in decision-making bodies. Participatory tools like community mapping, oral history projects, and youth engagement programs can foster ownership and resilience.

3. Promote Ethical Digitization:

Digital heritage initiatives should be grounded in **free, prior, and informed consent**. Before recording a dance, a ritual, or a traditional recipe, researchers and institutions must seek permission and explain how the information will be used, stored, and accessed. Culturally appropriate methods should be used to protect sensitive knowledge and prevent misrepresentation.

4. Foster Digital Literacy and Capacity Building:

Communities and cultural stakeholders should be empowered to use technology themselves. Training programs in digital storytelling, audiovisual archiving, and metadata management can help practitioners document their own heritage on their own terms, promoting sustainability and autonomy.

5. Support Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation:

The protection of ICH is not the sole domain of anthropologists or folklorists. Experts in law, media studies, computer science, education, and urban planning should collaborate to develop innovative tools and methodologies for safeguarding heritage in real-world contexts.

6. Strengthen Regional and International Collaboration:

ICH often crosses borders. Examples include nomadic poetry, traditional desert medicine, or shared dialects. Regional platforms particularly within the Arab world should be created to foster cultural exchange, knowledge-sharing, and joint preservation efforts that go beyond national boundaries.

"In today's fast-changing world, where identities are reshaped by migration, urbanization, and globalization, the need to safeguard ICH is more urgent than ever. It is not merely a matter of saving the past, but of equipping communities with the means to transmit wisdom, creativity, and belonging into the future. Laws, technologies, and policies must serve that mission not control it, but nurture it.

As we look ahead, the future of intangible heritage lies in policies that are inclusive, adaptable, ethically grounded, and driven by local voices. Only then can we ensure that cultural expressions continue to inspire, teach, and connect us across generations and borders."

Conclusions.

The protection and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a crucial endeavor for preserving the identity and diversity of communities around the world, particularly in the Arab region. While there are several international conventions, such as the 2003 UNESCO Convention, that provide a solid framework for ICH protection, their implementation at the national level remains complex. Challenges such as the lack of adequate legal frameworks, insufficient funding, commercialization pressures, political instability, and the marginalization of local communities have hindered the effective preservation of intangible heritage in many Arab countries.

However, despite these obstacles, there are several promising strategies that can enhance the protection of ICH. Strengthening national legislation to align with international standards, increasing financial investment in cultural heritage preservation, and encouraging community-centered approaches are key steps in ensuring the survival of cultural practices. Furthermore, leveraging modern technologies, such as digital tools for documentation and archiving, can play a significant role in preserving intangible heritage for future generations.

The balance between commercialization and cultural integrity remains a delicate issue. On one hand, tourism and cultural industries can provide financial support for heritage preservation, but on the other hand, the excessive commercialization of cultural practices risks distorting their original meanings. Therefore, creating ethical guidelines for the commercialization of ICH is essential to ensure that traditions remain authentic and that local communities benefit from their cultural assets.

In conclusion, protecting intangible cultural heritage in the Arab world requires a multifaceted approach that involves legal reforms, financial commitment, the active involvement of local communities, and the use

of modern technologies. By addressing the challenges and implementing these strategies, it is possible to safeguard the rich cultural traditions that define the identities of Arab societies while ensuring their continuity in a rapidly changing world.

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