



Digitalizing the Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Economic Growth in Developing Countries - Special Reference to Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity and supporting community livelihoods in developing countries. In Sri Lanka, ICH includes traditional music and dance, ritual performances, folk theatre, craftsmanship, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge. In 2003, UNESCO promulgated the Convention on the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which formally defined the concept of ICH and proposed various safeguarding measures, including identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, transmission, and revitalization of heritage practices. These measures highlight the importance of keeping intangible heritage active and meaningful within communities. This paper explores how digitalization can support the safeguarding of Sri Lanka's Intangible Cultural Heritage while contributing to sustainable economic growth. This study adopts a qualitative research design and will use a combination of an interviews. Particular attention is given to the use of multimedia tools such as audio-visual documentation, digital archives, social media platforms, and virtual cultural spaces. The findings indicate that ICH must remain a "living heritage" to survive over the long term. Continuous practice and use allow heritage to be transmitted from one generation to another. If cultural practices are not actively used, they risk gradual decline and eventual disappearance from the community. Digital technologies provide effective and accessible methods to keep ICH active by supporting documentation, public engagement, education, and wider dissemination. Moreover, digitalized ICH contributes to sustainable economic growth through cultural tourism, creative industries, and community-based enterprises. The paper argues use of digital media can strengthen both cultural sustainability and economic development in Sri Lanka. Integrating multimedia tools with heritage safeguarding strategies is essential for ensuring the long-term vitality of Intangible Cultural Heritage in developing countries.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage; Cultural Preservation; Digitalization; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Sustainable Economic Growth