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## Protecting And Promoting the Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Vietnam: Achievements and Contemporary Challenges

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### Abstract

*This article analyzes the current state of protecting and promoting the value of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Vietnam, based on the theoretical framework of the 2003 UNESCO Convention and theories on sustainable cultural development and community-based approaches. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining secondary document analysis and quantitative statistics, the study highlights Vietnam's notable achievements in developing a legal framework, conducting inventories, documenting, inscribing heritage elements, transmitting traditional knowledge, honoring artisans, and utilizing ICH in tourism and education. However, the paper also identifies several critical limitations, such as the gap between policy and implementation, the risk of commercialization and distortion of ICH values, and the underutilization of community roles. Accordingly, the article proposes solutions to enhance the effectiveness of ICH safeguarding and promotion in the context of globalization and modernization.*

**Keywords:** Protection and Promotion, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Community, Vietnam.

### Introduction

In recent decades, traditional conceptions of cultural heritage have undergone significant transformation, largely influenced by UNESCO's normative instruments. "Cultural heritage must be understood to encompass all natural and cultural components, both tangible and intangible..."(Bai, 2004). The concept of cultural heritage is no longer confined to historical monuments, scenic landscapes, and artifact collections, but now includes living traditions and expressions such as performing arts, social practices, rituals, traditional festivals, indigenous knowledge of nature and society, and traditional crafts. The adoption of the 2003 UNESCO Convention marked a critical step forward in developing new policies in the field of cultural heritage.

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is an essential component of the cultural heritage system and of the broader national culture. Unlike tangible heritage, which is static and material in nature, ICH comprises living cultural expressions that are closely tied to communities and reflect their knowledge, skills, aesthetic, religious, and moral values, as well as customary practices transmitted across generations. According to the Convention, ICH refers to "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage"(UNESCO, 2003).

In practice, each country retains its own definitions and classifications tailored to specific historical and cultural contexts. In Vietnam, the Law on Cultural Heritage (2001, amended in

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2009) defines ICH as spiritual products associated with communities or individuals, along with related material elements and cultural spaces, bearing historical, cultural, and scientific value that express community identity and are continuously recreated and transmitted across generations via oral tradition, apprenticeship, performance, and other forms (*Law on Cultural Heritage 2001 (amended and supplemented in 2009)*, 2009).

The law further classifies ICH into seven categories: language and scripts; folklore literature; folk performing arts; social practices and beliefs; traditional festivals; traditional craftsmanship; and indigenous knowledge (*Law on Cultural Heritage 2001 (amended and supplemented in 2009)*, 2009). In the past, due to limited understanding, ICH was often regarded as merely functional or subordinate to tangible heritage, rather than a relatively autonomous form of heritage. As a result, efforts to safeguard and promote ICH were insufficient, leading to distortion, degradation, and even the loss of many intangible values. In today's society, ICH is increasingly recognized and honored as an integral component of the human living environment.

Several key elements in ICH require attention: the creators and bearers of heritage and the communities where it is created and preserved; the cultural space, environment, time, and location of cultural events; and the tools and objects used in performances, rituals, and festivals. Based on these considerations, ICH can be understood as a system of cultural and social expressions that embody community knowledge, transmitted by individuals, and rooted in tradition. These expressions are passed down across generations and can evolve over time through collective recreation. As former UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura observed, ICH constitutes "a fundamental and equally important component within the global treasure trove of heritage" (Galla, 2004).

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with over 54 ethnic groups, creating a diverse cultural landscape in which ICH plays a central role. It reflects the richness, creativity, and adaptive capacity of communities throughout history. Forms such as *Xoan singing*, *Quan họ folk songs*, *Ca trù*, *Đờn ca tài tử*, *Bài chòi*, and the *Gióng Festival* are not only unique artistic expressions but also embody sacred beliefs and profound indigenous knowledge.

In recent years, Vietnam has achieved considerable progress in safeguarding and promoting ICH. The country has developed a relatively comprehensive legal framework, conducted inventories, documentation, and nominations of heritage elements for inclusion in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding by UNESCO. Simultaneously, programs for transmission, revitalization of performance spaces, recognition of artisans, and integration of ICH into education and tourism have been implemented.

However, Vietnam's efforts in safeguarding and promoting ICH are still confronted with multiple challenges. The processes of modernization, urbanization, and globalization have eroded the original cultural spaces of many heritage forms. Uncontrolled trends of commercialization and theatricalization for tourism purposes have led to distortions of ICH's authentic cultural essence. In addition, limited financial resources, inadequate cultural management capacity at the grassroots level, and the lack of meaningful community empowerment remain significant obstacles.

Based on an assessment of both achievements and challenges, this article aims to analyze outstanding results and persistent issues in Vietnam's efforts to safeguard and promote ICH.

Drawing on a multidimensional theoretical framework and applying both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study proposes specific and feasible recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of heritage preservation in the context of international integration and sustainable development.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **Literature Review**

In recent years, as the concept of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has gained wider recognition, there has been a growing number of studies proposing directions for safeguarding and promoting ICH values. As early as 1994, the Vietnam National Committee for the International Decade for Cultural Development agreed to submit to the Government the "*National Program for the Collection, Preservation, and Promotion of Cultural Heritage of Vietnam's Ethnic Groups*," which included the task of collecting, safeguarding, and promoting ICH in Vietnam. Hundreds of projects have since been carried out under this program, and their outcomes have been stored in the data repository of the Vietnam National Institute of Culture and Arts Studies. This has become a valuable archive for ICH, useful for information retrieval and essential for the documentation process—an indispensable component of safeguarding efforts.

Between 2005 and 2012, the Department of Cultural Heritage (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) published a seven-volume book series titled *A Pathway to Cultural Heritage*, featuring studies by researchers and cultural managers on both theoretical and practical aspects of ICH: including research, inventorying, collecting, documentation, transmission, and dissemination (Heritage, 2005-2012). In 2007, the book *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Vol. 1) (Heritage, 2007) compiled articles by domestic and international experts and cultural managers, offering important insights for identifying and assessing the vitality of ICH.

Specialized journals such as *Cultural Heritage*, *Culture and Arts*, *Cultural Studies*, *Folklore Studies*, *The World of Heritage*, and *Ethnology* regularly feature research on ICH in Vietnam, including internationally-oriented studies on the values of Vietnamese ICH. Although ICH is still a relatively new field in Vietnam, it has attracted increasing attention from researchers and cultural managers, approached through multiple modern safeguarding perspectives such as research, identification, collecting, inventorying, documentation; museological integration; recognition of artisans; and community-based conservation.

Regarding the collection and study of ICH, Luu Tran Tieu emphasized that during investigation and collection, it is essential to ensure the authenticity of the heritage; and in cases where changes have occurred due to historical or cognitive conditions, the right and opportunity for reinterpretation and creative transformation must be returned to the community (*Safeguarding and promoting intangible cultural heritage in Vietnam*, 2009). This view aligns with UNESCO's stance that ICH is constantly changing due to community needs and perceptions, and thus, safeguarding must respect the freedom of communities to choose, protect, transmit, and develop their own heritage (UNESCO, 2005).

Professor Ngo Duc Thinh argued that the collection and research of ICH in Vietnam often lack rigorous scientific methodology, which diminishes the quality of such efforts (Heritage, 2007). He stressed that research and collection are crucial for heritage safeguarding, as their results often serve as the basis for the proper restoration of heritage according to historically established forms.

On the topic of ICH inventorying, Le Thi Minh Ly asserted the importance of identifying and cataloging the diverse forms of ICH present across the national territory (Heritage, 2007). According to UNESCO, "to ensure proper identification for safeguarding," each country must maintain an up-to-date inventory of existing ICH, guided by the understanding that identification and inventorying should contribute to long-term and sustainable safeguarding-not merely as a process of quantification and documentation, but as a foundation for protection, revitalization, and integration into social life.

Regarding documentation, Tran Van Khe advocated for an approach centered on audiovisual archiving, analysis, promotion, and educational use of ICH. He proposed that field researchers should begin by recording music and performances, then systematically categorize and disseminate these materials to the broader public-not only for archival purposes but to raise awareness and appreciation of musical heritage through widespread access(Khe, 2002).

In relation to museums' role in safeguarding and promoting ICH, Dang Van Bai noted a number of conceptual misconceptions about ICH values in artifact collections and museum practices(Bai, 2004). Drawing on practical experience, Nguyen Van Huy suggested that when museums empower heritage bearers to interpret and present their own culture, it enhances their cultural self-awareness-helping to preserve traditional knowledge while simultaneously creating new products adapted to visitors' interests (Heritage, 2007).

Despite a growing body of valuable literature, there is still a shortage of interdisciplinary, policy-critical, and updated research that addresses ICH in the context of Vietnam's ongoing digital transformation, rural modernization, and international cooperation. This article seeks to fill part of that gap.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in four key theoretical pillars: UNESCO's Theory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003):(Bortolotto, 2007), (Bortolotto, 2015). The 2003 Convention emphasizes that intangible heritage is not merely a cultural symbol but an essential part of community life. Its key characteristics include intangibility, vitality, and collectivity, wherein the community is both the creator and bearer of the heritage. The theory asserts that safeguarding ICH cannot be separated from preserving the living conditions and cultural environment of the community. Community-Based Approach (Ensor & Berger, 2009; McLeroy et al., 2003; Stoecker, 2003): This bottom-up approach positions communities as central actors in identifying, managing, and promoting their own heritage. Research by (Kurin, 2004; Smith, 2006, 2015) demonstrates that when communities are genuinely empowered, heritage remains vibrant, accurately reflects local cultural values, and becomes a driving force for sustainable development. Theory of Sustainable Development Linked to Culture (Bortolotto, 2015; Elena & Antonio, 2020; Labadi, 2016; Roe, 1996) : Since 2013, UNESCO has recognized culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development- alongside economy, society, and environment. Under this framework, heritage is not merely a conservation object but a developmental resource that contributes to livelihoods, strengthens social cohesion, and enhances community creativity. When integrated into local development strategies, heritage becomes a catalyst for economic growth and cultural continuity.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the article offers a holistic, interdisciplinary analysis that draws from legal, anthropological, developmental, and cultural studies lenses- thereby enabling a comprehensive and context-sensitive critique of Vietnam's current ICH safeguarding and promotion practices.

## **Research Findings**

### **Institutional and Policy Development**

Vietnam has made significant efforts in building a legal and institutional framework for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). In 2001, for the first time, ICH was officially recognized in the Law on Cultural Heritage, marking a substantial shift in public awareness. In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and just two years later, Vietnam became one of the first 30 countries to ratify this important international treaty. Since then, legal documents such as Decree No. 98/2010/ND-CP, Decree No. 109/2017/ND-CP, and related circulars have specified the responsibilities of governmental levels and encouraged community participation in heritage conservation (Heritage, 2022).

In line with the Law on Cultural Heritage and the 2003 Convention, to date, approximately 70,000 ICH elements have been inventoried nationwide, with 416 inscribed in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage and 16 elements recognized by UNESCO (14 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and 2 on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding).

The Government also approved the National Cultural Development Strategy to 2030, emphasizing heritage preservation as a key component of cultural and social development. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism issued criteria for ICH inscription in the national list, along with guidance on inventorying, dossier preparation, and heritage transmission.

Proactive provinces such as Bac Ninh, Phu Tho, Quang Nam, and Hue have developed their own action plans, aligning heritage safeguarding with local development. However, a 2022 survey by the Vietnam National Institute of Culture and Arts Studies indicated that over 30% of provinces and cities still lacked specific ICH action plans, reflecting stark disparities in capacity and prioritization across localities (Heritage, 2022).

### **Inventory and Inscription**

Inventorying serves as the foundation of heritage safeguarding. As of 2024, Vietnam had documented over 70,000 ICH elements, including traditional festivals, folk knowledge, folk games, customs, practices, and performing arts. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, over 430 elements have been inscribed in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Heritage, 2022).

Notably, Vietnam currently has 16 ICH elements inscribed by UNESCO, including: Hue Royal Court Music (2003), the Space of Gong Culture in the Central Highlands (2005), Quan Ho Folk Songs of Bac Ninh (2009), Ca Tru Singing (2009), the Giong Festival of Phu Dong and Soc Temples (2010), Xoan Singing (2011 – urgent safeguarding, 2017 – removed from the list), the Worship of Hung Kings (2012), the Art of Don Ca Tai Tu (2013), Vi-Giam Folk Songs of Nghe Tinh (2014), Tug-of-War Rituals and Games (2015), the Worship of the Mother Goddesses of the Three Realms (2016), Bai Choi Art of Central Vietnam (2017), Then Practice of Tay-Nung-Thai peoples (2019), Xoe Thai Art (2021), Cham Pottery Making (2022), and most recently, the Ba Chua Xu Festival of Sam Mountain in An Giang (2024) (Phuong, 2024).

The process of inventorying and compiling scientific dossiers has helped to identify and promote the diverse ICH assets of Vietnam's ethnic communities. It has enabled timely interventions to safeguard and revitalize ICH elements at risk of decline or disappearance, contributing to the

preservation of ethnic cultural identities. Moreover, the research, restoration, transmission, and performance of ICH have enriched grassroots cultural life and supported socio-economic development in local communities.

ICH elements inscribed in national and international lists and the recognition of heritage bearers with honorary titles such as "Distinguished Artisan" have instilled pride and encouraged widespread participation by local communities and authorities in ICH safeguarding and promotion. These efforts have also supported the socialization of heritage conservation.

All UNESCO-recognized ICH elements in Vietnam have established or are developing safeguarding and promotion projects. Many provinces have also drafted and implemented safeguarding plans for ICH elements on the national list under the guidance of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

In several provinces, ICH elements have become tourist attractions with unique cultural branding (e.g., Soc Temple Festival, Huong Pagoda Festival in Hanoi; Hung Kings Festival in Phu Tho; Con Son – Kiep Bac Festival in Hai Duong; Yen Tu Festival in Quang Ninh; Ca Hue Singing; Ngo Boat Race in Soc Trang; Ba Chua Xu Festival in An Giang; Ook Om Bok Festival in Tra Vinh; Kate Festival and Cham Pottery in Bau Truc, Ninh Thuan). A notable milestone was in December 2017, when Xoan Singing of Phu Tho became the first element worldwide to be removed from UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and inscribed on the Representative List. This achievement highlighted Vietnam's commitment and contribution to global heritage safeguarding. While inscription enhances the international profile of ICH and facilitates resource mobilization, experts caution that it is only the beginning. Without sustained investment and long-term safeguarding plans—such as those still lacking for Ca Tru and Then—heritage titles may become symbolic rather than functional. Furthermore, local inventorying remains fragmented, often driven by short-term campaigns and lacking regular data updates, resulting in potential data loss and inaccuracies.

### **Transmission and Recognition of Heritage Bearers**

Heritage bearers, especially artisans, play a central role in preserving and transmitting ICH. Over the years, Vietnam has implemented policies to honor and support these individuals, including the conferment of the "People's Artisan" and "Distinguished Artisan" titles by Presidential decree. According to Decree No. 62/2014/ND-CP, a total of 1,253 individuals were recognized in the 2015 and 2019 rounds—66 as People's Artisans and 1,187 as Distinguished Artisans. In the traditional handicrafts sector, 17 People's Artisans and 120 Distinguished Artisans were recognized (Heritage, 2022).

By 2024, more than 900 artisans had been awarded titles, many of whom have helped to preserve endangered heritage forms such as Xam singing, Boi singing, water puppetry, and Dao Mau rituals.

Various creative transmission models have been implemented. Phu Tho pioneered the "Xoan Singing School" model, where students learn Xoan songs in village communal houses under the guidance of artisans. Bac Ninh has established over 100 Quan Ho clubs offering regular performances and free training for youth. In Central Vietnam, Bai Choi artisans teach in community houses or folk art classes. However, several challenges persist: (i) elderly artisans with poor health and no successors; (ii) declining interest among youth; and (iii) lack of financial support and official recognition for trainees. Many artisans passed away without transmitting their knowledge, resulting in a break in cultural continuity.

## **Promoting ICH through Tourism and Education**

ICH is not only a cultural value but also a developmental resource. In many provinces, ICH has become a unique tourism product, generating income and employment for local residents. For example, Quang Nam integrates Bai Choi performances into Hoi An tours; Bac Ninh offers Quan Ho tours during the Lim Festival; and Soc Trang incorporates Khmer rituals into community tourism programs. According to statistics, ICH-related festivals attract more than 10 million visitors annually, making a significant contribution to local economies.

In education, several effective models have emerged: Phu Tho introduced Xoan Singing into primary school heritage education; Hue organized extracurricular sessions on Court Music; and Hanoi piloted the "Heritage in Schools" program in urban districts. Nonetheless, implementation remains fragmented, with a lack of standardized curricula and insufficiently trained teachers in heritage pedagogy.

A growing concern in tourism is the increasing theatricalization and commercialization of ICH. For example, Ca Tru performances are shortened, losing their ritual structure; Quan Ho is modernized with electronic music; and performance spaces are removed from their original cultural contexts. While such adaptations may enhance visual appeal, they erode the sacredness, symbolic meaning, and educational depth of ICH.

Therefore, heritage promotion must be organically integrated with safeguarding, guided by strategic direction and effective oversight, to avoid "overdevelopment" that undermines the core cultural values—the very essence of intangible cultural heritage.

## **Discussion**

Based on the research findings, it is evident that Vietnam has made notable achievements in safeguarding and promoting intangible cultural heritage (ICH). However, these outcomes remain fragile and face ongoing challenges if not viewed through the lenses of policy, institutional capacity, community involvement, and sustainable development. This discussion focuses on three core issues: (1) the gap between policy and practice; (2) unsustainable development in tourism and education; and (3) the underutilized role of communities.

### **The Gap Between Policy and Practice**

One of the key weaknesses in the current safeguarding of ICH in Vietnam is the disconnect between policy design and grassroots implementation. While the legal framework—ranging from the 2001 Law on Cultural Heritage (amended in 2009) to various decrees and circulars—is relatively comprehensive, many provisions have not been effectively translated into practical governance tools. For instance, regulations require community participation in heritage inventorying, yet in practice, local implementation is often superficial due to a lack of technical guidance, trained personnel, and independent monitoring mechanisms. As a result, many heritage dossiers are prepared merely to meet administrative targets, failing to reflect the vibrant cultural realities of communities. This leads to misinformed policy directions, misallocation of resources, and low investment efficiency.

Moreover, post-inscription safeguarding plans—especially for UNESCO-recognized heritage—often lack long-term vision. Activities are typically limited to festivals, exhibitions, or performances, without establishing sustainable mechanisms for heritage transmission and development. This reflects the widespread phenomenon of "good policies but weak implementation," a major barrier to translating legal frameworks into tangible cultural value.

## Unsustainable Development in Tourism and Education

Integrating ICH into tourism and education is a sound strategy that raises public awareness and generates economic resources. However, without careful planning and oversight, these activities risk harming the authenticity of heritage. In tourism, a common issue is the uncontrolled commercialization and extreme theatricalization of heritage, particularly in performing arts. Performances of Quan Ho, Ca Tru, and Bai Choi are often shortened, industrialized, and removed from their original settings, stripping them of sacredness and community interaction. Consequently, tourists experience heritage as mere entertainment, while communities feel exploited and unrecognized.

In education, while some localities have introduced ICH into schools through extracurricular activities or integrated curricula, they lack standardized programs, teaching materials, and trained educators. As a result, heritage education remains superficial and fails to cultivate cultural values in younger generations. Successful models such as the "Xoan Singing School" in Phu Tho and "Quan Ho in Schools" in Bac Ninh are still isolated cases and have not been scaled nationally.

Therefore, heritage-based tourism and education must be approached with a long-term vision, cross-sector coordination, and committed partnerships among the state, communities, and private sector. Without this, promotional efforts may become counterproductive, damaging the very heritage they aim to protect.

## The Underutilized Role of Communities

Communities are the creators, custodians, and transmitters of heritage—a principle affirmed by the 2003 UNESCO Convention and various Vietnamese legal documents. In practice, however, this role remains limited due to the lack of effective mechanisms for genuine community participation as equal partners in heritage governance. Many conservation programs are top-down, with decisions on what to preserve, how to transmit, and how to celebrate heritage made by state authorities. Communities are often involved only at the final stages, such as rehearsals, signing documents, or performing, leading to detachment, low consensus, and limited initiative.

As a result, in many areas, heritage is no longer seen as a shared cultural asset but as an external intervention. This undermines the internal sustainability of heritage preservation. In contrast, successful cases such as the safeguarding of Xoan Singing (Phu Tho), Bai Choi (Central Vietnam), and Quan Ho (Bac Ninh) demonstrate that when communities are genuinely empowered—in organizing performance spaces, planning activities, and benefiting economically—heritage remains vibrant and self-sustaining.

The absence of support structures such as community heritage councils, community preservation funds, and artisan networks also hampers communities from building internal capacity for heritage transmission. Thus, it is necessary to shift from centralized management to multi-stakeholder governance, placing communities at the center with support from the state and relevant actors.

## Recommendations

Based on the theoretical and empirical analysis presented above, this study proposes several systematic recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of safeguarding and promoting intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Vietnam. These recommendations are designed with an



interdisciplinary, multi-level, and community-centered approach, aiming toward the sustainable and long-term development of heritage in the context of modernization and globalization.

### **Strengthening Institutional Frameworks and Strategic Policy Orientation**

Institutional frameworks and strategic policies are the foundational pillars determining the success of any heritage preservation initiative. Although Vietnam has developed a relatively comprehensive legal system, many provisions remain abstract, lacking specificity and practical enforcement mechanisms tailored to local contexts and the particularities of each heritage form.

First, the Law on Cultural Heritage (2001, amended in 2009) needs further revision and alignment with the principles of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. Specifically, the law should recognize the rights of communities to participate, co-manage, and benefit from heritage safeguarding. Current legislation remains skewed toward administrative-centralized governance and does not sufficiently promote policy co-creation by communities.

Second, a national technical standard system for safeguarding ICH should be established. This should include detailed guidelines for inventorying, classification, transmission, impact evaluation, and digitalization of ICH. The absence of unified technical standards has led to inconsistent implementation across provinces, resulting in disparities in quality, content, and effectiveness.

Third, the current intersectoral coordination mechanism remains fragmented, lacking an effective intermediary institutional structure to link culture with education, tourism, science, technology, and finance. Consequently, many safeguarding programs operate in isolation without the necessary cross-sectoral support. Establishing a legally binding intersectoral coordination mechanism—potentially at the level of a government decree or prime ministerial decision—is essential to integrating heritage safeguarding with broader local development strategies.

### **Empowering and Supporting Communities**

As creators, practitioners, and transmitters of heritage, communities must be central to all efforts to safeguard and promote ICH. However, in current management practices, their role remains largely symbolic or limited to activities such as performances, signing dossiers, or participating in ceremonial events. For sustainable safeguarding, a paradigm shift is needed—from top-down administrative management to community-based governance, in which communities are co-creators, not just beneficiaries.

The role of communities in heritage governance must be legally institutionalized. The Law on Cultural Heritage should explicitly recognize community rights, including the right to define heritage value, draft safeguarding plans, manage performance spaces, and benefit from promotional activities. These rights must be secured through mandatory consultation processes when preparing any heritage-related dossiers, programs, or projects.

Intermediate support institutions for communities should be established, such as community heritage councils, cultural cooperatives, artisan clubs, and networks of traditional craft families. These institutions can help strengthen community capacities and serve as bridges between residents, authorities, businesses, and civil society. For instance, cultural cooperatives can organize performances, produce traditional handicrafts, and coordinate community-based heritage tourism.

Training programs should be implemented to enhance community capacities, particularly for youth, women, ethnic minorities, and elderly artisans. Relevant skillsets include: (1) heritage transmission and restoration; (2) community cultural management; (3) planning and access to funding; and (4) communication and digital promotion. These training courses should be context-specific, flexible, and community-approved.

Flexible and transparent budget allocation mechanisms should be developed for communities, such as community heritage funds, delegated budget programs, or project-based grants. These mechanisms will empower communities to take ownership of heritage activities while improving transparency, public resource efficiency, and private sector engagement.

Finally, economic-cultural models linked to community livelihoods should be promoted, such as developing OCOP (One Commune One Product) heritage products, community tourism, cultural markets, and open performance spaces. These models support livelihoods while encouraging communities to actively practice heritage in vibrant and diverse settings. Empowering communities must go beyond rhetoric and be embedded in institutional frameworks, resources, capacity building, and decision-making rights. This is the prerequisite for sustainable, democratic, and culturally integrated ICH safeguarding.

### **Balancing Promotion and Safeguarding**

Utilizing ICH for socio-economic development is an inevitable trend. However, without careful control, promotional activities can lead to excessive commercialization, distortion of content and context, and loss of authenticity. Establishing a balance between promotion and safeguarding is thus essential to ensure heritage is not only preserved but thrives in contemporary society.

Promotion should not be seen as the opposite of safeguarding. Safeguarding provides the foundation for authentic promotion, while promotion revitalizes heritage and prevents stagnation. Heritage-based development programs must include detailed safeguarding plans, such as reconstructing performance spaces, maintaining practitioner roles, protecting indigenous knowledge, and restoring specific social contexts.

A key solution is the development of a Code of Ethics and professional standards for ICH promotion. These standards should define permissible limits in performance, publicity, and commercialization—for example: avoiding the truncation of sacred rituals, prohibiting modifications of original folk content, and restricting heritage performances in inappropriate modern spaces. Event organizers and tourism operators should also be trained in "responsible cultural interpretation."

In education, deeper investment is required. ICH should be systematically incorporated into formal curricula appropriate to each education level. Relying solely on extracurricular or illustrative activities leads to superficial learning and misunderstanding of heritage. Successful models such as "heritage schools," "artisan classes," and "village culture experiences" should be expanded with adequate resources, curricula, and dedicated instructors.

In communication, especially in the digital age, promotional materials such as videos, cultural maps, and digital museums must respect authenticity, include proper context, and avoid being purely entertainment-driven. Digitalization efforts must prioritize educational and preservation goals and enhance community access—particularly for young people.

In conclusion, balancing safeguarding and promotion is not about dividing resources, but about creating an integrated, coherent, and responsible strategy. When promotional efforts are

grounded in respect, understanding, and protection of original heritage values, ICH can truly become a source of creativity and sustainable development for both communities and the nation.

## Conclusion

Intangible cultural heritage is not only the crystallization of community wisdom and identity but also a strategic resource for sustainable cultural and social development in Vietnam. This study has highlighted significant achievements in heritage safeguarding while identifying persistent challenges such as the disconnect between policy and practice, the risks of commercialization, and the underutilized role of communities.

Based on these insights, the article has proposed a set of systematic solutions, ranging from institutional reform and local capacity enhancement to genuine community empowerment and the strategic balance between heritage preservation and promotion. The realization of these proposals will help sustain the vitality of heritage within communities and elevate Vietnam's position in the global effort to safeguard humanity's cultural legacy.

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