

Enhancing intangible cultural heritage in the knowledge economy

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Abstract : This paper examines the role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) within the intangible economy, emphasizing its economic potential and significance in preserving traditional knowledge. Through case studies focusing on Moroccan gastronomy, handicrafts, and the digitization of cultural practices, it demonstrates how ICH can be leveraged to generate income, strengthen cultural identity, and create employment opportunities. However, the valorization of ICH presents challenges, including the risk of excessive commodification and the potential loss of authenticity. Research is critical in documenting, innovating, and evaluating the economic and social impacts of ICH. Collaborative efforts among researchers, public institutions, businesses, and local communities are vital for fostering sustainable development. Lastly, the paper proposes recommendations for enhancing public policies, promoting research initiatives, and integrating ICH into the economy ethically and respectfully, while also offering perspectives on assessing its long-term impact.

Keywords : scientific research, knowledge economy, intangible cultural heritage, sustainability, safeguarding.

Résumé : Cet article examine le rôle du patrimoine culturel immatériel (PCI) dans l'économie immatérielle, en mettant l'accent sur son potentiel économique et son importance dans la préservation des savoirs traditionnels. À travers des études de cas axées sur la gastronomie marocaine, l'artisanat et la numérisation des pratiques culturelles, il montre comment le PCI peut être mis à profit pour générer des revenus, renforcer l'identité culturelle et créer des opportunités d'emploi. Cependant, la valorisation du PCI présente des défis, notamment le risque d'une marchandisation excessive et la perte potentielle d'authenticité. La recherche est essentielle pour documenter, innover et évaluer les impacts économiques et sociaux du PCI. Les efforts de collaboration entre les chercheurs, les institutions publiques, les entreprises et les communautés locales sont essentiels pour favoriser le développement durable. Enfin, le document propose des recommandations visant à améliorer les politiques publiques, à promouvoir les initiatives de recherche et à intégrer le PCI dans l'économie de manière éthique et respectueuse, tout en offrant des perspectives sur l'évaluation de son impact à long terme.

Mots-clés : recherche scientifique, économie du savoir, patrimoine culturel immatériel, durabilité, sauvegarde.

Introduction

In a world increasingly oriented towards the intangible economy, where value is derived more from knowledge, ideas, and intangible resources rather than physical goods, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is emerging as a vital strategic asset. UNESCO defines ICH as the practices, knowledge, representations, and traditions passed down through generations, embodying a distinctive cultural wealth that is deeply intertwined with the identities of communities. Furthermore, it represents a largely untapped economic potential, particularly in tourism, creative industries, and digital innovation.

In this context, scientific research is essential. It not only aids in preserving and documenting cultural practices at risk due to globalization but also facilitates their

incorporation into innovative and sustainable economic models. Nonetheless, a key question persists: How can we balance the economic valuation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) with the preservation of its authenticity and cultural roots ?

This paper will examine the issue at hand, utilizing case studies to illustrate the role of research in documenting, preserving, and promoting intangible cultural heritage. We will further investigate how these initiatives contribute to the intangible economy, fostering synergies between cultural traditions and economic innovation. The goal is to demonstrate that ICH can serve as both an economic lever and a conduit for cultural diversity, while also highlighting the challenges and opportunities linked to its valorization.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Knowledge economy : an economy based on intangible assets

The economy has changed. In just a few years, a new component has emerged as a key driver of economic growth: the immaterial. Today, real wealth is not concrete; it's abstract. It's not material, it's intangible. The ability to innovate, create concepts, and produce ideas has become an essential competitive advantage. Material capital has been replaced by immaterial capital, or, to put it another way, the capital of talent, knowledge, and know-how, as the essential criteria for economic dynamism¹.

The knowledge economy is fundamentally driven by information. Information is the primary element in the production process, influencing production methods and marketing opportunities. Information can encompass a range of elements, including ideas, data, scientific research, expertise, and skills. It is essential to recognize that this type of economy aligns with concepts such as the information economy, symbolic economy, and post-industrial economy².

Unlike the traditional economy, which is based on transforming material resources, the intangible economy values knowledge, innovation, and networks. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, this economic transition is driven by sectors such as digital technologies, creative industries, and cultural tourism, which make intensive use of intangible elements³.

1.2. Intangible cultural heritage : a symbol of cultural identity

The intangible cultural heritage constitutes a major axis in preserving identity in all its noble dimensions. It is the product and fruit of human interaction with his social and cultural environment, from all the traditions, customs, and skills handed down from generation to generation. It is the forms of oral expression, oral narratives, and the collective imagination of local or national events or shared dreams that escaped from the

¹ Lévy, M., Jouyet, J. (2007). L'économie de l'immatériel : la croissance de demain : rapport de la Commission sur l'économie de l'immatériel. France : La Documentation française.

² الاقتصاد المعرفي : وأثره على التنمية الاقتصادية للدول العربية. (2018). دار حميثرا للنشر.

³ OECD (2022), *The Culture Fix: Creative People, Places and Industries*, Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED), OECD Publishing, Paris.

individual to the collective, as well as musical and lyrical forms, legends, rituals, culinary arts, dress, and everything related to the self, the land, and the symbolic world. It is also embodied in the cultural spaces associated with all these activities, which allow the continuity of oral and popular cultural identity and confirm its belonging to successive historical civilizations.

Numerous economists (De La Torre⁴; Greffe⁵; Vecco⁶) have helped to differentiate the main typologies of values attached to cultural heritage, according to historical periods, societies, political situations, expert opinions, and types of heritage. The economic analysis of cultural heritage values is fundamental to understanding the efforts made by individuals, groups, and communities to safeguard it. It traditionally identifies a use value, “the value that derives from the possible commercial use of the resource, today or tomorrow”⁷, as well as a non-use value, which is broken down into existence, option, and transmission values.

Existence value expresses « the value attached to the simple existence of an asset. We know it exists, but we don't use it »⁸. In contrast, use value implies a direct or indirect use of heritage in the present. This approach to the question of heritage value, and the economic definitions of use value and non-use value, implies consideration of the resulting market and non-market dimensions, which are intrinsically linked⁹.

1.3. Synergy between ICH and the knowledge economy : towards integrated value creation

The connection between ICH and the intangible economy lies in their shared ability to generate value from intangible resources. Traditional knowledge, when documented and disseminated through scientific research, can be integrated into innovative business models¹⁰. For example :

a. Economic value creation

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), particularly through gastronomy, crafts, and festivals, plays a crucial role in the creative industries. These industries transform cultural elements into high-value-added products and services while enhancing local traditions. For example, Moroccan gastronomy goes beyond the culinary arts : it embodies a national identity and serves as an economic lever. Emblematic dishes such as couscous and tajine

⁴ De la Torre, Marta, ed. 2002. *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage: Research Report*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Conservation Institute.

⁵ Xavier Greffe. La valorisation économique du patrimoine. Ministère de la culture ; Département des Etudes de la Prospective et des Statistiques (DEPS). La Documentation Française, pp.384, 2003, Questions de culture.

⁶ Walter Santagata, Marilena Vecco, *Économie du patrimoine monumental*, Economica Paris (2007), Volume 1200, Issue 3, 07/2007, Pages 215-328.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cominelli, F. (2020). Patrimoine culturel immatériel : paradigmes économiques, débats et perspectives. In J. Csergo, C. Hottin, & P. Schmit (éds.), *Le patrimoine culturel immatériel au seuil des sciences sociales* (1-). Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.

¹⁰ Mediterranean Migration & Medias, *Revue des Humanités*, volume 1, n°2, Septembre 2024- Le Patrimoine culinaire au Maroc - Driss BOUMEGGOUTI, Université Jean Jaurès – Toulouse 2 p : 69.

attract tourists and inspire collaborations with international chefs, boosting the country's appeal while generating direct and indirect income in the tourism and agri-food sectors¹¹.

Similarly, craftsmanship, with its know-how handed down from generation to generation, is at the heart of the creative industries. In Morocco, zelliges¹², carpets and leather goods are an integral part of the intangible economy. These crafts are not only sold on local markets but also exported abroad as luxury items. In addition, collaborations between craftsmen and contemporary designers enhance the attractiveness of products on international markets, while preserving traditional techniques.

Finally, festivals play a strategic role in promoting ICH. Events such as the Sacred Music Festival in Fez or the Gnaoua and World Music Festival in Essaouira¹³ highlight local traditions, attracting national and international visitors. These events generate economic spin-offs for the hotels, catering, and logistics sectors while serving as platforms for promoting cultural practices to new generations. This shows that ICH when valued in an integrated approach can be an engine for economic growth and cultural development.

b. Digitization and accessibility

Digital technologies offer powerful tools for documenting and preserving intangible cultural heritage (ICH), while also opening up unprecedented economic opportunities. For example, platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok enable local communities to share their traditions with a global audience¹⁴. An artisan, by publishing tutorials on carpet-making or videos of traditional dances, can reach a wide audience and attract orders or visitors. This visibility helps not only to generate income but also to strengthen interest in practices that are sometimes threatened with extinction.

In addition, digitization projects such as interactive archives and mobile applications facilitate intergenerational transmission. UNESCO, for example, is working with developers to create online databases documenting practices such as traditional songs, recipes, and rituals. These tools, accessible from thousands of kilometers away, enable diasporas to maintain a link with their culture of origin and promote cultural education in remote contexts¹⁵.

¹¹ Ibid : p :73

¹² From 2016 to 2022, Moroccan zellij exports grew, primarily to the United States, which accounted for over 68% of imports. European countries followed at about 18%. In 2020, zellij exports made up 82% of Fez's traditional industry exports, totaling 57.9 million dirhams (around \$6 million). According to the Fez Chamber of Traditional Industry, the sector thrived during the Corona pandemic, particularly in demand from the U.S.

¹³ **Amira El Naggare**, « L'image d'une destination à travers un événement culturel. Le cas des Festival Mawazine de Rabat, Festival Musiques sacrées de Fès et Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde d'Essaouira », *Études caribéennes* [En ligne], 2 | Novembre 2018, mis en ligne le 15 novembre 2018, consulté le 26 novembre 2024

¹⁴ Makhabbat Ramazanova and Isabel Freitas , The Role of Social Media in the Conservation and Safeguard of Gastronomy as Intangible Cultural Heritage , 2024.

¹⁵ [Browse the Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Register of good safeguarding practices - intangible heritage - Culture Sector - UNESCO](#)

Digital technologies can also transform the ICH into an immersive experience, thanks to tools such as virtual and augmented reality¹⁶. An augmented reality application could, for example, bring traditional festivals to life, or offer a virtual tour of artisan workshops. By offering such experiences, local communities can reach global tourism markets without the need for physical travel, diversifying their revenue streams while preserving the integrity of cultural practices.

c. Cultural tourism

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is a strategic asset for tourism development, especially when integrated into immersive, authentic experiences. Craft workshops, for example, enable visitors to discover traditional know-how while interacting directly with local communities. In Morocco, activities such as pottery in Safi or babouche-making in Marrakech¹⁷ attract tourists in search of unique experiences. These workshops not only generate income for the artisans, but also reinforce the sense of cultural pride within the communities.

Guided tours focusing on ICH offer another valuable opportunity. Themed tours based around culinary practices, such as discovering traditional bread or taking part in a couscous preparation workshop¹⁸, allow tourists to immerse themselves in the daily lives of local people. These experiences go beyond mere tourist consumption, helping to pass on traditions to future generations and contributing to the local economy.

The argan trees in the Essaouira region and the women's cooperatives producing argan oil¹⁹ offer a unique educational experience. In addition to discovering the production process, visitors contribute directly to supporting the local economy and valorizing the role of women in these practices.

d. Ethical challenges and sustainability

The economic integration of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) requires a delicate balance between valorization and preservation, to avoid excessive commodification or loss of authenticity. When ICH becomes a tourist or commercial product, it can be transformed to appeal to a wide audience, at the risk of simplifying or distorting its cultural meanings²⁰. For example, certain craft traditions or festivals, in an effort to meet tourist

¹⁶ Zhang, J., Wan Yahaya, W. A. J., & Sanmugam, M. (2024). The Impact of Immersive Technologies on Cultural Heritage: A Bibliometric Study of VR, AR, and MR Applications. *Sustainability*, 16(15), 6446. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16156446>

¹⁷ https://www.tripadvisor.fr/AttractionProductReview-g293734-d13429724-Babouch_Making_Workshop_in_Marrakech-Marrakech_Marrakech_Safi.html

¹⁸ <https://ich.unesco.org/fr/RL/les-savoirs-savoir-faire-et-pratiques-lies-a-la-production-et-a-la-consommation-du-couscous-01602>

¹⁹ Morocco exports almost all its crude oil to Europe, where the real economic wealth is created through the transformation of crude oil into high value-added products (cosmetics, foodstuffs, etc.), which are then sold and exported at high cost.

²⁰ V. Vadi, 'Intangible Cultural Heritage and Trade', in C. Waelde, C. Cummings, M. Parvis, and H. Enright (eds.), *Research Handbook on Contemporary Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar 2018) 398-415, ISBN 9781786434005 (cased); ISBN 9781786434012 (eBook) p :5

expectations, can lose their most authentic elements. Vigilance is therefore needed to maintain the link between these practices and the communities that perpetuate them.

Preservation mechanisms can include establishing authenticity labels²¹, training new generations of craftsmen, or educating tourists about the cultural significance of the practices observed. In Morocco, for example, initiatives such as the recording of Malhoun music²² or the documentation of weaving techniques in the Atlas Mountains²³ aim to protect these traditions while promoting them economically. These actions ensure that the economy generated by ICH primarily benefits local communities while respecting their heritage.

In addition, international legal and political frameworks, such as the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage²⁴, play a key role in protecting against cultural appropriation or unethical commercial use. These tools ensure that traditions do not become mere objects of consumption, but remain alive and relevant to those who practice them. By balancing economy and authenticity, it is possible to transform ICH into an engine for sustainable development.

2. Methods

To analyze the promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) within the context of the knowledge economy, this study adopts a qualitative, exploratory approach that combines literature review and case studies. This methodological choice is justified by the still-emerging and multidimensional nature of the subject, which requires an in-depth exploration of the interactions between cultural, economic, and digital dynamics.

The exploratory approach thus makes it possible to identify the main forms of value creation linked to ICH, while highlighting the rationales of stakeholders, the uses of digital technologies, and the associated ethical issues. It also provides a relevant framework for selecting meaningful case studies and constructing an analytical framework structured around four dimensions: economic value creation, digitization and accessibility, cultural tourism, as well as ethical and sustainability challenges²⁵.

2.1. Documentary analysis

A literature review was conducted to examine the relationship between intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the knowledge economy. This analysis is based on a diverse

²¹ To promote the country's cultural heritage, the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communication has launched the "Moroccan Heritage" label in 2019. At the same time, a taxonomy of the intangible cultural heritage of the Kingdom's twelve regions has been drawn up, based on anthropological studies initiated by the Ministry.

²² <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/malhoun-a-popular-poetic-and-musical-art-01592>

²³ Rapport du Ministère du Tourisme, de l'Artisanat, et de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire <https://www.mda.gov.ma/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Textile-arts.pdf>

²⁴ The latest edition includes the amendments to the Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention at its tenth session (UNESCO Headquarters, 11 to 12 June 2024) [2003 Convention Basic Texts 2024 version FR.pdf](https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/malhoun-a-popular-poetic-and-musical-art-01592)

²⁵ Trudel, Louis & Vonarx, Nicolas. (2007). La recherche qualitative est-elle nécessairement exploratoire?, p :39.

corpus of sources selected according to criteria of thematic relevance, institutional reliability, and recency (primarily from the last decade).

The corpus includes:

- Institutional reports, notably UNESCO's strategic documents related to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH, as well as publications from Moroccan national heritage promotion programs;
- Scholarly articles on the intangible economy, cultural and creative industries, as well as theoretical approaches to cultural capital and collective knowledge;
- Digital resources and technological platforms for documenting and disseminating practices related to ICH.

The analysis of these documents was conducted using a qualitative content analysis approach. It involved identifying key concepts, the theoretical frameworks employed, and the main recurring themes, in line with the study's objectives. This approach made it possible to establish a structured theoretical and analytical framework to support the interpretation of the case studies.

2.2. Case studies

Three case studies were selected for this research to illustrate the various approaches to leveraging intangible cultural heritage (ICH) within the knowledge economy. The selection of these cases was based on a purposive sampling strategy²⁶, guided by several criteria: (1) their relevance to ICH, (2) their ability to leverage innovation strategies, particularly digital ones, (3) their contribution to economic value creation, and (4) their alignment with at least one of the four analytical dimensions identified in this study (economic value creation, digitization and accessibility, cultural tourism, ethical issues, and sustainability).

From this perspective, three fields were selected for their complementary nature. First, Moroccan gastronomy serves as a significant example of promoting ICH through cultural tourism and culinary tours, generating local economic benefits while fostering the transmission of traditional skills.

Second, artisanal skills, particularly in the field of fashion, illustrate a dynamic of hybridization between tradition and contemporary creation. Collaborations between artisans and designers enable the reinterpretation of traditional techniques with a focus on innovation and openness to international markets.

Finally, the digitization of cultural practices represents a third form of valorization, facilitating access to cultural heritage through digital tools (interactive archives,

²⁶ purposive sampling emerges as a critical tool in qualitative and mixed methods research, providing nuanced insights into specific phenomena. Tajik, Omid & Golzar, Jawad & Noor, Shagofah. (2024). Purposive Sampling. *International Journal of Education and Language Studies*.

educational apps²⁷), while opening up new opportunities for monetization and dissemination on a global scale.

These three cases, though distinct, allow for a comparative understanding of the different approaches to the valorization of ICH and an analysis of the tensions and complementarities between economic, technological, and cultural issues.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

To conduct this research, a corpus of qualitative data was compiled from a variety of documentary sources, including institutional reports (notably those from UNESCO), digital databases dedicated to intangible cultural heritage, and economic studies on the cultural industries and tourism. These sources were selected based on criteria of thematic relevance, reliability, and complementarity, in order to cover the cultural, economic, and technological dimensions of the subject.

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative, thematic analysis approach. It took place in several stages: (1) organization and in-depth reading of the corpus, (2) identification and coding of recurring themes, (3) grouping of data into analytical categories, and (4) interpretation of the results from a comparative perspective.

The analysis was structured around four main dimensions: economic value creation, digitization and accessibility, cultural tourism, and ethical and sustainability issues. This analytical framework made it possible to highlight the commonalities and unique characteristics of the various initiatives studied, as well as the tensions between economic development and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in the context of the knowledge economy.

3.4. Study limitations

This methodology has certain limitations. It relies primarily on sources available in French and English, which may limit the diversity of perspectives analyzed. Furthermore, the economic impact of initiatives to promote intangible cultural heritage is difficult to assess quantitatively in the short term, and the results do not allow for statistical generalization.

Nevertheless, the exploratory approach adopted offers an in-depth and contextualized view of the interactions between research, the intangible economy, and intangible cultural heritage. The results provide insights that can be applied to other similar contexts and allow for a better understanding of the complex dynamics of the promotion, preservation, and dissemination of ICH.

4. Results

²⁷ Achille, Cristiana & Fiorillo, Fausta. (2022). Teaching and Learning of Cultural Heritage: Engaging Education, Professional Training, and Experimental Activities. *Heritage*. 5. 2565-2593. 10.3390/heritage5030134.

The findings highlight the multifaceted impact of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) on the intangible economy. The documentation and dissemination of ICH illustrate the importance of digitization and accessibility, underscoring the crucial role of research in preserving traditional knowledge. This translates into the creation of digital databases and the publication of scientific papers, which preserve these practices while making them accessible to a wider audience.

The promotion of ICH through innovation, particularly in fashion, gastronomy, and cultural tourism, illustrates the dimension of economic value creation and cultural tourism. The integration of traditional skills into contemporary sectors allows these practices to be adapted to modern contexts while preserving their authenticity. The comparison across these fields shows that, while gastronomy generates immediate economic benefits for local communities, traditional craftsmanship has a more lasting impact on cultural identity and intergenerational transmission.

The economic and social benefits confirm that the promotion of ICH brings tangible advantages to local communities, such as job creation, increased tourism revenue, and the export of artisanal products. At the same time, these initiatives strengthen a sense of belonging and cultural identity, underscoring the importance of ethical considerations and sustainability.

Overall, these findings highlight the need to strike a balance between economic development and the preservation of authentic cultural practices, which aligns with current debates in cultural economics and heritage studies regarding the tension between economic exploitation and cultural conservation.

5. Discussion

The promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it fosters economic value creation, as demonstrated by the examples of gastronomy and artisanal skills, which generate income for local communities and stimulate cultural tourism. On the other hand, these initiatives carry risks of excessive commodification, particularly when ICH is reduced to mere consumer products, which can compromise its authenticity and deep cultural significance—a point widely discussed in the literature on cultural economics.

The comparative analysis of the three cases studied shows that gastronomy tends to produce immediate economic benefits, while artisanal skills have a more lasting impact on cultural identity and intergenerational transmission. Digitalization and accessibility emerge as complementary levers, broadening the audience while offering opportunities for long-term economic value creation.

To address these challenges, collaboration among researchers, public institutions, businesses, and local communities is essential to ensuring the sustainable and ethical development of ICH. Respect for the cultures of origin and the preservation of authenticity are necessary conditions for ensuring the continuity of these practices and their

transmission to future generations. This balanced approach illustrates how ICH can be integrated into the intangible economy while preserving its intrinsic cultural value.

Conclusion (and recommendations)

This study highlights the central role of scientific research in promoting intangible cultural heritage (ICH), particularly in preserving traditional knowledge and supporting sustainable economic initiatives. The findings show that integrating ICH into the intangible economy can generate significant economic benefits (job creation, cultural tourism, promotion of crafts) while strengthening cultural identity and intergenerational transmission.

The conclusions suggest that public policies should be strengthened to protect and promote ICH by adopting balanced strategies that encourage both the creation of economic value and respect for cultural authenticity. Innovative research projects, particularly those leveraging digital technologies, must be encouraged to broaden accessibility while ensuring ethical and sustainable promotion.

In terms of recommendations for future research, it is necessary to assess the long-term social and economic impacts of initiatives to promote ICH, by comparing different sectors (gastronomy, crafts, digital) and analyzing how these practices are adapting to globalization and increasing digitalization. These studies will help develop effective strategies to ensure the harmonious and sustainable growth of ICH within the intangible economy, while preserving the cultural richness and symbolic significance of these practices.

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