

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE RESEARCH AND CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARLY EVOLUTION (1980–2025)

James S. Guidangen

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Kalinga State University, Philippines

ORCID: 0009-0004-6270-8220

jguidangen@ksu.edu.ph

Abstract

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has emerged as an important dimension of cultural sustainability, community resilience, and sustainable development amid globalization, migration, climate change, and digital transformation. Despite increasing scholarly attention, existing research on ICH remains fragmented across disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, education, sustainability science, and heritage governance. This study aimed to examine the intellectual evolution, thematic development, and global research dynamics of ICH scholarship from 1980 to 2025 within the context of sustainability-oriented discourse. Employing a systematic review and bibliometric research design guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, the study synthesized and analyzed 452 Scopus-indexed publications retrieved as of March 2026 using Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny and VOSviewer for science mapping and thematic analysis. Findings revealed a significant intellectual transition from identity-centered discourse toward broader sustainability-oriented heritage governance frameworks emphasizing cultural sustainability, community resilience, indigenous knowledge systems, climate adaptation, digital heritage, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study further identified expanding international collaboration networks and increasing interdisciplinary engagement in heritage scholarship. Emerging themes highlighted the growing integration of participatory governance, decolonial heritage perspectives, and culturally grounded sustainability approaches within global policy and development discourse. The findings contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship by clarifying the evolving role of intangible cultural heritage within sustainable development and providing insights for policymakers, educators, cultural institutions, and heritage practitioners involved in safeguarding cultural continuity and community resilience.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Cultural Sustainability, SDGs, Heritage Governance, Indigenous Knowledge, Bibliometric Analysis

Introduction

In recent decades, globalization, migration, urbanization, climate change, and rapid digital transformation have intensified concerns regarding the preservation of cultural diversity and the continuity of living cultural traditions. Within this context, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has emerged as an important dimension of cultural sustainability because it embodies collective knowledge, practices, rituals, oral traditions, beliefs, and cultural expressions transmitted across generations within communities (UNESCO, 2003). Beyond cultural preservation, ICH contributes significantly to social cohesion, intercultural understanding, collective identity, and community resilience while aligning closely with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 11 on sustainable communities, and SDG 16 on inclusive and peaceful societies (United Nations, 2015).

The growing recognition of ICH is closely associated with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasizes culturally responsive, inclusive, and resilient societies (United Nations, 2015). Scholars increasingly argue that culture should be recognized as a foundational pillar of sustainable development because cultural continuity strengthens adaptive capacity, social resilience, and long-term community well-being (Soini & Dessein, 2016; Throsby, 2017). Consequently, scholarship on intangible cultural heritage has expanded substantially across interdisciplinary fields such as anthropology, sociology, education, tourism, heritage studies, sustainability science, and cultural governance.

A major turning point in global heritage governance occurred with the adoption of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, which shifted heritage discourse from monument-centered preservation toward community-centered safeguarding approaches emphasizing participation, cultural diversity, and intergenerational continuity (UNESCO, 2003). Since then, contemporary scholarship has increasingly examined the relationship between heritage safeguarding, indigenous knowledge systems, climate adaptation, community resilience, and sustainability governance within broader sustainable development frameworks. This intellectual transition reflects the growing recognition that ICH functions not only as a preservation concern but also as an important resource for resilience-oriented governance and culturally grounded sustainability strategies.

At the same time, contemporary societies continue to face growing threats to cultural continuity due to commercialization, environmental degradation, migration, digital homogenization, and climate-related displacement. These challenges have accelerated cultural erosion and the loss of indigenous knowledge systems in many communities, intensifying international efforts to safeguard living heritage through participatory governance and community-based preservation initiatives. As a result, intangible cultural heritage is increasingly conceptualized as a dynamic sustainability-oriented construct that supports cultural continuity, social inclusion, resilience, and sustainable development within rapidly changing sociocultural environments (Soini & Dessein, 2016; Throsby, 2017; UNESCO, 2003).

Research Gap

The existing literature on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) remains fragmented across disciplinary and localized contexts, with many studies focusing primarily on specific cultural practices, safeguarding initiatives, or sector-based applications rather than examining the broader intellectual evolution of ICH within sustainability-oriented discourse. Although scholarship increasingly addresses themes such as cultural continuity, indigenous knowledge systems, resilience, and heritage preservation, limited studies have systematically analyzed the long-term conceptual transformation of ICH research from identity-centered perspectives toward sustainability-oriented governance frameworks. Furthermore, existing reviews often lack comprehensive longitudinal and bibliometric synthesis capable of tracing thematic evolution, collaboration patterns, and emerging discussions related to climate adaptation, decolonial heritage, digital heritage, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Addressing these gaps, the present study provides an interdisciplinary and longitudinal bibliometric synthesis of ICH scholarship across four decades to clarify its evolving role within sustainable development, resilience-oriented governance, and contemporary cultural policy discourse.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the intellectual evolution, thematic development, and global research dynamics of scholarship on intangible cultural heritage from 1980 to 2025 within the context of sustainable development and cultural sustainability discourse. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the evolution of intangible cultural heritage scholarship from identity-centered discourse toward sustainability-oriented heritage governance;
2. Identify the dominant sustainability-related themes shaping contemporary scholarship on intangible cultural heritage;
3. Analyze global collaboration patterns influencing interdisciplinary heritage research; and
4. Determine the implications of intangible cultural heritage research for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation and cultural resilience.

Significance of the Study

The study contributes theoretically by clarifying the conceptual evolution of intangible cultural heritage scholarship from cultural identity discourse toward sustainability-oriented governance frameworks. Methodologically, the study integrates systematic review procedures with bibliometric science mapping techniques to examine thematic evolution and interdisciplinary knowledge structures. From a policy perspective, the findings provide evidence-based insights for educators, policymakers, cultural institutions, and heritage practitioners involved in heritage safeguarding, cultural sustainability, and community-based resilience initiatives.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Lens

This study is anchored on Cultural Sustainability Theory, Critical Heritage Theory, and Community Resilience Theory to explain the evolving intellectual structure of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) scholarship within sustainability-oriented discourse.

Cultural Sustainability Theory

Cultural Sustainability Theory emphasizes the preservation, adaptation, and intergenerational transmission of cultural practices, values, identities, and traditions within rapidly changing societies (Soini & Dessein, 2016). The theory argues that culture should be recognized as a fundamental dimension of sustainable development because cultural continuity contributes to social cohesion, collective identity, and long-term community well-being. Throsby (2017) further explains that cultural capital, including intangible cultural heritage, functions as an essential resource supporting social resilience and sustainable societal development. Within this study, Cultural Sustainability Theory provides the foundation for understanding how ICH evolved from cultural preservation concerns toward broader sustainability-oriented governance frameworks.

Critical Heritage Theory

Critical Heritage Theory conceptualizes heritage not merely as preserved cultural artifacts but as socially constructed and politically negotiated processes shaped by discourse, representation, and power relations (Smith, 2006). Heritage is continuously produced through institutional frameworks, social interactions, and cultural practices that determine which traditions are recognized, valued, and safeguarded (Harrison, 2013). This perspective is important in examining how contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes participatory safeguarding, decolonial heritage approaches, and inclusive governance within intangible cultural heritage research.

Community Resilience Theory

Community Resilience Theory explains the capacity of communities to adapt, recover, and maintain continuity amid environmental, social, economic, and cultural disruptions (Magis, 2010; Berkes & Ross, 2013). Cultural practices, oral traditions, indigenous knowledge systems, and intergenerational learning contribute significantly to resilience because they strengthen local identity, social cohesion, and adaptive capacity within communities.

Integrated Conceptual Lens

The study integrates the three theoretical perspectives to explain the intellectual evolution of intangible cultural heritage scholarship from identity-centered discourse toward sustainability-oriented governance frameworks. Earlier heritage scholarship largely focused on cultural identity, belonging, and collective memory. However, contemporary scholarship increasingly positions heritage within broader discussions concerning cultural sustainability, resilience, participatory safeguarding, and governance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a systematic review and bibliometric research design to examine the intellectual evolution, thematic development, and global research dynamics of scholarship on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) from 1980 to 2025. The study integrated systematic review procedures with bibliometric science mapping techniques to synthesize fragmented interdisciplinary literature related to heritage preservation, cultural sustainability, resilience, and sustainability governance. The methodological procedures were guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework to ensure transparency, consistency, and methodological rigor in the identification, screening, and selection of relevant literature (Page et al., 2021).

Bibliometric analysis was employed to examine publication trends, collaboration networks, thematic evolution, and conceptual structures within global ICH scholarship. The integration of systematic review procedures and bibliometric mapping is increasingly recognized as appropriate for interdisciplinary sustainability-oriented research because it enables comprehensive analysis of intellectual structures and emerging research directions across large scholarly datasets (Donthu et al., 2021).

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Data Sources

Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus Core Collection databases in March 2026. These databases were selected because of their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed interdisciplinary research related to cultural studies, heritage governance, sustainability science, sociology, education, and anthropology. Following duplicate removal and eligibility screening, a final dataset of 452 publications published between 1980 and 2025 was included in the bibliometric analysis. The initial database search yielded 684 records from Scopus. After duplicate removal, 592 records remained for title and abstract screening. Following eligibility assessment and exclusion of unrelated publications, 452 publications were retained for the final bibliometric analysis.

Search Strategy

A structured Boolean search strategy was employed using combinations of heritage-related, identity-related, and sustainability-oriented keywords within the Title, Abstract, and Keywords fields. The search logic included terms associated with “intangible cultural heritage,” “cultural identity,” “heritage governance,” “cultural sustainability,” “community resilience,” “indigenous knowledge,” and “sustainable development.” The search was limited to English-language publications indexed between 1980 and 2025. The search process was conducted independently and systematically to ensure reproducibility and minimize selection bias in article retrieval and screening procedures.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, reviews, conference papers, scholarly book chapters	Editorials, commentaries, non-scholarly publications
Conceptual Relevance	Studies related to ICH, sustainability, resilience, governance, or identity	Studies unrelated to heritage sustainability
Language	English-language publications	Non-English publications
Timeframe	Publications from 1980–2025	Publications outside the timeframe
Subject Focus	Social sciences, arts and humanities, sustainability research	Purely technical or unrelated studies

Analytical Tools

Data analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix R-package through the Biblioshiny interface and supported by VOSviewer for science mapping and network visualization (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Bibliometrix was utilized to analyze annual scientific production, thematic evolution, conceptual structures, and citation patterns, while VOSviewer was used to visualize co-authorship networks, collaboration structures, and keyword co-occurrence relationships. These analytical tools enabled comprehensive examination of the intellectual evolution and sustainability orientation of global scholarship on intangible cultural heritage.

Results

Research Trends and Temporal Dynamics in Intangible Cultural Heritage Scholarship (1980–2025)

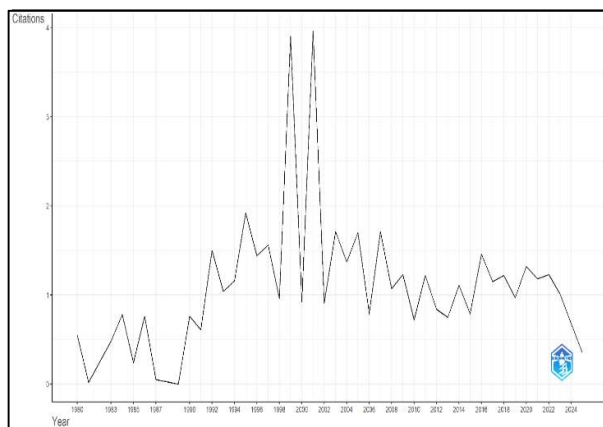
The analysis of annual scientific production reveals the progressive intellectual expansion of scholarship on intangible cultural heritage (ICH), cultural sustainability, and heritage governance between 1980 and 2025. During the foundational period from 1980 to 2002, publication output remained relatively limited, reflecting the tendency of early heritage scholarship to focus primarily on cultural identity, collective memory, and symbolic representation within anthropology and cultural studies (Hall, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). At this stage, heritage was generally conceptualized as an identity-centered cultural construct rather than as a sustainability-oriented framework.

A substantial increase in publication productivity emerged after 2003 following the adoption of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Convention significantly elevated international recognition of safeguarding practices, cultural continuity, and participatory heritage

governance (UNESCO, 2003). This development contributed to the institutionalization of heritage discourse within international policy and interdisciplinary scholarship, resulting in increasing academic attention toward cultural preservation, indigenous knowledge systems, and intergenerational transmission.

Research productivity accelerated further after 2015 with the integration of culture within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Contemporary scholarship increasingly connected heritage with sustainability-oriented themes such as community resilience, climate adaptation, digital heritage, and sustainability governance (United Nations, 2015). The rapid expansion of publications during this period demonstrates the growing interdisciplinary recognition of ICH as an important component of sustainable development and resilience-oriented governance frameworks (Soini & Dessein, 2016; Throsby, 2017).

Annual Scientific Production in ICH Research (1980–2025)



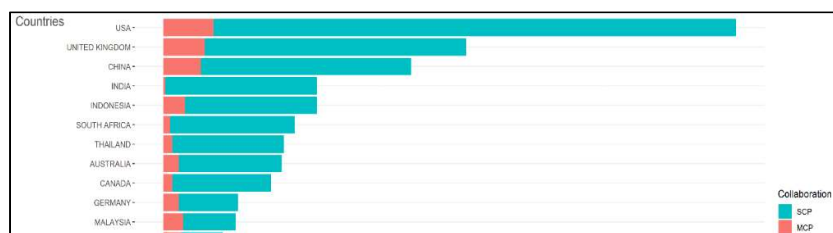
Global Research Productivity

The bibliometric mapping indicated that the United States, United Kingdom, and China consistently demonstrated the highest publication visibility and collaborative influence within the dataset. These countries demonstrated strong publication outputs due to established academic infrastructures, extensive research funding systems, and greater representation within international indexing databases. Their scholarly contributions substantially shaped theoretical and empirical discussions related to heritage preservation, cultural sustainability, and governance-oriented heritage research.

At the same time, increasing participation from Global South countries such as India, Indonesia, South Africa, Thailand, and Malaysia reflects the growing visibility of indigenous knowledge systems, community-based cultural practices, and culturally grounded sustainability perspectives within international scholarship. This trend suggests expanding interdisciplinary engagement with decolonial heritage discourse, intercultural inclusion, and participatory safeguarding frameworks (Duxbury et al., 2017; Throsby, 2017).

Despite these developments, research productivity remains concentrated among countries with stronger academic infrastructures and greater access to international publication systems. Such disparities continue to highlight broader concerns regarding epistemic inequality and the underrepresentation of locally grounded and indigenous heritage scholarship within global sustainability discourse.

Leading Countries in ICH Research Productivity



Co-authorship Networks and International Collaboration

The co-authorship analysis revealed expanding international collaboration and interdisciplinary engagement within sustainability-oriented scholarship on intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The collaboration networks demonstrated interconnected scholarly relationships among authors, institutions, and countries across anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, sustainability science, education, and heritage governance. These collaborative structures indicate that contemporary heritage research increasingly operates within globally interconnected academic ecosystems characterized by intercultural exchange and transnational knowledge production.

The findings further showed that countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, China, Germany, and South Africa functioned as major collaborative hubs within the international research network. Increasing participation from Asian and African institutions reflects growing scholarly attention toward indigenous knowledge systems, community resilience, participatory safeguarding, and culturally grounded sustainability approaches. These collaborative trends suggest the emergence of broader heritage diplomacy and international cooperation in addressing cultural sustainability and resilience-oriented governance challenges (UNESCO, 2003).

The increasing frequency of multi-country publications after 2015 further indicates the growing interdisciplinary and international character of heritage scholarship. Comparative heritage studies, intercultural inclusion, climate adaptation, and digital heritage preservation increasingly require collaborative frameworks involving researchers, cultural institutions, and policymakers across geographic regions. Such developments demonstrate that contemporary scholarship on intangible cultural heritage is increasingly shaped by globally interconnected sustainability-oriented research networks.

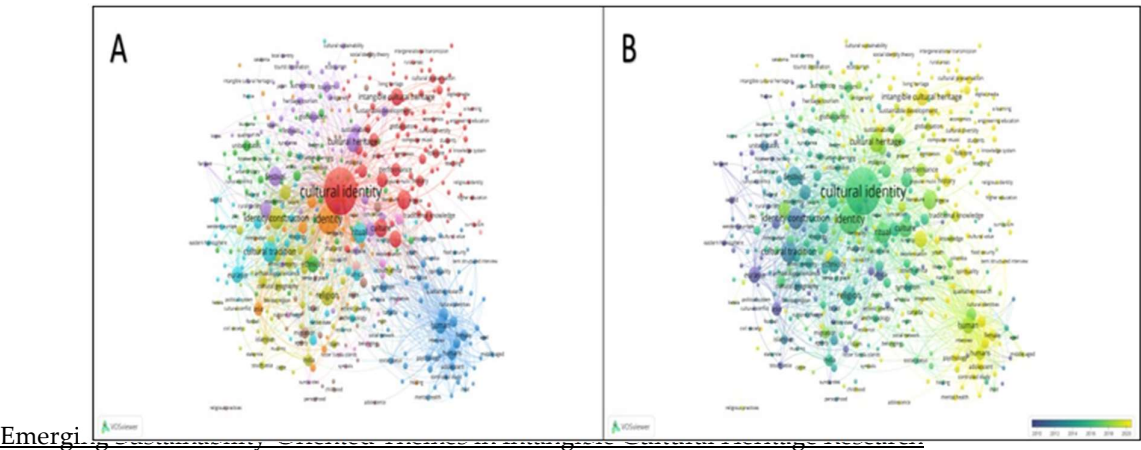
Keyword Co-occurrence and Intellectual Evolution

Keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed a substantial intellectual transition in intangible cultural heritage scholarship from identity-centered discourse toward sustainability-oriented governance frameworks. Earlier scholarship primarily focused on concepts such as cultural identity, ethnicity, collective memory, and belonging, reflecting the dominance of sociocultural and anthropological perspectives within early heritage studies (Hall, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Following the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, research themes increasingly emphasized heritage preservation, safeguarding practices, oral traditions, cultural transmission, and participatory governance (UNESCO, 2003). This thematic shift marked the institutionalization of heritage discourse within international policy and interdisciplinary scholarship.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly integrates sustainability-oriented concepts such as cultural sustainability, community resilience, sustainability governance, indigenous knowledge systems, climate adaptation, and digital heritage. The emergence of these themes demonstrates the growing alignment between heritage studies and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-oriented discourse emphasizing inclusion, resilience, cultural continuity, and sustainable communities (United Nations, 2015). The conceptual evolution further suggests that intangible cultural heritage is increasingly recognized not merely as a preservation concern but also as a critical component of resilience-oriented governance and sustainable development frameworks.

Intellectual Evolution of ICH Scholarship



Emergi

The thematic evolution analysis revealed several emerging sustainability-oriented themes shaping the contemporary direction of scholarship on intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Recent research increasingly positions heritage within broader interdisciplinary discussions concerning digital transformation, climate adaptation, participatory governance, indigenous knowledge systems, and decolonial cultural preservation frameworks. These developments demonstrate the expanding integration of heritage scholarship within global sustainability and resilience-oriented discourse.

One of the most prominent emerging themes is digital heritage. Contemporary studies increasingly examine digital archiving, virtual preservation, artificial intelligence, and online cultural transmission as mechanisms for safeguarding living heritage within rapidly changing sociotechnical environments. Digital technologies are increasingly recognized as important tools for documenting oral traditions, rituals, indigenous practices, and endangered cultural expressions while expanding accessibility and intercultural knowledge exchange.

Climate resilience also emerged as a significant thematic direction within contemporary heritage scholarship. Increasing scholarly attention has been devoted to the role of indigenous ecological knowledge systems, traditional environmental practices, and culturally grounded adaptation strategies in addressing climate-related challenges. Heritage practices are increasingly conceptualized as resilience resources that contribute to community continuity, biodiversity conservation, and locally grounded environmental governance (Soini & Dessein, 2016).

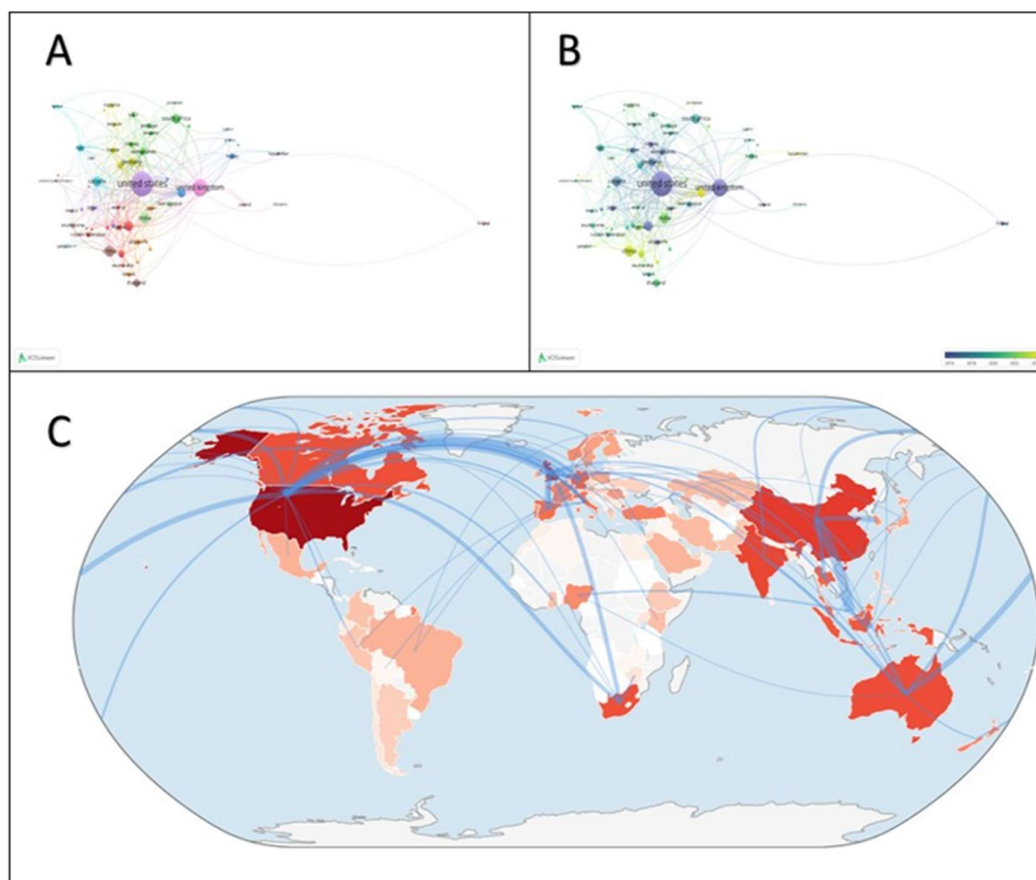
Another major emerging theme involves indigenous knowledge systems and participatory safeguarding approaches. Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes indigenous communities as active custodians of cultural knowledge rather than passive beneficiaries of institutional preservation frameworks. This thematic shift reflects broader efforts toward decolonial heritage discourse, emphasizing culturally contextualized safeguarding, local participation, epistemic inclusion, and intercultural sustainability (Smith, 2006).

The increasing prominence of sustainability governance further demonstrates the integration of heritage studies within international policy and development frameworks. Heritage governance research increasingly examines participatory safeguarding, intercultural inclusion, cultural policy, and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-oriented governance approaches emphasizing resilience, inclusion, and sustainable communities (United Nations, 2015). Collectively, these emerging themes illustrate the transformation of intangible cultural heritage scholarship from preservation-oriented discourse toward interdisciplinary sustainability-oriented governance frameworks.

Emerging Themes in Contemporary ICH Scholarship



Conceptual Evolution of ICH Scholarship



Discussion

Transition from Identity to Sustainability

The findings of the study demonstrate a substantial intellectual transition in scholarship on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) from identity-centered discourse toward broader sustainability-oriented governance frameworks. Earlier heritage scholarship primarily emphasized cultural identity, collective memory, ethnicity, and symbolic representation within anthropology and cultural studies (Hall, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Heritage was commonly conceptualized as a mechanism for preserving social belonging and cultural continuity within communities.

Contemporary scholarship, however, increasingly positions ICH within interdisciplinary discussions concerning sustainability, resilience, governance, and inclusive development. This conceptual evolution became particularly visible following the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, which emphasized community-centered safeguarding, participation, and intergenerational transmission (UNESCO, 2003). More recent scholarship further demonstrates how heritage studies expanded beyond preservation-oriented concerns toward dynamic sustainability frameworks involving climate adaptation, digital heritage, cultural governance, and resilience-oriented development. The evolution of the field therefore reflects broader transformations within global sustainability discourse recognizing culture as an essential dimension of sustainable societies (Soini & Dessein, 2016; Throsby, 2017).

Heritage as a Sustainability Framework

The findings further suggest that intangible cultural heritage increasingly functions as a sustainability framework connecting cultural continuity, resilience, governance, and inclusive development. The growing integration of sustainability-oriented themes within heritage scholarship aligns closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 11 on sustainable communities, and SDG 16 on inclusive institutions and peaceful societies (United Nations, 2015).

Heritage practices such as oral traditions, rituals, indigenous ecological knowledge, and community-based cultural transmission contribute significantly to social cohesion and resilience by strengthening adaptive capacity and collective continuity amid globalization and environmental change. Contemporary heritage governance therefore increasingly emphasizes participatory safeguarding, intercultural inclusion, and culturally grounded sustainability approaches. These developments indicate that ICH is no longer viewed solely as a preservation concern but also as a critical component of resilience-oriented governance and sustainable development policy frameworks.

The increasing prominence of governance-related scholarship also reflects expanding recognition that effective safeguarding requires collaboration among governments, educational institutions, cultural organizations, and local communities. Participatory governance frameworks encourage more inclusive and community-centered approaches to cultural preservation while promoting intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, and sustainability-oriented policy development.

Indigenous and Community Implications

One of the most important developments identified in contemporary scholarship is the increasing visibility of indigenous knowledge systems and community-centered safeguarding approaches. Recent heritage discourse increasingly recognizes indigenous and local communities as active custodians of cultural knowledge and sustainability practices rather than passive subjects of institutional preservation. This shift reflects broader decolonial perspectives challenging historically centralized and Western-oriented heritage frameworks (Smith, 2006).

The growing scholarly emphasis on indigenous ecological knowledge, oral traditions, traditional governance systems, and culturally contextualized safeguarding highlights the importance of locally grounded perspectives within sustainability discourse. Indigenous knowledge systems contribute substantially to climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, environmental management, and community resilience because they are rooted in long-term interaction between communities and their sociocultural environments.

The findings further support the importance of participatory governance approaches that strengthen local representation, community engagement, and epistemic inclusion within heritage policy and sustainability planning. Supporting community-led safeguarding initiatives and culturally contextualized governance frameworks may contribute to more inclusive, equitable, and resilient approaches to cultural sustainability and sustainable development.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to the interdisciplinary understanding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) by demonstrating its conceptual evolution from identity-centered discourse toward sustainability-oriented governance frameworks integrating perspectives from cultural studies, sustainability science, sociology, education, environmental governance, and resilience theory. The study reinforces the view that culture serves as a foundational dimension of sustainable development because cultural continuity strengthens social cohesion, resilience, and adaptive capacity within communities (Soini & Dessein, 2016; Throsby, 2017). Furthermore, the findings highlight the growing conceptualization of ICH as a dynamic governance framework emphasizing participatory safeguarding, intercultural inclusion, community resilience, digital heritage, indigenous knowledge systems, climate adaptation, and sustainability-oriented policy development within contemporary global sustainability discourse.

Policy Implications

The findings provide important policy implications for UNESCO, educational institutions, cultural organizations, and policymakers by emphasizing the growing role of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) within sustainability-oriented governance and inclusive cultural development frameworks. The study highlights the importance of community participation, intercultural dialogue, cultural education, and intergenerational knowledge transmission in safeguarding living heritage and promoting resilience, inclusion, and cultural continuity (UNESCO, 2003). Furthermore, the findings support participatory and community-based safeguarding approaches that recognize indigenous and local communities as active custodians of cultural knowledge, thereby strengthening locally grounded resilience strategies and culturally responsive sustainable development initiatives.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the analysis was restricted to English-language publications, which may have excluded important locally grounded and non-English heritage scholarship. Second, the study relied primarily on Scopus and Web of Science indexed publications, potentially limiting the representation of regional, community-based, and indigenous knowledge systems not included in major international databases.

Conclusion

This study examined the intellectual evolution and global research dynamics of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) scholarship from 1980 to 2025 using a systematic bibliometric and science mapping approach. The findings revealed a significant transition from identity-centered heritage discourse toward broader sustainability-oriented frameworks emphasizing cultural sustainability, resilience, participatory safeguarding, governance, and sustainable development. While cultural identity and heritage preservation remain foundational themes, contemporary scholarship increasingly integrates climate adaptation, indigenous knowledge systems, digital heritage, and community-centered governance within Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-oriented discourse (Soini & Dessein, 2016; Throsby, 2017; United Nations, 2015). The study further highlighted the expanding interdisciplinary and international character of heritage research through growing collaboration networks and thematic diversification, positioning intangible cultural heritage as a dynamic construct linking cultural continuity, resilience, governance, and inclusive sustainable development.

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