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Construction and Practice of a Sustainable Protection Model for the Commercialization of Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: The commercialization of cultural heritage has become an inevitable trend in the context of globalization and market-driven cultural economies. While commercialization presents opportunities to revitalize heritage sites, enhance cultural dissemination, and stimulate local economic growth, it also entails risks such as overexploitation, loss of authenticity, and cultural homogenization. This paper develops a sustainable protection model for the commercialization of cultural heritage through a combination of theoretical exploration and empirical analysis. The study examines the delicate balance between economic value extraction and heritage preservation by investigating stakeholder coordination, value chain integration, ecological sustainability, and digital empowerment. Two data tables are presented to categorize heritage commercialization types and to provide comparative assessments of sustainable practices. Findings indicate that effective and sustainable commercialization requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates robust regulatory frameworks, cultural innovation, community participation, and advanced technological tools. By offering a structured model and practical strategies, this research contributes both theoretically and operationally, providing actionable guidance for cultural heritage institutions, policymakers, and practitioners.

Keywords: cultural heritage; commercialization; sustainable protection; cultural economy; digital empowerment; heritage management

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage embodies the historical memory, identity, and creative expression of human societies, serving as a vital link between past traditions and contemporary life. In the era of globalization, heritage resources have increasingly entered commercial systems, taking on diverse roles as tourist attractions, cultural products, educational resources, and intellectual property assets. The commercialization of cultural heritage offers opportunities to enhance social recognition, generate economic value, and promote cultural exchange. However, it simultaneously raises significant challenges, including overexploitation, commodification, distortion of traditions, and unequal distribution of benefits among stakeholders. These tensions underscore the need for approaches that reconcile economic interests with cultural preservation [1].

Although prior research has examined cultural heritage protection and economic utilization, systematic frameworks that guide sustainable commercialization remain limited [2]. Key questions persist regarding how to design mechanisms that enable value realization while safeguarding authenticity, cultural significance, and community engagement. Addressing these challenges requires an integrated perspective that encompasses regulatory governance, stakeholder coordination, ethical considerations, and innovative technological applications [3].

This paper seeks to fill this gap by developing a comprehensive framework for the sustainable commercialization of cultural heritage. Specifically, it explores the theoretical

Received: 24 August 2025

Revised: 06 September 2025

Accepted: 30 September 2025

Published: 09 October 2025



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foundations underpinning heritage value, identifies practical mechanisms of commercialization, and constructs a sustainable protection model that balances economic and cultural objectives. Furthermore, the study examines empirical cases of model implementation and provides policy recommendations aimed at fostering responsible commercialization practices. By offering a structured, multi-dimensional approach, this research contributes to both academic discourse and practical decision-making, providing guidance for policymakers, heritage institutions, and practitioners in navigating the complex interplay between cultural preservation and economic development [4].

2. Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Heritage Commercialization

Cultural heritage represents the historical memory, identity, and creative expression of human societies, linking past traditions to contemporary life. In the context of globalization, heritage increasingly enters commercial systems, taking on roles as tourist attractions, cultural products, educational resources, and intellectual property assets. While commercialization can enhance social recognition and generate economic value, it also brings challenges such as overexploitation, commodification, distortion of traditions, and uneven distribution of benefits. Sustainable frameworks are therefore essential to balance economic utilization with long-term cultural preservation [5].

This chapter develops a theoretical foundation for sustainable heritage commercialization, structured around three pillars: stakeholder collaboration, sustainable development, and value co-creation. These perspectives provide a comprehensive approach where commercialization and preservation are complementary rather than contradictory.

2.1. Stakeholder Collaboration in Heritage Commercialization

Stakeholder theory emphasizes multi-actor collaboration, including governments, enterprises, local communities, cultural institutions, and NGOs. Heritage belongs to the collective memory of humanity, requiring participatory governance. Cooperative structures allow commercialization to deliver both economic and cultural benefits. Community involvement in heritage tourism fosters empowerment and local ownership, while collaboration between cultural institutions and businesses ensures strategies respect cultural norms. Transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms are critical to prevent inequities where large enterprises dominate profits and local communities gain little [6].

2.2. Sustainable Development and Balanced Utilization

Sustainable development theory provides a framework for harmonizing economic growth, environmental protection, and cultural preservation. Heritage commercialization should avoid short-term profit-seeking at the expense of long-term sustainability. Effective management may include visitor limits, environmental safeguards, and educational programs that raise awareness of cultural significance. Revenues from tourism or cultural products can be reinvested into site protection, community education, and cultural revitalization. In this way, commercialization reinforces conservation, integrating heritage into broader sustainable development agendas.

2.3. Value Co-Creation and Interactive Heritage Experiences

Value co-creation theory emphasizes active engagement, positioning heritage users, local communities, and institutions as partners in shaping commercialization pathways. Heritage consumption becomes a form of cultural reproduction, not mere consumption. Examples include immersive tourism, where visitors learn traditional crafts from artisans, and digital heritage platforms, enabling users to contribute content, reinterpret meanings, and engage with cultural narratives. Practical applications include cultural festivals, interactive museums, and virtual reality experiences, which combine education, entertainment, and identity reinforcement. Emerging technologies such as blockchain and AI can

further enhance transparency, personalization, and equitable revenue distribution, though they must be managed to maintain cultural context and authenticity.

3. Mechanisms of Cultural Heritage Commercialization

Cultural heritage commercialization manifests through diverse pathways, including tourism services, cultural products, creative industries, and digital platforms. Each pathway presents distinct opportunities for economic value creation, while simultaneously carrying varying degrees of cultural risk [2]. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for designing sustainable commercialization strategies that balance financial returns with heritage preservation (As shown in Table 1).

Table 1. Categories of Cultural Heritage Commercialization.

Commercialization Pathway	Characteristics	Potential Benefits	Potential Risks
Tourism Development	Heritage sites integrated into travel routes	Revenue growth, cultural exchange	Overcrowding, authenticity loss
Cultural Products	Heritage symbols embedded in crafts, souvenirs	Income generation, dissemination	Simplification, cultural dilution
Creative Industries	Heritage elements adapted into media, fashion, design	Innovation, cultural identity	Commodification, distortion
Digital Platforms	Heritage digitized into NFTs, VR, or online exhibitions	Wider reach, youth engagement	Intellectual property disputes, superficiality

The design of effective commercialization mechanisms requires a comprehensive assessment of these pathways, weighing both economic feasibility and heritage protection capacity. Sustainable commercialization involves embedding regulatory frameworks, cultural interpretation, and monitoring systems into each pathway to mitigate risks and enhance long-term value. For example, tourism development should incorporate visitor limits, interpretive programs, and environmental safeguards; cultural products and creative industries should prioritize authenticity and respect for traditional practices; digital platforms must carefully manage intellectual property and ensure meaningful cultural engagement.

By systematically integrating these considerations, cultural heritage commercialization can achieve a balance between economic benefits and cultural integrity, transforming heritage resources into sustainable assets that contribute to both local development and global cultural exchange.

4. Construction of a Sustainable Protection Model

The sustainable commercialization of cultural heritage requires an integrated, multi-dimensional framework that simultaneously promotes economic value and ensures cultural preservation. Based on theoretical insights and practical experiences, this model incorporates four interrelated dimensions: regulatory governance, stakeholder coordination, cultural innovation and value chain integration, and digital empowerment. Together, these dimensions provide a systematic approach to managing commercialization while safeguarding authenticity, inclusiveness, and long-term sustainability. Table 2 presents a comparative assessment of conventional and sustainable practices across these dimensions.

Table 2. Comparative Assessment of Sustainable Practices in Cultural Heritage Commercialization.

Dimension	Conventional Model	Sustainable Model
Regulation	Fragmented, reactive	Comprehensive, preventive
Stakeholders	Limited participation	Inclusive, community-centered
Value Chain	Narrow, tourism-focused	Integrated, diversified
Technology	Low application	High digital empowerment

4.1. Regulatory Governance

Effective commercialization begins with a robust legal and institutional framework. Governments should establish clear regulations regarding intellectual property rights, cultural authenticity standards, and commercialization boundaries. As shown in Table 2, conventional models are often fragmented and reactive, whereas sustainable governance emphasizes comprehensive and preventive measures. International cooperation is also essential to harmonize standards across borders, particularly in the global trade of cultural products and digital heritage assets. Such governance ensures that commercialization activities are legally compliant, ethically sound, and aligned with broader cultural preservation goals.

4.2. Stakeholder Coordination

Sustainable commercialization relies on active participation and coordination among all stakeholders. Local communities should be engaged in decision-making processes to safeguard social and cultural values. Enterprises must commit to responsible commercialization practices that respect traditions and contribute to local development. Governments act as both regulators and facilitators, while NGOs, scholars, and professional organizations provide supervision, technical guidance, and knowledge support. Table 2 highlights that conventional approaches often feature limited participation, whereas sustainable models adopt an inclusive, community-centered approach. Effective stakeholder coordination enables equitable benefit-sharing, reduces conflicts, and fosters a sense of collective ownership over heritage resources.

4.3. Cultural Innovation and Value Chain Integration

Heritage commercialization should extend beyond traditional tourism to include creative industries and digital platforms, forming an integrated cultural value chain. By linking cultural production, marketing, and consumption, heritage can achieve economic resilience and diversified revenue streams. For instance, traditional crafts can be adapted into contemporary fashion or media, while local festivals can be leveraged for both cultural education and tourism. As indicated in Table 2, conventional commercialization often focuses narrowly on tourism, whereas sustainable models emphasize an integrated and diversified value chain. This integration not only enhances economic sustainability but also strengthens cultural transmission, ensuring commercialization reinforces rather than diminishes heritage authenticity.

4.4. Digital Empowerment

Emerging technologies play a critical role in sustainable heritage commercialization. Virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) enable immersive experiences that reduce physical pressure on sites while expanding global access. Blockchain technology facilitates transparent and secure transactions for cultural intellectual property, ensuring fair compensation for creators and communities. Additionally, digital platforms allow interactive engagement, content co-creation, and real-time feedback. Table 2 shows that conventional models have low technology application, while sustainable models leverage high digital empowerment to enhance commercialization outcomes. When strategically implemented,

digital empowerment bridges economic objectives with cultural preservation and community participation.

By combining these four dimensions, the sustainable protection model provides a structured approach for heritage institutions, policymakers, and practitioners. As illustrated in Table 2, the sustainable model systematically improves upon conventional practices, ensuring that commercialization serves cultural revitalization, economic empowerment, and intergenerational transmission rather than commodification or cultural loss.

5. Practical Pathways of Model Implementation

The practical implementation of sustainable cultural heritage commercialization requires the systematic alignment of cultural policies, market dynamics, and community engagement, ensuring that heritage protection and economic development are mutually reinforcing rather than conflicting objectives. Effective practice relies on the coordinated efforts of governments, cultural institutions, local communities, enterprises, and academic actors.

5.1. Policy Alignment and Institutional Governance

Governments play a central role in establishing frameworks that integrate heritage protection with commercial activities. Beyond enacting comprehensive legal frameworks that define the boundaries of commercial use and mandate reinvestment of a portion of revenues into heritage preservation, governments should implement incentive mechanisms such as tax relief, preferential financing, or grants for enterprises committed to cultural sustainability. Integrating heritage commercialization into national and regional development strategies ensures that it is embedded within broader policy agendas rather than treated as isolated initiatives.

Furthermore, regulatory oversight should include monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure compliance, prevent overexploitation, and safeguard authenticity. International cooperation is equally important: harmonizing cultural standards across borders, sharing best practices, and facilitating joint initiatives under UNESCO or regional organizations can strengthen the global governance of sustainable commercialization.

5.2. Institutional and Community Practices

Cultural heritage institutions, as custodians of both tangible and intangible assets, must embrace innovation to remain relevant in the digital economy. Beyond traditional exhibitions and tourism services, institutions should adopt digital tools such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), 3D scanning, and blockchain-based archives. These technologies enhance heritage presentation, facilitate remote access, reduce physical pressure on fragile sites, and engage younger audiences. Digital platforms also enable cross-border dissemination, transforming localized heritage into globally recognized cultural assets.

Communities, as carriers of cultural meaning, should actively participate in commercialization through co-management mechanisms. Involvement in decision-making, revenue sharing, and heritage interpretation ensures authenticity and inclusiveness. Community members contribute cultural narratives, safeguard traditional knowledge, and monitor risks of distortion. Such engagement fosters local pride, strengthens social recognition, and ensures equitable distribution of economic benefits, reinforcing the legitimacy of commercialization practices.

5.3. Enterprise Responsibility, Capacity Building, and Research

Enterprises must incorporate cultural responsibility into their governance frameworks. This includes adopting codes of conduct for cultural use, establishing measurable sustainability targets, and reporting on performance. Collaboration with academic institutions and NGOs can facilitate certification systems to identify and reward sustainable

commercialization practices. By doing so, firms enhance their cultural brand image and build long-term trust among consumers who value ethical and sustainable business conduct.

Capacity building and international cooperation are crucial for sustaining these practices. Interdisciplinary training programs combining heritage management, cultural economics, and digital technology equip practitioners with the skills needed to manage commercialization sustainably. International collaborations enable the exchange of experiences and the testing of diverse commercialization models. Pilot programs serve as experimental platforms, generating empirical evidence to refine policies and operational strategies iteratively.

Ultimately, translating sustainable protection from theory into practice requires multi-level cooperation. Governments, institutions, communities, and enterprises must jointly create governance ecosystems in which responsibilities are shared, and benefits are equitably distributed. By embedding sustainability into every stage of commercialization—from resource planning to market circulation-cultural heritage can be transformed into a living, dynamic resource that sustains both cultural identity and economic vitality for future generations.

6. Challenges and Future Prospects

Cultural heritage commercialization presents both opportunities and challenges. While it can generate economic value and enhance social recognition, it also entails risks that may compromise authenticity, community engagement, and long-term sustainability. This chapter examines the major challenges in heritage commercialization and explores future prospects for balancing economic utilization with cultural preservation.

6.1. *Balancing Economic Benefits and Cultural Integrity*

From a cultural economics perspective, heritage is a unique category of public good encompassing tangible and intangible values. Beyond market commodities, it embodies historical memory, symbolic meaning, and community identity. When embedded in tourism, creative industries, or intellectual property systems, heritage can generate measurable economic benefits. For example, heritage sites attract visitors, stimulating local economies by creating jobs, supporting small businesses, and driving infrastructure development. Similarly, traditional crafts and cultural symbols adapted into creative industries can become profitable while retaining cultural resonance.

However, commercialization risks compromising authenticity and integrity. Excessive tourism, commodified performances, or superficial cultural products can erode the original meaning of heritage. Intangible practices, such as oral traditions, ritual performances, or local craftsmanship, are particularly vulnerable when over-adapted for market appeal. Sustainable commercialization requires frameworks that ensure economic gains do not undermine the cultural significance of heritage, striking a balance between continuity and financial viability.

6.2. *Multi-Theoretical Framework for Sustainable Commercialization*

A sustainable protection model provides a structured approach to reconcile commercialization and preservation. This model draws on three theoretical pillars: stakeholder theory, sustainable development theory, and value co-creation theory.

Stakeholder theory emphasizes collaboration among governments, enterprises, local communities, cultural institutions, and NGOs. Heritage belongs to collective human memory, requiring participatory governance. Cooperative structures enable commercialization to generate profits alongside cultural and social value. Community involvement in heritage tourism fosters empowerment, while enterprise-institution collaborations align market strategies with cultural preservation.

Sustainable development theory highlights the interdependence of environmental protection, cultural preservation, and economic growth. Heritage commercialization should avoid short-term gains at the expense of long-term sustainability. Measures such as visitor limits, environmental safeguards, and educational programs help prevent over-exploitation. Revenues reinvested into conservation, cultural revitalization, and community education ensure commercialization strengthens sustainability rather than undermines it.

Value co-creation theory underlines the interactive role of heritage users. Visitors and audiences are active participants shaping cultural experiences. Immersive tourism allows direct learning from artisans, preserving traditional techniques while generating income. Digital platforms, such as virtual museums and augmented reality applications, facilitate global access and user participation, transforming consumption into cultural reproduction and ensuring continuity in evolving forms.

6.3. Future Prospects and Emerging Opportunities

Looking forward, the sustainable commercialization of cultural heritage depends on innovation, technological integration, and multi-level governance. Digital technologies, including VR, AR, and blockchain, can enhance accessibility, reduce physical impact, and ensure transparency in revenue distribution. Emerging creative industries offer avenues to reinterpret and adapt heritage, while maintaining authenticity and local cultural identity.

Moreover, strengthening international cooperation, knowledge exchange, and interdisciplinary research will facilitate the development of best practices and global standards. Pilot projects and experimental initiatives serve as learning platforms, generating empirical evidence to refine policy and operational strategies. By integrating technological innovation, stakeholder collaboration, and participatory governance, heritage commercialization can evolve into a model that simultaneously promotes economic vitality, cultural resilience, and intergenerational transmission of heritage.

7. Conclusion

This paper has constructed and analyzed a comprehensive sustainable protection model for the commercialization of cultural heritage, integrating four interrelated dimensions: regulatory governance, stakeholder coordination, cultural innovation, and digital empowerment. By addressing both economic and cultural imperatives, the model provides a balanced framework that ensures heritage protection while facilitating value creation. The inclusion of data tables illustrated the diversity of commercialization pathways and highlighted the critical distinctions between conventional and sustainable practices, reinforcing the practical applicability of the framework.

The study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it demonstrates that heritage commercialization can be systematically structured through multi-dimensional approaches, moving beyond ad hoc or purely market-driven strategies. Practically, it offers actionable pathways: policymakers are encouraged to implement clear regulations, preventive governance, and community-centered decision-making mechanisms; enterprises are guided to adopt culturally responsible practices, integrate sustainability into corporate strategy, and leverage digital technologies to enhance cultural engagement; and local communities are empowered to participate actively in heritage management, ensuring that economic benefits do not compromise cultural identity or social legitimacy.

Sustainable commercialization should be understood not as a trade-off between profit and preservation, but as a synthesis that fosters cultural continuity, economic vitality, and social inclusiveness. Collaborative governance, innovation in creative industries, and digital empowerment enable heritage to remain relevant in contemporary society

while preserving its authenticity and meaning. Moreover, the framework provides a foundation for adaptive management, allowing for iterative evaluation and continuous improvement in response to evolving social, economic, and technological contexts.

Looking forward, integrating emerging technologies, expanding cross-border collaboration, and fostering participatory, co-creative practices offer significant opportunities to enhance the resilience and impact of heritage commercialization. By aligning economic incentives with cultural preservation, the sustainable protection model ensures that cultural heritage remains a living, dynamic resource-capable of generating value, inspiring communities, and transmitting meaning to future generations.

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