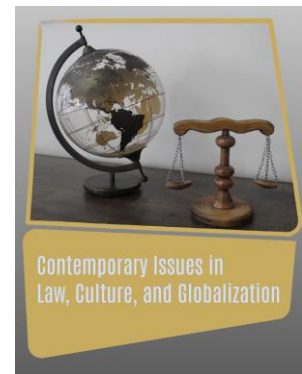




Globalization, Cultural Heritage, and Legal Protection: Challenges of Preservation

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how globalization reshapes the legal protection of cultural heritage and to identify the main preservation challenges perceived by heritage experts, legal professionals, cultural practitioners, and community stakeholders in Tehran. This qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 24 participants in Tehran, Iran. Participants included cultural heritage specialists, legal professionals, museum and archive personnel, municipal cultural officers, academics, and community representatives involved in heritage-related activities. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants with direct experience of heritage preservation, legal regulation, cultural policy, or community-based cultural work. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached after 21 interviews, followed by three confirmatory interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed through thematic analysis. NVivo software was used to organize transcripts, generate initial codes, compare patterns across participant groups, and develop final categories. Trustworthiness was strengthened through member checking, peer review of codes, prolonged engagement with the data, and maintenance of an analytic audit trail. Analysis generated four main categories: legal fragmentation and weak enforcement; commercialization and tourist-oriented transformation of heritage; digital globalization and contested ownership of cultural knowledge; and community exclusion from preservation governance. Participants emphasized that globalization has increased international visibility and documentation opportunities, yet it has also intensified pressures from urban development, marketization, cultural commodification, illicit circulation of cultural objects, and unequal access to legal decision-making. The findings show that legal protection is strongest when it combines formal regulation, institutional coordination, digital documentation, community participation, and culturally sensitive enforcement. Globalization creates both opportunities and risks for cultural heritage preservation. While international legal instruments and digital technologies can strengthen protection, preservation remains fragile when legal frameworks are fragmented, communities are marginalized, and heritage is treated primarily as an economic resource. Effective legal protection requires integrated governance, community-based safeguarding, and stronger coordination between national law, international standards, and local cultural meanings.

Keywords: globalization; cultural heritage; legal protection; preservation; qualitative research; Tehran; intangible heritage; heritage law

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Introduction

Cultural heritage has become one of the most contested fields of legal, political, and social regulation in the age of globalization. Once largely associated with monuments, historical sites, museum collections, and national identity, heritage is now understood as a dynamic field that includes tangible objects, intangible practices, collective memory, cultural landscapes, traditional knowledge, rituals, craftsmanship, archives, and living forms of cultural expression. This broader understanding reflects a major shift from a narrow “cultural property” model toward a more inclusive “cultural heritage” model. The former emphasizes ownership, custody, and material objects, whereas the latter recognizes social meaning, community participation, cultural continuity, and intergenerational responsibility (Blake, 2015; Francioni & Vrdoljak, 2020; Merryman, 1986). This shift is particularly important in globalized societies, where cultural heritage is increasingly affected by transnational markets, digital circulation, urban development, migration, tourism, and international legal regimes.

Globalization has produced contradictory consequences for cultural heritage. On the one hand, it has expanded international cooperation, increased public awareness of endangered heritage, strengthened documentation technologies, and encouraged states to participate in global preservation regimes. The UNESCO 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage established a framework for identifying and protecting sites of “outstanding universal value,” while the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage extended international attention to living traditions, oral expressions, rituals, performing arts, social practices, and traditional craftsmanship (UNESCO, 1972, 2003). Similarly, the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention have contributed to international efforts against the illicit import, export, and transfer of cultural objects (UNESCO, 1970; UNIDROIT, 1995). These instruments show that cultural heritage protection is no longer exclusively a domestic matter; it is embedded in international legal cooperation, diplomatic negotiation, restitution claims, market regulation, and global cultural governance.

On the other hand, globalization has intensified threats to cultural heritage by accelerating the movement of people, capital, images, objects, and cultural meanings across borders. Heritage sites may be transformed into tourist commodities; traditional cultural expressions may be detached from their communities and consumed as global cultural products; historical neighborhoods may be displaced by development projects; and cultural objects may circulate through illicit markets with limited regard for provenance, community rights, or public memory. Appadurai (1996) described globalization as a condition characterized by complex flows of people, media, technology, capital, and ideas. In the heritage field, these flows are visible in the movement of artifacts, the circulation of cultural symbols through digital platforms, the international branding of heritage sites, and the reinterpretation of local traditions for global audiences. Heritage is therefore not merely preserved under globalization; it is selected, translated, marketed, contested, and sometimes transformed.

The legal protection of cultural heritage is complicated by the fact that heritage has multiple meanings for different actors. For states, it may represent sovereignty, national identity, tourism potential, and diplomatic prestige. For local communities, it may represent memory, belonging, religious practice, livelihood, and intergenerational continuity. For international organizations, it may represent universal value, cultural diversity, and human heritage. For markets, it may become an asset, attraction, brand, or collectible object. Smith (2006) argued that heritage is not simply a thing inherited from the past but a cultural and political process through which meanings are constructed in the present. This view challenges conventional legal frameworks that define heritage mainly through expert classification, state registration, or property status. It also raises a central question: whose interpretation of heritage becomes legally recognized, and whose relationship to heritage remains invisible?

The globalization of heritage law has expanded the normative vocabulary of preservation, but it has not eliminated structural tensions. One major tension concerns the relationship between universal value and local meaning. The international heritage

system often frames certain sites or practices as belonging to humanity as a whole. This universalizing language can mobilize international support, but it may also weaken the authority of local communities if global recognition privileges expert, state, or tourism-oriented narratives over lived cultural relationships (Labadi, 2013; Smith, 2006). A second tension concerns the relationship between preservation and development. Urban heritage is often located in spaces under pressure from infrastructure projects, real estate markets, traffic expansion, commercial redevelopment, and tourism investment. In such contexts, law is expected to protect heritage while also permitting economic modernization. The result is frequently a fragmented regulatory environment in which preservation objectives compete with planning, property, investment, and municipal priorities (Graham et al., 2000; Labadi & Logan, 2015).

A third tension concerns the legal status of intangible heritage. Tangible heritage can often be registered, mapped, owned, restored, or physically guarded. Intangible heritage, however, exists through practice, performance, transmission, and community recognition. Legal systems that are designed around objects and property may struggle to protect rituals, oral histories, craft knowledge, foodways, music, and local forms of cultural expression. The 2003 UNESCO Convention addressed this gap by emphasizing safeguarding, transmission, documentation, and respect for communities (UNESCO, 2003). Yet implementation remains difficult because intangible heritage is living and changing. Excessive legal fixation may freeze practices into official forms, while insufficient protection may expose them to commercial appropriation, loss of transmission, or misrepresentation (Bendix et al., 2012; Blake, 2015).

Digital globalization adds another layer of complexity. Digital archives, virtual museums, three-dimensional scanning, online exhibitions, and social media platforms can support preservation by making heritage more visible, accessible, and documented. At the same time, digitization raises difficult legal and ethical questions. Who controls digital reproductions of heritage objects? Can sacred or community-sensitive knowledge be made publicly available? How should law respond when traditional cultural expressions are copied, remixed, commercialized, or circulated without community consent? Digital preservation may protect heritage from physical loss, but it may also detach heritage from place, ritual authority, and cultural context. Thus, legal protection must address not only physical conservation but also digital rights, data governance, cultural sensitivity, and community control over representation.

In Iran, cultural heritage protection has particular importance because of the country's long historical continuity, diverse ethnic and linguistic traditions, religious and architectural heritage, manuscript cultures, traditional arts, urban historical textures, and internationally recognized heritage sites. Tehran, as the capital and a major center of administration, migration, higher education, museums, archives, cultural institutions, and urban development, provides a valuable context for studying the relationship between globalization, heritage, and law. The city contains historical palaces, museums, religious sites, traditional neighborhoods, archives, and cultural institutions, while also experiencing intense modernization, real estate development, demographic change, digital cultural consumption, and global cultural influences. These features make Tehran a meaningful site for exploring how professionals and stakeholders understand preservation challenges in a globalized environment.

Although international heritage law provides important standards, effective protection depends on national implementation, institutional coordination, public participation, and local legitimacy. Legal instruments alone cannot preserve heritage if enforcement is weak, if agencies work in isolation, if communities are excluded, or if economic interests override cultural values. Conversely, community attachment alone may be insufficient without legal recognition, funding, documentation, and institutional support. Heritage preservation therefore requires an integrated approach that combines law, policy, conservation science, urban governance, education, community participation, and ethical management. This study responds to the need for qualitative understanding of how these tensions are experienced by actors directly involved in cultural heritage preservation.

The present study explores the challenges of legal protection for cultural heritage under conditions of globalization. Rather than treating globalization only as an external force, the study examines how global processes are interpreted in local professional and community contexts. It asks how heritage stakeholders in Tehran perceive the effects of globalization on tangible and intangible heritage, how they evaluate existing legal and institutional mechanisms, and what preservation strategies they consider necessary. By focusing on semi-structured interviews, the study seeks to capture the complexity of lived, professional, and institutional perspectives that may not be visible in purely doctrinal or policy-based analyses. The study contributes to cultural heritage law by emphasizing that preservation is not only a legal-technical matter but also a social process shaped by identity, participation, power, economic pressure, and cultural meaning.

Methods and Materials

This study used a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach was selected because the aim was to explore participants' experiences, interpretations, and professional judgments regarding globalization, cultural heritage, and legal protection. The study was not designed to measure the prevalence of attitudes but to identify patterns of meaning, institutional concerns, and perceived preservation challenges among people familiar with heritage-related issues.

The participants consisted of 24 individuals from Tehran. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who had direct knowledge of cultural heritage preservation, legal regulation, cultural policy, museum work, urban heritage, community cultural practices, or academic research on heritage. The sample included heritage specialists, lawyers, museum and archive personnel, municipal cultural officers, university academics, traditional arts practitioners, and community representatives. Inclusion criteria were: residence or professional activity in Tehran; at least three years of relevant experience in cultural heritage, law, cultural policy, museum studies, urban planning, or community cultural work; willingness to participate in an interview; and ability to provide informed consent. Individuals without direct experience or knowledge of heritage-related issues were excluded.

The final sample size was determined through theoretical saturation. Saturation was reached after 21 interviews, when no substantially new codes or categories emerged from the data. Three additional interviews were conducted to confirm and refine the emerging categories. This approach is consistent with qualitative sampling principles, in which sample adequacy is determined by depth, relevance, and saturation rather than statistical representativeness (Guest et al., 2006).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview guide included open-ended questions about participants' understanding of cultural heritage, perceived effects of globalization, legal and institutional barriers to preservation, the role of international conventions, the impact of tourism and commercialization, digital documentation, community participation, and recommendations for improving legal protection. Sample questions included: "How has globalization affected cultural heritage preservation in Tehran?" "What are the main legal challenges in protecting tangible and intangible heritage?" "How do economic development and tourism influence preservation decisions?" and "What role should local communities have in legal and institutional heritage protection?"

Interviews were conducted face-to-face or online depending on participant availability. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were written after each interview to document contextual observations, preliminary analytic impressions, and emerging questions. Data collection continued alongside preliminary analysis so that later interviews could explore developing themes in greater depth.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. Pseudonyms and participant codes were used in transcripts and reporting. Any identifying institutional or personal details were removed from quotations.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed a systematic process of familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review of themes, definition and naming of categories, and final interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo software was used to organize the data, manage transcripts, store codes, compare participant groups, and retrieve coded segments. First, all transcripts were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Second, meaningful units related to globalization, preservation, legal protection, institutional barriers, and community participation were coded. Third, similar codes were grouped into preliminary categories. Fourth, the categories were reviewed against the original transcripts to ensure that they reflected participants' accounts. Fifth, final categories were named and defined.

To strengthen trustworthiness, several strategies were used. Credibility was supported through member checking with selected participants and peer review of coding decisions. Dependability was enhanced through documentation of the analytic process and maintenance of an audit trail. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive memo writing and comparison of interpretations with direct interview excerpts. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the participants, context, and analytic categories, consistent with qualitative trustworthiness principles (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

The study included 24 participants from Tehran. Of these, 13 participants were male and 11 were female. Participants' ages ranged from 29 to 61 years. Five participants were between 25 and 34 years old, seven were between 35 and 44 years old, eight were between 45 and 54 years old, and four were 55 years or older. In terms of professional background, six participants were cultural heritage specialists, four were legal professionals, four were museum or archive personnel, three were municipal cultural officers, three were university academics, two were traditional arts practitioners, and two were community representatives. Regarding work experience, five participants had 3–7 years of relevant experience, nine had 8–15 years, and ten had more than 15 years. Most participants had postgraduate education: seven held master's degrees and nine held doctoral degrees, while eight had bachelor's degrees or professional qualifications related to heritage, law, culture, or urban management.

The first main category concerned legal fragmentation and weak enforcement. Participants repeatedly emphasized that cultural heritage protection is formally recognized but practically weakened by institutional overlap, unclear responsibilities, insufficient monitoring, and inconsistent implementation. Legal professionals noted that heritage protection often intersects with property law, municipal regulation, construction permits, tourism policy, criminal law, and administrative law, but these areas do not always operate in a coordinated way. A heritage specialist stated, "The law exists, but the problem is that every institution reads it from its own position. One office speaks about preservation, another about development, and another about ownership. The heritage itself becomes lost between them" (P7, heritage specialist). Participants also described a gap between registration and protection. According to one museum professional, "When a building or object is registered, people think it is safe. But registration is only the beginning. Without budget, supervision, and legal consequences, registration becomes a file, not protection" (P12, museum personnel). Several participants argued that globalization has increased the need for legal clarity because cultural heritage is now exposed to faster commercial circulation, international tourism, digital reproduction, and private investment. However, domestic legal mechanisms often respond slowly. A lawyer explained, "Global markets move faster than legal procedures. By the time a dispute is recognized, the object, image, or design may already be somewhere else" (P4, legal professional). This category shows that legal protection is not merely a matter of having laws but of ensuring enforceability, coordination, institutional accountability, and timely response.

The second category reflected participants' concern that globalization has encouraged the commercialization of heritage and the transformation of cultural meanings into tourist-oriented products. Participants did not reject tourism itself; many recognized that tourism can generate income, employment, international awareness, and incentives for conservation. However,

they distinguished between sustainable cultural tourism and uncontrolled commodification. A municipal cultural officer noted, “Tourism can help heritage survive, but when the main question becomes ‘How many visitors can we attract?’ instead of ‘What does this place mean?’, preservation becomes performance for the market” (P16, municipal officer). Participants described examples such as historical spaces being redesigned for visual attractiveness, traditional crafts being simplified for commercial sale, and rituals being performed outside their original social or spiritual context. One traditional arts practitioner said, “A craft is not only an object. It has a teacher, a story, a hand movement, a way of life. When it is copied only as a souvenir, something important disappears” (P21, traditional arts practitioner). Participants also linked commercialization to urban development pressures. Historical neighborhoods and buildings may be valued rhetorically as heritage but treated practically as obstacles to investment. An academic participant explained, “Globalization brings capital and comparison. Cities want to look modern and competitive. In this race, old textures are sometimes seen as backward, unless they can be packaged for tourism” (P18, academic). This category indicates that legal protection must address not only physical destruction but also the distortion of cultural meaning through market-driven reinterpretation.

The third category concerned digital globalization and contested ownership of cultural knowledge. Participants recognized the positive role of digital technologies in documentation, education, conservation planning, online exhibitions, digital archives, and public access. Several participants argued that digital tools can help preserve fragile materials, create records of endangered sites, and connect younger generations with heritage. However, participants also raised concerns about digital appropriation, unauthorized reproduction, loss of context, and weak legal protection for intangible and community-based knowledge. One archive specialist observed, “Digitization protects the document from physical damage, but it creates another question: who has the right to circulate it, edit it, sell it, or remove its context?” (P10, archive personnel). A community representative expressed a similar concern about local rituals and oral traditions: “When someone records our ceremony and publishes it online, people think it is preservation. But nobody asks whether the community agrees or whether everything should be public” (P23, community representative). Legal professionals emphasized that existing intellectual property frameworks do not always fit collective, inherited, or sacred cultural expressions. A participant stated, “The legal system is comfortable with individual authors and owners. It is less comfortable with collective memory, traditional knowledge, and cultural expressions that belong to a community across generations” (P5, legal professional). Participants therefore viewed digital globalization as both an opportunity and a threat. It can increase visibility and documentation, but without legal and ethical safeguards, it may reproduce older inequalities in new digital forms.

The fourth category related to community exclusion from preservation governance. Participants argued that heritage protection often remains expert-driven, institution-centered, and legally formalized in ways that leave local communities with limited influence. While expert knowledge was considered essential, participants emphasized that legal protection becomes fragile when it ignores the meanings, practices, and needs of communities connected to heritage. A community representative stated, “Officials come and say this place is heritage, but they do not ask the people who live with it every day. If people are not part of the decision, they may see preservation as restriction, not as protection” (P24, community representative). Heritage specialists also noted that community exclusion can produce resistance, neglect, or superficial compliance. One participant explained, “You cannot protect living heritage only with signs, fences, and administrative orders. People must feel that the heritage is theirs and that protection also protects their dignity and livelihood” (P8, heritage specialist). Participants connected this problem to globalization by arguing that global heritage recognition sometimes strengthens state and expert authority while weakening local voices. International recognition can bring prestige and resources, but it may also encourage standardized forms of presentation that do not fully reflect local narratives. An academic participant noted, “The danger is that heritage becomes written for international audiences while the people closest to it become spectators” (P19, academic). This category

suggests that sustainable legal protection requires participatory governance, community consultation, benefit-sharing, and recognition of cultural rights.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that globalization has produced a complex preservation environment in which cultural heritage is simultaneously protected, exposed, commercialized, digitized, and contested. Participants did not understand globalization as a purely destructive force. Rather, they described it as a double-edged process: it increases international visibility, documentation opportunities, legal cooperation, and public awareness, but it also intensifies market pressure, legal uncertainty, digital appropriation, and institutional competition. This finding is consistent with Appadurai's (1996) argument that globalization operates through transnational flows that reshape cultural meanings and social relations. In the context of cultural heritage, these flows are visible in tourism, digital circulation, international legal regimes, cultural markets, and urban development. The study therefore supports the view that heritage preservation must be understood as both a legal and socio-cultural challenge.

The first finding concerned legal fragmentation and weak enforcement. Participants emphasized that the existence of heritage laws does not automatically produce effective preservation. This result aligns with scholarship arguing that international cultural heritage law depends heavily on domestic implementation, institutional capacity, and coordination between legal regimes (Blake, 2015; Francioni & Vrdoljak, 2020). The UNESCO 1972 Convention, the UNESCO 2003 Convention, and the UNESCO 1970 Convention provide broad normative frameworks, but their effectiveness depends on how states translate international obligations into enforceable national laws, administrative procedures, budgets, and sanctions (UNESCO, 1970, 1972, 2003). Participants' concern about the gap between registration and real protection is also consistent with critical heritage studies, which argue that official recognition may produce symbolic legitimacy without necessarily ensuring community benefit, material conservation, or long-term safeguarding (Harrison, 2013; Smith, 2006). In this study, registration was viewed as necessary but insufficient; participants wanted monitoring, inter-agency coordination, and enforceable consequences.

The second finding concerned commercialization and tourist-oriented transformation. Participants recognized the economic value of tourism but warned that heritage may be reduced to a consumable image or marketable experience. This finding is consistent with Graham et al. (2000), who argue that heritage is often shaped by economic, political, and identity-based uses in the present. Heritage can become a resource for development, place branding, and tourism, but such uses may conflict with preservation and community meaning. ICOMOS principles on cultural heritage tourism similarly emphasize that tourism should be managed in ways that respect cultural significance, local communities, and conservation responsibilities (ICOMOS, 2022). The participants' distinction between sustainable tourism and commodification is important because it avoids a simplistic rejection of tourism. Instead, it suggests that law must regulate tourism in a way that protects authenticity, prevents overuse, supports local communities, and ensures that economic benefits do not override cultural values.

The third finding concerned digital globalization and contested ownership of cultural knowledge. Participants described digitization as a preservation opportunity and a source of legal ambiguity. This finding reflects broader debates about the changing nature of heritage in digital environments. Digital technologies can support documentation, access, education, and disaster preparedness, but they also raise questions about ownership, consent, sacred knowledge, privacy, and cultural misappropriation. The problem is especially complex for intangible heritage and traditional knowledge because conventional intellectual property law is usually designed around individual authorship, originality, fixation, and limited duration of protection. Cultural heritage, by contrast, may be collective, intergenerational, evolving, and inseparable from community identity (Blake, 2015; Logan et al., 2016). Participants' concerns therefore support the argument that legal protection must

move beyond object-centered and author-centered models to include community rights, ethical digitization, controlled access, and culturally sensitive data governance.

The fourth finding concerned community exclusion from preservation governance. This result strongly aligns with critical heritage scholarship, particularly Smith's (2006) critique of the "authorized heritage discourse," in which experts, states, and official institutions often define heritage in ways that marginalize ordinary communities. Participants in this study did not reject expert authority, but they argued that expert-led preservation becomes incomplete when communities are excluded from decision-making. This is consistent with people-centered conservation approaches, which emphasize that heritage protection is more sustainable when communities are engaged in identifying, managing, interpreting, and benefiting from heritage (ICCROM, 2026). It is also consistent with the UNESCO 2003 Convention's emphasis on communities, groups, and individuals as central to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). The findings suggest that participation should not be treated as a symbolic consultation after decisions have already been made; rather, it should be built into legal procedures, planning systems, documentation practices, and benefit-sharing mechanisms.

Overall, the findings suggest that legal protection of cultural heritage under globalization requires an integrated model. Such a model should combine international standards, national law, urban policy, digital regulation, community participation, and ethical tourism management. International conventions remain important because they establish shared standards and support cooperation, particularly in relation to world heritage, intangible heritage, illicit trafficking, and restitution. However, international law alone cannot resolve local preservation challenges. As Bendix et al. (2012) argue, global heritage regimes are always translated into specific national and local contexts. This study confirms that translation is not merely administrative; it is political, cultural, and legal. In Tehran, participants perceived preservation challenges as arising from the interaction of global pressures with local institutional structures, urban development priorities, community expectations, and legal enforcement problems.

The study also indicates that cultural heritage law should be understood as a field of balancing rather than simple prohibition. Preservation requires restrictions on destructive development, illicit trade, and unauthorized commercialization, but it also requires positive obligations such as documentation, funding, education, public participation, digital stewardship, and support for transmission. This is particularly important for intangible heritage, which cannot be protected only through ownership rules or physical conservation. Safeguarding must support the social conditions that allow cultural practices to continue. Therefore, legal protection should not freeze heritage into static forms; it should enable communities to transmit, reinterpret, and sustain heritage in changing conditions.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 24 participants from Tehran, which means that the findings cannot represent all heritage stakeholders in Iran or other cultural contexts. Tehran is a complex and influential urban setting, but heritage challenges may differ in smaller cities, rural communities, border regions, and areas with distinct ethnic or linguistic traditions. Second, the study relied only on semi-structured interviews. Although interviews provided rich interpretive data, the study did not include observation, document analysis, legal case analysis, or ethnographic engagement with specific heritage sites. Third, the findings reflect participants' perceptions and professional experiences rather than direct measurement of legal effectiveness or preservation outcomes. Finally, because cultural heritage is politically and socially sensitive, some participants may have avoided discussing institutional weaknesses in full detail.

Future research should examine cultural heritage protection in different Iranian cities and regions to compare how globalization affects diverse heritage contexts. Comparative studies between Tehran and cities with major historical textures, such as Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, Tabriz, and Kerman, could provide deeper insight into the relationship between law, urban development, tourism, and community participation. Future studies should also combine interviews with legal document

analysis, policy analysis, site observation, and case studies of specific preservation disputes. Research on digital heritage protection is especially needed, including studies on digitization ethics, online circulation of cultural expressions, community consent, and digital ownership. Further research could also examine the perspectives of younger generations, traditional artisans, minority communities, private developers, and tourists.

Practically, cultural heritage protection should be strengthened through clearer institutional coordination, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and more participatory governance. Legal authorities and cultural institutions should create transparent procedures for community consultation before decisions are made about registration, restoration, tourism development, or digital dissemination. Heritage impact assessments should be integrated into urban planning and development approval processes. Digital documentation projects should include ethical guidelines on consent, access, cultural sensitivity, and community control. Tourism policies should prioritize sustainability, local benefit, and protection of cultural meaning rather than only visitor numbers. Finally, public education programs should help communities understand heritage law, preservation responsibilities, and the cultural value of both tangible and intangible heritage.

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges of cultural heritage preservation under conditions of globalization, focusing on the perspectives of heritage, legal, cultural, municipal, academic, and community stakeholders in Tehran. The findings show that globalization creates a contradictory preservation environment. It expands access to international legal norms, digital technologies, cultural exchange, and global awareness, but it also exposes heritage to commercialization, legal uncertainty, urban development pressure, digital appropriation, and community marginalization. Four main categories were identified: legal fragmentation and weak enforcement; commercialization and tourist-oriented transformation; digital globalization and contested ownership of cultural knowledge; and community exclusion from preservation governance.

The study concludes that cultural heritage protection cannot rely only on formal legal recognition or expert-led conservation. Effective preservation requires enforceable law, institutional coordination, sustainable tourism regulation, ethical digital governance, and meaningful community participation. Heritage should not be treated merely as a historical object, tourism asset, or symbol of national prestige. It is also a living social resource connected to memory, identity, dignity, and intergenerational continuity. In a globalized world, the central challenge is not simply to protect heritage from change, but to ensure that change occurs through legally accountable, culturally respectful, and socially inclusive processes.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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