



Cultural Rights and Global Governance: Policy Implementation and Social Meaning

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how cultural rights are understood, translated, and implemented within global governance frameworks and how these policies acquire social meaning among policy actors, cultural professionals, and community representatives in Tehran. This qualitative study employed an interpretive descriptive design based on semi-structured interviews with 24 participants selected through purposive maximum-variation sampling in Tehran. Participants included cultural policy experts, municipal cultural officers, civil society activists, artists, cultural producers, and community representatives with direct experience of cultural policy, heritage initiatives, minority cultural expression, or public cultural programming. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached at the twenty-first interview, followed by three additional interviews to confirm category stability. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, lasted 45–75 minutes, and were audio-recorded with informed consent. Verbatim transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. NVivo software was used to organize coding, compare patterns across participant groups, develop categories, and retrieve illustrative quotations. Trustworthiness was enhanced through peer debriefing, analytic memo-writing, member checking with selected participants, and maintenance of an audit trail. Five main categories emerged from the data: cultural rights as lived recognition, the translation gap between global norms and local implementation, unequal access to cultural participation, intermediary actors as bridges of trust, and the symbolic politics of cultural governance. Participants perceived cultural rights not only as legal entitlements but also as social claims related to dignity, visibility, language, memory, artistic freedom, and belonging. While global governance frameworks were viewed as important normative references, their implementation was often weakened by administrative ambiguity, selective enforcement, limited public participation, and insufficient sensitivity to local cultural meanings. The findings suggest that cultural rights become meaningful when global norms are translated into participatory, locally intelligible, and institutionally accountable practices. Effective implementation requires moving beyond formal policy adoption toward inclusive cultural governance, community consultation, transparent decision-making, and recognition of cultural diversity as a living social process.

Keywords: cultural rights; global governance; policy implementation; cultural participation; social meaning; qualitative research; Tehran; cultural diversity

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Introduction

Cultural rights have increasingly become central to debates on human rights, global governance, cultural diversity, and inclusive development. Although civil, political, social, and economic rights have often received stronger institutional attention,

cultural rights are now recognized as indispensable to human dignity, identity, participation, and democratic belonging. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the right of everyone to participate freely in cultural life, while Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right to take part in cultural life, enjoy the benefits of scientific progress, and benefit from the protection of moral and material interests arising from creative production (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966). These provisions indicate that cultural rights are not merely decorative additions to the human rights system; rather, they are constitutive of how individuals and communities express identity, transmit memory, participate in public life, and negotiate recognition within modern legal and political orders.

The contemporary significance of cultural rights has been amplified by globalization. Globalization has intensified the circulation of people, images, languages, media, religious practices, artistic forms, and policy norms across borders. This process has created new opportunities for intercultural exchange and cultural innovation, but it has also produced anxieties concerning cultural homogenization, symbolic domination, heritage loss, unequal representation, and the marginalization of minority communities (Appadurai, 1996; Yúdice, 2003). Cultural rights therefore occupy a complex position within global governance. They are simultaneously instruments for protecting diversity, frameworks for enabling participation, and sites of contestation over the meaning of culture itself. UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity describes cultural diversity as inseparable from human dignity and frames cultural rights as an enabling environment for creative diversity (UNESCO, 2001). Similarly, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions emphasizes that cultural diversity can be protected only where human rights, freedom of expression, access to information, and the ability to choose cultural expressions are guaranteed (UNESCO, 2005).

A key development in the international clarification of cultural rights was General Comment No. 21 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Committee interpreted the right to take part in cultural life as including access, participation, and contribution to cultural life, while also emphasizing availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability, and appropriateness as necessary conditions for implementation (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [CESCR], 2009). This interpretation is important because it moves cultural rights beyond abstract recognition toward concrete policy obligations. States are expected not only to refrain from unjustified interference with cultural practices but also to adopt positive measures enabling individuals and communities to access cultural resources, participate in cultural decision-making, preserve cultural heritage, and contribute to cultural development. In this sense, cultural rights involve both negative and positive obligations, including respect, protection, and fulfillment.

However, the implementation of cultural rights remains theoretically and practically challenging. First, culture itself is a fluid, contested, and dynamic concept. It cannot be reduced to folklore, heritage, ethnicity, art, or tradition alone. Culture includes symbolic meanings, everyday practices, ways of life, language, memory, values, creative expression, and forms of belonging (Hall, 1997). Treating culture as fixed or homogeneous may reproduce exclusion by privileging dominant cultural narratives over minority, hybrid, or emerging cultural identities. Benhabib (2002) cautions against essentialist approaches that present cultures as bounded wholes, arguing instead that cultures are internally contested and continuously reinterpreted. This insight is particularly relevant to cultural rights because legal and policy institutions often require stable categories, while lived cultural identities are plural, relational, and changing.

Second, cultural rights raise questions about the relationship between individual and collective dimensions of rights. Cultural participation is experienced individually, yet many cultural practices depend on collective memory, shared language, communal spaces, and intergenerational transmission. Donders (2008) argues that cultural life cannot be fully understood through an individual-rights lens alone because culture is produced and sustained through social interaction. At the same time, collective claims must not be used to restrict the rights of individuals within communities, particularly women, children, dissenting artists,

or internal minorities. This tension is recognized in international cultural-rights frameworks, which stress that cultural diversity cannot be invoked to violate human rights or limit their scope (UNESCO, 2001, 2005). Therefore, cultural rights require a careful balance between recognition of collective cultural life and protection of individual autonomy.

Third, cultural rights depend heavily on policy implementation. International declarations and conventions provide normative language, but their social effectiveness depends on how they are translated into national law, municipal planning, cultural programming, education, heritage management, media policy, funding mechanisms, and public participation. Implementation studies have long shown that policy outcomes are shaped not only by formal rules but also by administrative discretion, institutional coordination, resource allocation, and the interpretive actions of frontline officials (Lipsky, 1980; Matland, 1995; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). This is especially important for cultural rights because their implementation often requires cooperation among ministries, municipalities, cultural organizations, schools, heritage authorities, civil society groups, and community actors. Fragmentation between these actors can produce a gap between policy aspiration and lived experience.

The socio-legal literature further suggests that rights become effective only when they are translated into local meanings and practices. Merry (2006) demonstrates that global human rights norms are not simply imposed from above; they are vernacularized by activists, organizations, legal professionals, and community intermediaries who adapt universal language to local moral worlds. Goodale and Merry (2007) similarly argue that human rights should be studied as practices moving between global and local fields. This perspective is directly relevant to cultural rights and global governance. Cultural rights may be formally recognized in international instruments, but their meaning becomes socially real only when individuals and communities understand them as relevant to everyday experiences of recognition, access, dignity, and participation.

The relationship between cultural rights and recognition is also central. Taylor (1994) argues that recognition is a vital human need because misrecognition can inflict harm by imprisoning individuals or groups in distorted identities. Fraser (2000) expands this argument by distinguishing recognition from redistribution while emphasizing that justice often requires both cultural recognition and material equality. Applied to cultural rights, this means that symbolic inclusion alone is insufficient if communities lack access to cultural spaces, funding, education, media visibility, or institutional participation. Conversely, cultural services may fail if they are delivered without respect for identity, language, memory, and community voice. Cultural rights therefore involve a dual demand: recognition of cultural meaning and redistribution of cultural opportunity.

Global governance complicates this field by introducing multiple layers of authority. Cultural rights are shaped by international organizations, treaties, monitoring bodies, national governments, municipal institutions, non-governmental organizations, professional associations, digital platforms, and local communities. The concept of global governance does not refer to a single world government; rather, it describes the dispersed regulation of global problems through networks of institutions, norms, policies, and actors. In the field of culture, global governance includes standard-setting by UNESCO, treaty monitoring by UN bodies, heritage-listing practices, cultural diversity policies, donor-funded cultural programs, and transnational advocacy networks. These mechanisms generate normative pressure, policy language, and institutional models, but their effects vary across local contexts.

In countries and cities marked by historical, linguistic, religious, ethnic, generational, and class diversity, cultural-rights implementation becomes particularly complex. Tehran provides a meaningful urban context for examining these issues because it functions as a dense administrative, cultural, educational, artistic, and migratory center. It contains official cultural institutions, independent cultural actors, diverse community networks, heritage spaces, youth cultural practices, religious and linguistic diversity, and competing visions of public culture. In such an urban setting, cultural rights are not only legal claims but also practical questions: Who has access to cultural institutions? Whose memory is represented in public spaces? Which

cultural expressions receive funding or visibility? How do communities understand participation? How are global cultural-rights norms translated into municipal and national policy practices?

Despite the growing international literature on cultural rights, there remains a need for qualitative studies that examine how cultural-rights policies are understood by actors involved in implementation and those affected by such policies. Much of the existing scholarship addresses normative foundations, international legal interpretation, or cultural policy at an abstract level. Less attention has been paid to how global cultural-rights language becomes socially meaningful—or loses meaning—within local governance processes. This gap is important because cultural-rights implementation is not merely a technical matter. It involves interpretation, negotiation, trust, symbolic legitimacy, and everyday institutional encounters.

Accordingly, this study explores cultural rights and global governance through the lens of policy implementation and social meaning. It asks how policy actors, cultural professionals, civil society representatives, and community participants in Tehran understand cultural rights; how they perceive the relationship between global norms and local implementation; and what barriers and enabling conditions shape the realization of cultural rights in practice. By focusing on semi-structured interviews, the study aims to illuminate the lived meanings attached to cultural rights and the institutional conditions under which these rights are translated into cultural participation, recognition, and public legitimacy.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative interpretive design to explore how cultural rights are understood and implemented in relation to global governance frameworks and local cultural-policy practices. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to examine meanings, perceptions, interpretive tensions, and lived experiences rather than measure predetermined variables. The research focused on the social construction of cultural rights, the perceived implementation gap between global norms and local policy, and the role of institutional and community actors in shaping the practical meaning of cultural participation.

Participants were selected through purposive maximum-variation sampling. The inclusion criteria were: being over 18 years of age, residing or working in Tehran, having direct experience with cultural policy, cultural programming, civil society activity, cultural production, heritage work, minority or community cultural representation, or public cultural participation, and willingness to participate in an interview. Individuals without relevant experience of cultural-rights issues or cultural-policy implementation were excluded.

The final sample consisted of 24 participants from Tehran. Participants included seven cultural policy experts, five civil society or non-governmental organization activists, four municipal cultural officers, four artists and cultural producers, and four community representatives. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Saturation was identified at the twenty-first interview, when no substantially new codes or categories emerged. Three additional interviews were conducted to confirm the stability and adequacy of the categories.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview guide included open-ended questions about participants' understanding of cultural rights, experiences with cultural participation, perceptions of global cultural-rights frameworks, views on policy implementation, institutional barriers, community participation, and examples of successful or unsuccessful cultural-governance practices. Follow-up questions were used to clarify meanings, elicit examples, and explore contradictions in participants' accounts.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face in quiet and private locations selected by participants, while several were conducted online due to scheduling constraints. All interviews were conducted in Persian. With participants' informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Identifying information was removed during transcription, and participants were assigned codes from P1 to P24.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis began with repeated reading of transcripts to achieve immersion in the data. Initial codes were generated inductively from participants' words and meanings. Codes were then compared across transcripts and grouped into subcategories. Through iterative analysis, subcategories were refined into broader main categories that captured recurring patterns in participants' accounts. NVivo software was used to organize transcripts, manage coding, retrieve quotations, compare participant groups, and document analytic decisions.

The analysis combined inductive coding with sensitizing concepts from cultural-rights theory, policy implementation, and socio-legal studies. However, the final categories were grounded in the interview data rather than imposed from the literature. Trustworthiness was enhanced through peer debriefing, memo-writing, comparison of negative cases, and member checking with six participants who reviewed a summary of the preliminary findings. An audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions, category development, and revisions.

Findings

The study included 24 participants from Tehran. Of these, 13 participants were women and 11 were men. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 61 years. Regarding educational level, four participants held a bachelor's degree, eleven held a master's degree, and nine held a doctoral degree or were doctoral candidates. In terms of professional background, seven participants were cultural policy experts, five were civil society activists, four were municipal cultural officers, four were artists or cultural producers, and four were community representatives. Work experience in cultural, legal, civic, or policy-related fields ranged from 3 to 28 years.

The first category showed that participants understood cultural rights not simply as legal provisions but as lived recognition of identity, dignity, and belonging. For many participants, cultural rights referred to the possibility of being visible in public culture without being reduced to stereotypes or treated as peripheral. Participants emphasized language, memory, artistic expression, local rituals, neighborhood histories, and access to cultural spaces as central elements of cultural rights. One community representative explained, "When people talk about cultural rights, they usually think about museums or festivals, but for us it is more basic. It means that our way of speaking, remembering, and celebrating is not treated as something strange" (P18, community representative). A cultural producer similarly stated, "Recognition is not only putting one traditional performance on a stage once a year. It is allowing people to define themselves in public space" (P11, artist). This category indicates that cultural rights were experienced as a demand for meaningful inclusion rather than symbolic display. Participants repeatedly linked cultural rights to respect, voice, and the ability to participate in defining cultural identity.

The second category concerned the gap between global cultural-rights frameworks and local implementation. Participants were generally aware that international organizations and global conventions use strong language about diversity, participation, and cultural freedom. However, many believed that this language often remained abstract when transferred into local administrative systems. Cultural policy experts argued that global norms are frequently adopted as formal vocabulary without sufficient institutional mechanisms, budgetary commitments, or participatory procedures. One policy expert stated, "The words are present in policy documents: diversity, participation, cultural access. But when a municipality wants to implement a program, there is no clear procedure for asking communities what they need" (P3, cultural policy expert). A municipal officer added, "Sometimes we receive general instructions, but the practical meaning is unclear. Should we fund local associations? Should we change public programming? Should we consult minority groups? The policy does not say how" (P15, municipal cultural officer). This category shows that implementation problems were not only caused by lack of commitment but also by ambiguity, weak coordination, and absence of operational guidelines.

The third category revealed that participants viewed cultural participation as unequally distributed across class, gender, neighborhood, age, and minority status. Participants argued that formal availability of cultural programs does not guarantee

equal access. Cultural centers, galleries, libraries, workshops, and festivals may exist, but their location, cost, language, atmosphere, and social codes can exclude some groups. A civil society activist explained, “When cultural participation is discussed, officials say there are programs. But who feels welcome in those programs? Who can afford transport? Who sees their own life represented there?” (P8, civil society activist). Several participants emphasized that cultural-rights implementation must consider spatial inequalities within Tehran, particularly differences between central cultural districts and peripheral neighborhoods. Others noted that women, young people, migrants, linguistic minorities, and economically disadvantaged groups often face subtle barriers to participation. One participant said, “The problem is not always direct prohibition. Sometimes people exclude themselves because the institution does not look like it belongs to them” (P20, community representative). This finding suggests that cultural rights require more than formal access; they require socially meaningful accessibility.

The fourth category highlighted the role of intermediary actors in translating cultural-rights norms into locally meaningful practice. Participants identified NGOs, artists, educators, neighborhood facilitators, cultural associations, and informal community leaders as actors who can bridge the distance between institutions and communities. These actors were seen as important because they understand both policy language and local cultural meanings. One NGO activist stated, “Communities often do not trust official institutions immediately. They trust people who have worked with them, who know their language and concerns. Without these mediators, participation remains formal” (P6, civil society activist). Artists also described themselves as translators between lived cultural experience and public discourse. A theater practitioner explained, “Sometimes a performance can say what a policy meeting cannot. It makes cultural rights emotional and visible” (P13, artist). However, participants also noted that intermediary actors often lack stable funding, legal protection, and institutional recognition. This category indicates that cultural governance depends not only on state agencies but also on relational infrastructures of trust.

The fifth category concerned the symbolic politics through which cultural governance defines what counts as legitimate culture. Participants argued that institutions often support cultural diversity selectively, favoring heritage forms, official narratives, or noncontroversial expressions while neglecting contemporary, critical, hybrid, or minority cultural practices. One cultural policy expert observed, “There is a difference between celebrating diversity and allowing diversity to speak critically. Many policies accept culture when it is decorative, not when it asks questions” (P4, cultural policy expert). Participants also discussed public heritage, urban memory, and representation in cultural events as fields where power operates. A community representative stated, “If our history appears only as folklore, then we are visible but not respected. We become decoration for someone else’s story” (P22, community representative). This category shows that cultural rights involve struggles over meaning, not only access to services. Policy implementation may reproduce symbolic inequality if communities are invited to participate without power to shape narratives, priorities, or institutional decisions.

Discussion

This study explored how cultural rights are understood and implemented within the relationship between global governance frameworks and local cultural-policy practices in Tehran. The findings show that cultural rights were perceived not only as legal entitlements but also as social claims concerning recognition, access, dignity, participation, and symbolic representation. The five categories—cultural rights as lived recognition, translation gap between global norms and local implementation, unequal access to cultural participation, intermediary actors as bridges of trust, and symbolic politics of cultural governance—demonstrate that cultural-rights implementation is simultaneously normative, institutional, and interpretive. These findings are consistent with international human rights frameworks that define cultural rights as integral to human dignity and participation in cultural life (CESCR, 2009; UNESCO, 2001). They also support socio-legal arguments that rights become meaningful only when translated into local practices, relationships, and institutional routines (Goodale & Merry, 2007; Merry, 2006).

The first finding, cultural rights as lived recognition, indicates that participants associated cultural rights with the ability to be visible and respected in public life. This aligns with Taylor's (1994) argument that recognition is not a superficial courtesy but a vital condition of identity formation and social dignity. It also corresponds with Fraser's (2000) claim that justice requires attention to status subordination and cultural misrecognition. Participants did not define cultural rights only in terms of access to museums, festivals, or artistic programs; rather, they connected cultural rights to language, memory, everyday practices, neighborhood histories, and the ability of communities to define themselves. This expands narrow institutional understandings of culture as heritage or performance. It also reflects Hall's (1997) view that culture is a field of meaning-making and representation. Therefore, cultural-rights policies that focus only on formal programming may fail to address the deeper issue of whether communities experience themselves as recognized members of the cultural public.

The second finding concerned the translation gap between global norms and local implementation. Participants recognized the value of global frameworks but emphasized that international language often becomes vague when transferred into administrative practice. This finding strongly aligns with policy implementation theory. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) showed that policy failure often occurs not because goals are absent but because implementation requires complex coordination across multiple decision points. Matland's (1995) ambiguity-conflict model is also relevant: cultural rights are characterized by high interpretive ambiguity because terms such as participation, diversity, access, and recognition can be understood differently by different actors. When ambiguity is combined with institutional fragmentation, implementation becomes inconsistent. Lipsky's (1980) concept of street-level bureaucracy further explains why municipal officers and cultural administrators become practical interpreters of policy. In the absence of clear procedures, they exercise discretion that may either enable or restrict cultural participation. The finding therefore suggests that cultural-rights implementation requires operational guidelines, intersectoral coordination, and clear mechanisms for community consultation.

The third finding showed that cultural participation is shaped by unequal access. Participants emphasized that formal availability of cultural programs does not ensure substantive accessibility. This finding corresponds with CESC's (2009) emphasis on availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability, and appropriateness as conditions of the right to take part in cultural life. It also aligns with Sen's (2009) capability approach, which distinguishes formal rights from real opportunities to act. A person may formally have the right to participate in cultural life but lack the economic resources, spatial access, linguistic confidence, social acceptance, or institutional trust necessary to exercise that right. Nussbaum (2011) similarly argues that justice must be evaluated in terms of what people are actually able to do and be. In this study, class, neighborhood, gender, age, and minority status shaped whether cultural institutions felt accessible and meaningful. Thus, cultural-rights implementation must be evaluated not only by the number of programs offered but by who participates, who feels represented, and who remains absent.

The fourth finding emphasized intermediary actors as bridges of trust. Participants described NGOs, artists, educators, local facilitators, and community representatives as essential translators between institutional policy and lived cultural experience. This finding is consistent with Merry's (2006) concept of vernacularization, which explains how global rights language is adapted into local moral and cultural frameworks. Goodale and Merry (2007) similarly argue that human rights operate through practice, mediation, and translation between global and local fields. In the context of cultural rights, intermediary actors do more than communicate policy; they create trust, interpret meaning, identify community needs, and make participation socially credible. However, the findings also show that these actors often lack stable institutional support. This creates a paradox: cultural governance depends on intermediaries, but governance systems may fail to protect or resource them. Strengthening cultural rights therefore requires investment in civic and artistic infrastructures, not only formal state institutions.

The fifth finding concerned symbolic politics in cultural governance. Participants argued that cultural diversity is often accepted when it is decorative, historical, or noncontroversial, but less accepted when it is critical, contemporary, or politically meaningful. This supports Bennett's (1998) argument that cultural policy is not neutral; it organizes populations, values, and forms of public legitimacy. It also reflects Yúdice's (2003) analysis of culture as a resource used by states, markets, and institutions for social and political purposes. When institutions select which cultural expressions are legitimate, they shape the symbolic boundaries of belonging. This finding also aligns with Benhabib's (2002) critique of essentialist cultural representation. Communities may be made visible through simplified heritage images while their internal diversity, contemporary struggles, and critical voices are ignored. Therefore, cultural-rights implementation must include not only representation but also participatory authority over how cultural narratives are produced and circulated.

Overall, the findings suggest that cultural rights should be understood as a practical field of governance rather than merely a legal category. Global governance frameworks provide important normative standards, but they do not automatically produce cultural justice. Their effects depend on how institutions interpret them, how resources are distributed, how communities are consulted, and how cultural meanings are negotiated. This conclusion is compatible with Shore and Wright's (1997) view that policy should be studied anthropologically as a practice that produces meanings, categories, and subjectivities. In this study, cultural-rights policies were not experienced as neutral administrative tools; they shaped who felt visible, who trusted institutions, and whose cultural life was treated as valuable. Accordingly, cultural-rights implementation must be assessed through both institutional indicators and social meanings.

The study contributes to cultural-rights scholarship in three ways. First, it shows that cultural rights are experienced through recognition and belonging, not merely legal access. Second, it demonstrates that implementation gaps arise from ambiguity, weak coordination, and limited participatory mechanisms. Third, it identifies intermediary actors as crucial but under-supported agents of cultural governance. These insights are important for global governance because international cultural-rights frameworks depend on local legitimacy. Without locally meaningful implementation, global norms may remain symbolic, technocratic, or disconnected from the communities they aim to protect.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted only in Tehran; therefore, the findings may not fully represent cultural-rights experiences in smaller cities, rural areas, border regions, or communities with different institutional and cultural conditions. Second, although the sample included diverse participant groups, the number of participants was limited to 24, which is appropriate for qualitative inquiry but not intended for statistical generalization. Third, the study relied on self-reported interview data, meaning that participants' accounts may reflect personal experiences, professional positions, or institutional constraints. Fourth, because cultural rights are politically and socially sensitive, some participants may have avoided discussing certain issues in full detail. Finally, the cross-sectional design captured perceptions at one point in time and could not examine how cultural-rights implementation changes across policy cycles.

Future research should examine cultural-rights implementation across multiple cities and regions to compare how local histories, institutional capacities, and community structures influence policy translation. Comparative studies between metropolitan, provincial, and rural contexts would help clarify whether the barriers identified in this study are specific to Tehran or reflect broader governance patterns. Future studies could also focus on particular groups, such as linguistic minorities, migrant communities, women artists, youth cultural networks, or heritage communities, to provide deeper insight into differentiated experiences of cultural participation. Longitudinal research would be valuable for tracking how cultural-rights policies evolve from adoption to implementation and evaluation. Mixed-methods studies could also combine interviews with policy document analysis, observation of cultural programs, and surveys of cultural participation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural-rights realization.

Policy practice should move beyond symbolic recognition toward participatory cultural governance. Cultural institutions and municipal agencies should create clear mechanisms for community consultation, participatory budgeting, inclusive cultural programming, and transparent evaluation of cultural-rights initiatives. Cultural programs should be assessed not only by attendance numbers but also by diversity of participation, perceived inclusion, accessibility, and community influence over decision-making. Policymakers should support intermediary actors such as NGOs, artists, educators, and local cultural facilitators because they play a central role in building trust between institutions and communities. Cultural-rights training should be provided for municipal officers, cultural administrators, and program designers so that global cultural-rights standards are translated into practical procedures. Finally, cultural governance should recognize communities not as passive recipients of cultural services but as active producers of meaning, memory, identity, and public culture.

Conclusion

This study examined cultural rights and global governance by focusing on policy implementation and social meaning among cultural-policy actors, civil society representatives, artists, municipal officers, and community participants in Tehran. The findings show that cultural rights are understood not merely as abstract legal norms but as lived claims to recognition, dignity, participation, language, memory, and belonging. Participants valued global cultural-rights frameworks but emphasized that their local effectiveness depends on translation into clear institutional procedures, accessible programs, participatory mechanisms, and socially meaningful forms of representation.

The study identified five main categories: cultural rights as lived recognition, translation gap between global norms and local implementation, unequal access to cultural participation, intermediary actors as bridges of trust, and symbolic politics of cultural governance. Together, these categories show that cultural-rights implementation cannot be reduced to the existence of formal policies or cultural programs. Rather, implementation must be evaluated by whether people feel represented, whether communities can influence cultural narratives, whether cultural spaces are genuinely accessible, and whether institutions are trusted as legitimate partners.

The findings suggest that global governance frameworks provide essential normative foundations, but they require local interpretation, administrative clarity, and participatory legitimacy. Cultural rights become meaningful when communities are not merely displayed within official culture but are empowered to shape cultural policy, public memory, and institutional priorities. Therefore, effective cultural governance should combine legal recognition, social inclusion, equitable access, and community participation. Such an approach can strengthen cultural rights as a practical dimension of democratic governance and human dignity.

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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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