

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH PERFORMANCE

Amarachi Attamah

A performance can be an exhibition of
A performance can be a technical display
A performance can be a revelation

- Koner, P. (2013). *Elements of Performance: A Guide for Performers in Dance, Theatre & Music*. London: Taylor & Francis.

I was born to a people known as the Igbo people, of Southeastern Part of Nigeria.

In 2006, UNESCO termed the language of my people 'endangered' and would probably go extinct in 50 year. perhaps that gave me purpose and I became a Chant artist, and an advocate for the sustainability of our language and cultural heritage.

I hold a master's degree in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Preservation from Syracuse University, New York USA, A masters degree in Media studies and a BSc in Media studies.

Today I honor different international invitations to speak, perform and participate in curatorial projects.





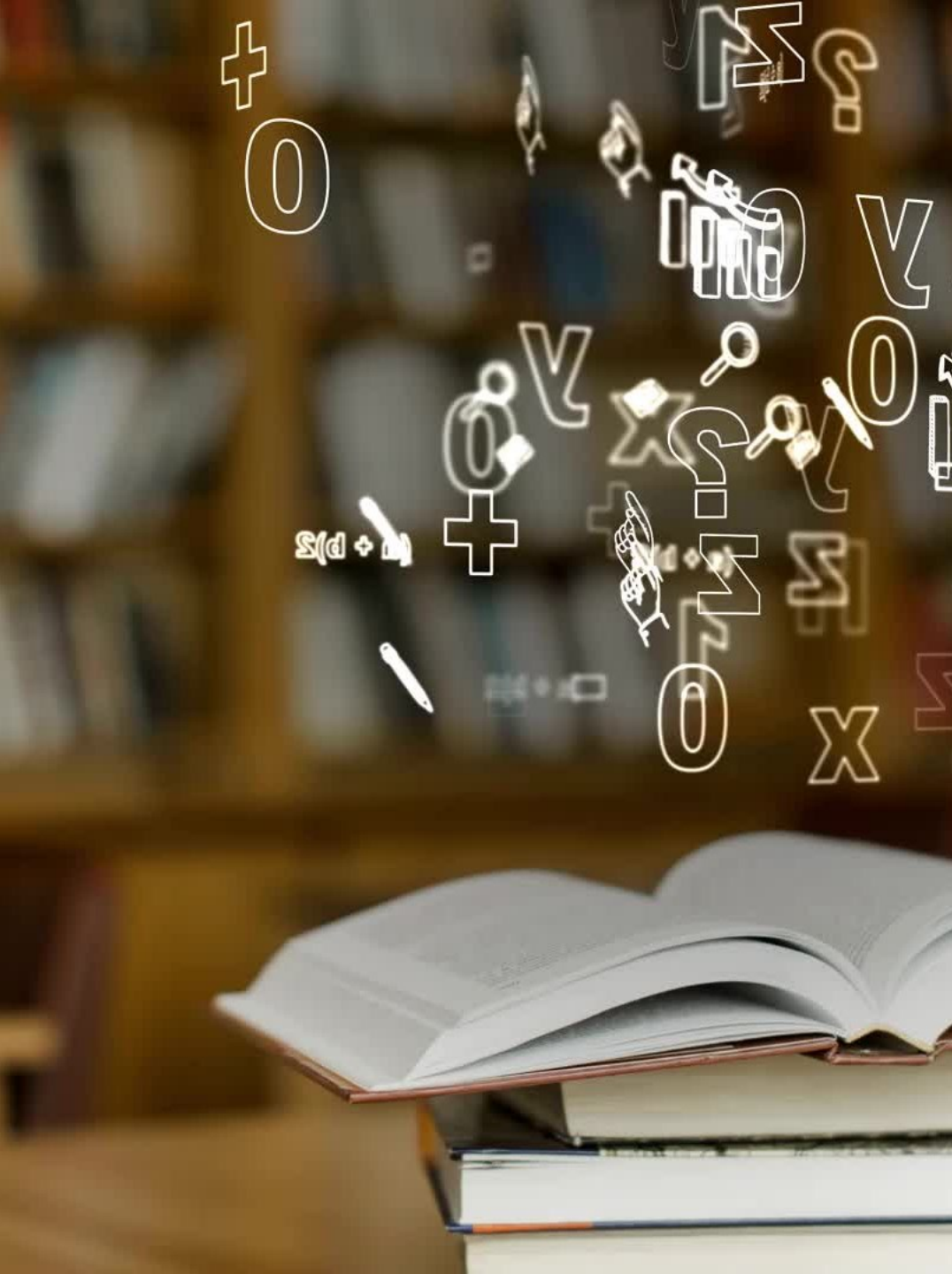
What is Culture?

In their book titled, *Cultural Sustainability and the Nature-Culture Interface: Livelihoods, Policies, and Methodologies*, Siivonen and her colleagues, (2018) explained cultures as

“...the way we life. It is the cloth we wear, the food we eat, the language we speak, the stories we tell and the ways we celebrate. It is the way we show our imaginations through art, music, and writings. Culture is also about out root. Where did our ancestors come from.”

- Culture is, therefore, the totality of the way of life of a people. It is the entirety of the manner of being and doing of a people including greeting rituals, marriage ceremonies, religious rites, social practices etc. It is a structure and system of meaning.
- It is the framework of beliefs, memories, and values of a specific people. It has also been described as a “dynamic and fluid process” from which certain structures emerge. Culture gives meaning to a people.



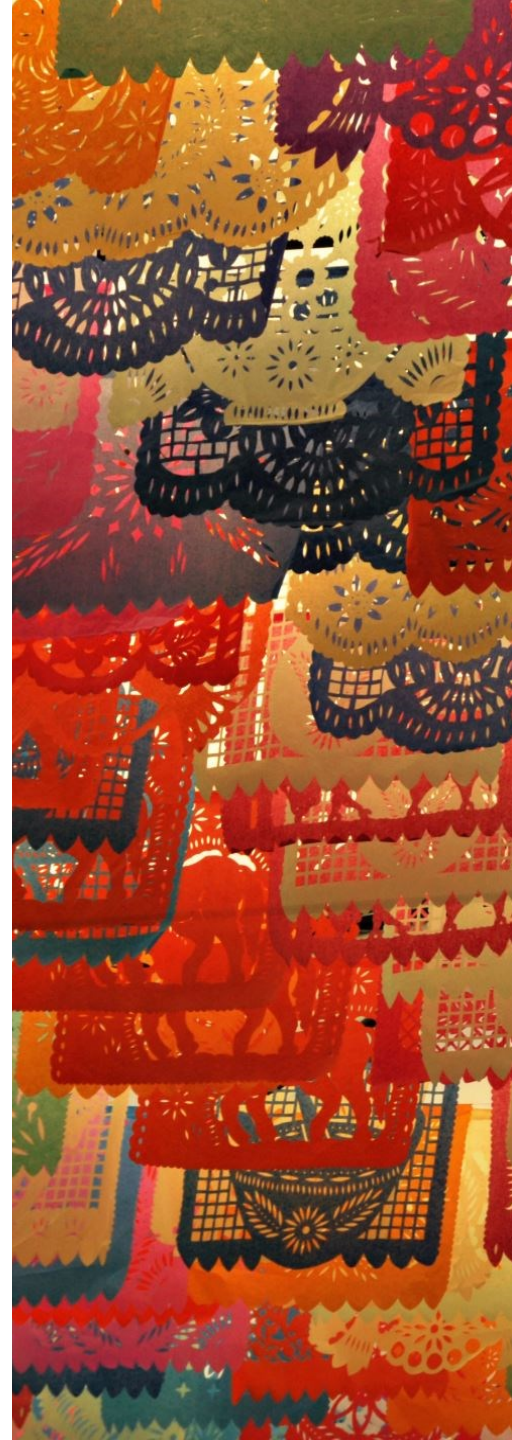


Sustainability?

- Oxford Learner's Dictionary explains sustainability as "...the degree to which a process or enterprise is able to be maintained or continued." Cultural sustainability is therefore the degree to which a culture can be maintained and continued.
- The concept of sustainability is directed towards the future. Cultural sustainability involves protecting cultures through the promotion of diversity as well as crafting policies and programs designed to eliminate impediments to cultural expression.
- It involves the identification, preservation, and perpetuation of values and identities of a people. The value of culture in human diversity as well as development is becoming more emphasized.

Understanding Cultural Heritage

- Humans are culture-making beings. The human cultural heritage is the element needed for the maintenance of cultural identity. Identity is extremely vital in the perpetuation and survival of any group of people.
- Cultural heritage presents a bi-directional outlook. First, there is the tangible cultural heritage which deals with material objects such as artifacts that could be displayed in museums. Secondly, there is the intangible cultural heritage.



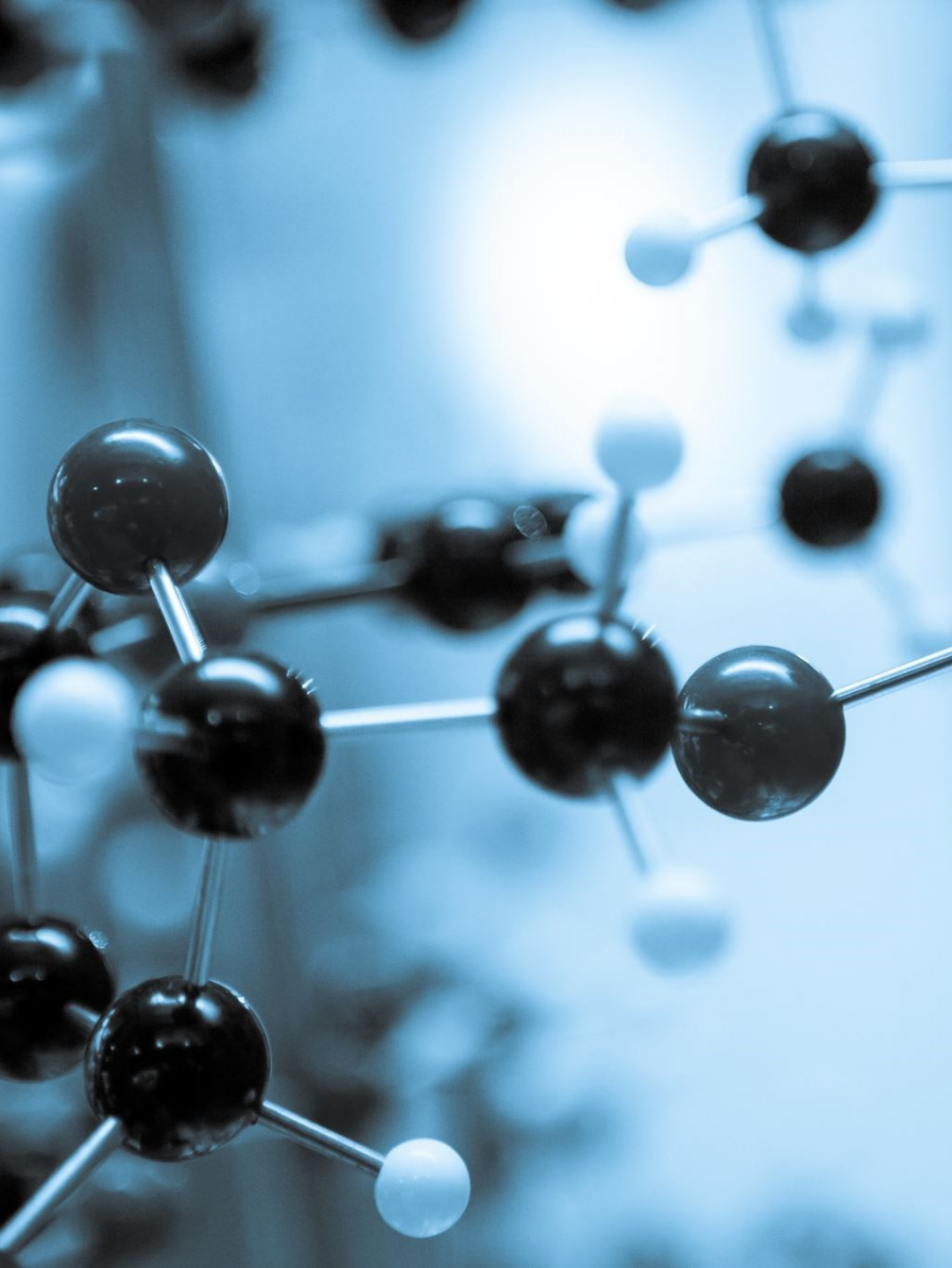
Intangible Cultural Heritage?

- The term intangible invokes a sense of something that is non-physical, lacking in density, unable to be touched or felt. It deals with abstract things, and or values which are unquantifiable using standard conventional scientific measures.
- Intangible heritage is a type of heritage that is not embodied in any physical form. They are rather pointers to something of cultural importance and value which are immaterial. Non-material cultures could render significant assistance in deepening our cultural interpretation as well as contextualization.



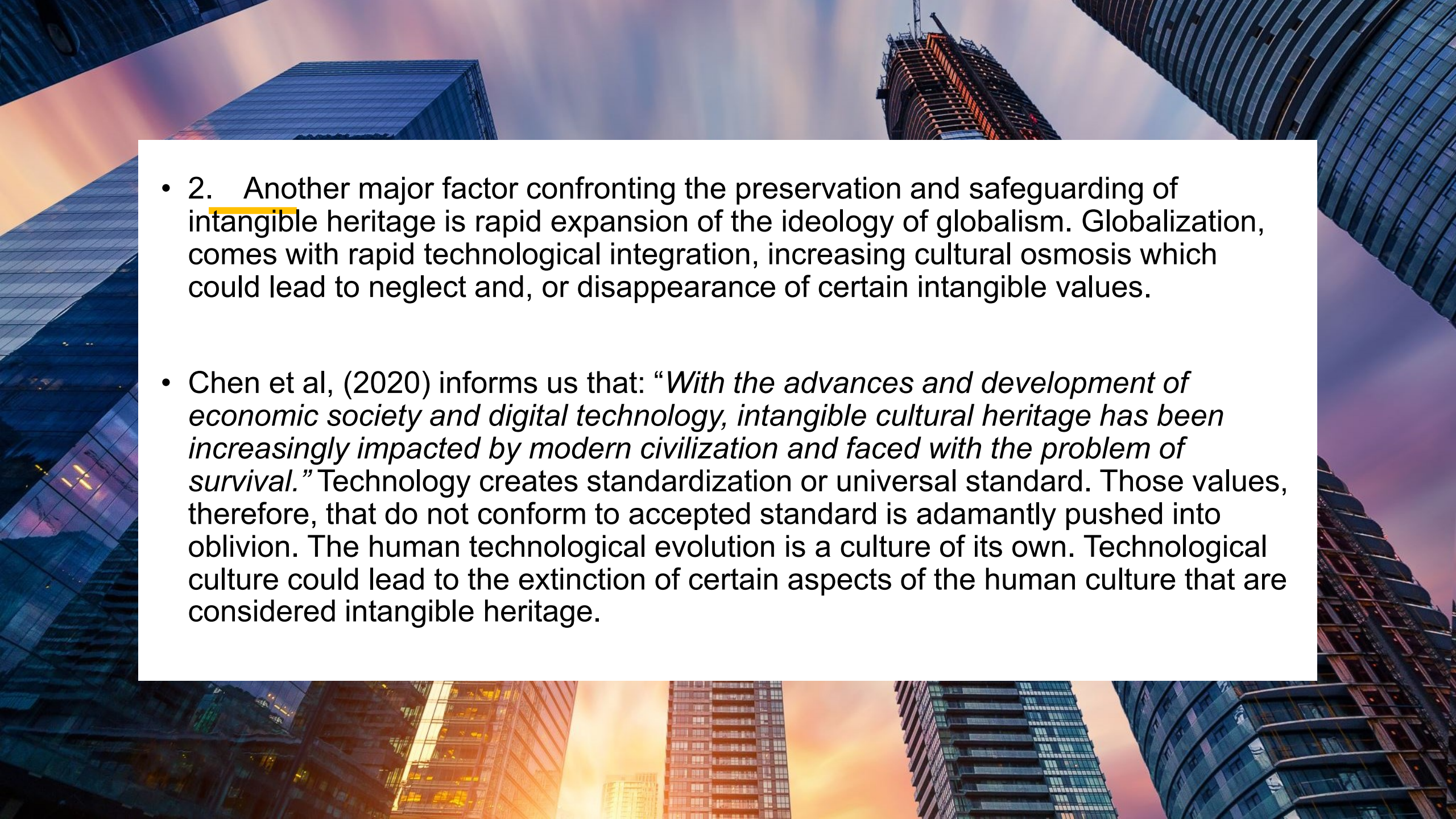
- Intangible cultural heritage has yielded beneficial fruits even in the interpretation of museum artifacts. They are those heritages which are embodied in people rather than in places or in things. Intangibility in this sense refers to materially unquantifiable aspect of the human culture. It deals with non-physical values and practices of a people.
- It is that which a society or a culture upholds to be valuable. It is history represented in terms of memory. The people themselves are carriers of the value instead extrinsically represented in objects, monuments, and artifacts as in tangible heritage.
- According to UNESCO, intangible heritage is “the practice, representations, expression, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in such cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”
- Richard Kurin, in his 2004 article titled: *Museum and Intangible Heritage: Culture Dead or Alive*, described intangible heritage as “...living, vital and embedded in ongoing social relationship.” Our understanding of intangible heritage should not be limited to inherited traditions and customs of past histories only. It also involves modern-day rural and metropolitan expressions.

-



Threats to Intangible Cultural Heritage

- 1. Empiricism is the prevalent methodological investigative approach to modern science. Thus, philosophical, or metaphysical idealism is de-emphasized in scientific research. In the west, Aristotle has often been called the father of empiricism while Plato is called the father of idealism.
- There is no doubt that radical and or, extreme form of empiricism presents as a problem to the very idea of intangible heritage. Empiricism makes it difficult to validate those values that are not represented in term of physical forms. For instance, religion is treated with contempt by empiricism because it is not subject to laboratory investigation.

- 
- 2. Another major factor confronting the preservation and safeguarding of intangible heritage is rapid expansion of the ideology of globalism. Globalization, comes with rapid technological integration, increasing cultural osmosis which could lead to neglect and, or disappearance of certain intangible values.
 - Chen et al, (2020) informs us that: “*With the advances and development of economic society and digital technology, intangible cultural heritage has been increasingly impacted by modern civilization and faced with the problem of survival.*” Technology creates standardization or universal standard. Those values, therefore, that do not conform to accepted standard is adamantly pushed into oblivion. The human technological evolution is a culture of its own. Technological culture could lead to the extinction of certain aspects of the human culture that are considered intangible heritage.

- 3. Culture-contact creates both modification and annihilation of lesser dominant cultural heritages. Charles Darwin calls this “survival of the fittest. If not protected there is possible extinction of values and cultures that are intangible.



- It there becomes very challenging for our intangible heritages to survive today and one of the engaging ways to contribute to its sustainability is through performance.



- It could be categorized under many different UNESCO domains:
 - Chant Art
 - Oral Tradition
 - Performing Arts
 - Emotion
 - Dance
 - Everyday Life
 - Instrumental Music
 - Poetry
 - Vocal Singing
 - Throat Singing
 - Funeral
 - Wedding
 - Wind Instrument



Conclusion

- I am not oblivion of the challenges. We live in the 21st century. It is an era of high-tech, digital revolution, virtual realities, augmented realities, cybernetic systems, artificial intelligence and sophisticated bionic machines.
- But this is the future we have been called upon to contribute our talents to. We must therefore be prepared to meet up with the demand of the future as I believe we are ...
- We must sustain our indigenous talents and creativity in the enhancement of the human condition, to foster an atmosphere of love, connection, healing, peace and stability around the world.