

Sustaining the Performance Environment of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam in the Contemporary Context: The Case of the “Khap Thai” in Thanh Hoa Province

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Abstract:

This article focuses on studying the organization and sustainability of the performance environment for intangible cultural heritage in a contemporary context, using the case of the Khap Thai in Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam. Based on the theory of performance environment and an ethnographic approach combined with sociological surveys, the study identified the constituent elements of the Khap Thai environment, including space, subjects, content, and practice methods. The findings show that while Khap Thai was originally closely tied to daily life, it now primarily exists in community events and organized activities. The participation of the younger generation is limited, and the impacts of theatricalization, tourism, and policy constraints increase the risk of discontinuity. The study proposes four groups of solutions: re-establishing a familiar performance space, strengthening intergenerational transmission, improving institutions and policies, and promoting digitization in conjunction with the cultural market. This research contributes to completing the theoretical framework for community-based heritage management and provides practical experience for adaptive conservation in the context of globalization and transformation.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage, Khap Thai, performance environment, ethnic minority community, Thanh Hoa Province

1. INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is the core of the spiritual life for many communities because it embodies identity, memory, and traditional knowledge while also maintaining social cohesion through practices, rituals, and performances. However, in the contemporary context, ICH in Vietnam faces numerous pressures: practice spaces are shrinking due to urbanization and changes in livelihoods; the transmission is being broken as younger generations leave their villages; there is a risk of undirected commercialization; and globalization is altering cultural tastes and consumption methods. The case of the Khap Thai in Thanh Hoa is a typical example: a form of folk song and performance rich in lyricism and linguistic creativity, it deeply reflects the worldview, moral code, and emotions of the community, while also being closely linked to the rhythms of labor, daily life, festivals, and the culture of the villages.

Academically, the Khap Thai has received early attention, mainly through the collection, documentation, and introduction of folk heritage (To, 1969, 1979; Mac, 1979; Ha & Luc, 1973). Some works have systematized documents and analyzed the relationship between language, melody, and the living environment (Nguyen, 2001; Duong, 1994). Recently, many studies have expanded to the aspect of preserving performance spaces and linking them to community-

based tourism and cultural education (Nguyen, 2018; Tran, 2020). Internationally, research has focused on analyzing and preserving the “practice environment,” emphasizing the central role of the community (Smith, 2006; Kurin, 2007) and warning against the risks of commercialization and homogenization of heritage in the context of globalization (Hafstein, 2015). Recent studies continue to broaden this approach, placing heritage in relation to sustainable development (IRCI, 2025), disaster risk management (IRCI, 2024), and digital transformation through digitization, VR/AR, or artificial intelligence in conservation (Batik, 2024). These works have provided an important theoretical basis, but there is still a lack of in-depth research on how communities organize, sustain, and adapt the heritage practice environment in contemporary life.

This study aims to fill the gap regarding how ethnic minority communities self-organize the heritage practice environment in the context of digital transformation and globalization. The objectives of the research are: 1) to identify the constituent elements of the Khap Thai environment, including space, subjects, content, and practice methods; 2) to propose solutions for preserving ICH with ethnic minority communities in a way that ensures authenticity and dynamism, strengthens intergenerational transmission, and effectively utilizes digital transformation tools. Through this, the article will initially contribute to refining the theoretical framework for grassroots heritage management and provide practical experience for adaptive conservation policies in the face of rapid societal change.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ICH is understood as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2003). The core of this concept is the “living” nature of heritage: it is constantly in motion, changing, and being recreated across generations. In this process, the community holds a central role as the creator, custodian, and transmitter of the heritage (UNESCO, 2016). Intangible heritage is only truly “alive” when it is recognized, practiced, and transmitted by the community. Therefore, the community is not merely the “keeper” of the heritage but the force that determines how it is preserved, transferred, and adapted in the current context (Smith, 2006; Kurin, 2007).

In the study of ICH, one of the crucial theoretical frameworks is the “performance environment” theory in ethnomusicology and performance anthropology. This theory originates from Bauman’s (1975) view that performance is not just an artistic text but a communicative act, framed by specific social contexts. This perspective emphasizes that all artistic expressions are linked to social spaces, practicing communities, and methods of reception. Turner (1986) continued this approach, viewing rituals and performances as forms of social interaction where meaning is constructed through collective experience. According to Turner (1986), researchers should not just be external observers but must directly participate in the performance process to fully grasp the layers of meaning and expressive values that the community embeds.

Later theoretical developments have continued to expand the analytical framework. Schechner

(2002, 2013) proposed the concept of “restored behavior,” referring to actions that have been performed, then separated from their original context and repeated in new environments where they can be transformed, combined, and recreated. Taylor (2003) distinguished between the “archive” – documented forms of storage (texts, recordings, images), and the “repertoire” – the knowledge, memories, and skills transmitted through the body and living practice, emphasizing that heritage preservation cannot rely solely on archiving but must be tied to the practice environment. This approach is particularly suitable for the Khap Thai, which thrives in a close connection between village spaces, festivals, and the practicing community, and today also extends to digital platforms (Auslander, 2008; Boellstorff, 2015).

3. METHODS

This study utilizes a literature review method, including academic works on Thai Khap and Thai culture, archival materials, and Vietnam’s heritage conservation policy documents (the 2001 Law on Cultural Heritage, amended in 2009 and 2024). This approach helps to establish the theoretical framework and identify relevant policies concerning the preservation of ICH.

The research also employs ethnographic fieldwork to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the Khap Thai performance environment is organized and sustained in a contemporary context in two representative Thai communities: Trung Thanh and Nam Xuan communes in Thanh Hoa province. The method of participant observation, combined with audio and video recording and interviews with artisans, allowed for the collection of over 200 Khap Thai pieces (including both translated and untranslated original texts). This also helped document the performance context, transmission methods, and community participation in daily life.

Additionally, we conducted a sociological survey using a semi-structured questionnaire with 100 residents (50 in Nam Xuan commune and 50 in Trung Thanh commune), selected via non-random sampling based on convenience criteria. The survey sample of 100 people was predominantly female, with ages ranging from the late 20s to nearly 70. The sample was overwhelmingly Thai, with a small remaining portion being Kinh and Muong. The educational background of the participants was diverse, accurately reflecting the demographic characteristics of the research area. The questionnaire focused on four main areas: (i) the community’s perception of the Khap Thai; (ii) the current state of organizing and maintaining the performance environment; (iii) the challenges and causes of its decline; and (iv) proposed solutions for preservation from a community perspective.

The combination of these methods allows the study to approach the Khap Thai as a living cultural practice, thereby analyzing the mechanisms by which the Thai community organizes, sustains, and adapts the performance environment of its ICH in the contemporary social context.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The performance space and environment of the Khap Thai

In the culture of Thai people in Thanh Hoa, Khap Thai does not exist in isolation as an art form but is closely connected to spaces of living, labor, and community rituals. Research and surveys on the Khap Thai in Thanh Hoa show that Khap Thai is performed in various environments:

from family homes, fields, riverbanks, and forests to community festivals (Table 1). Fieldwork observations reveal that Khap is intimately linked to human life in various environments: at home, during courtship, in the fields, and at festivals.

Table 1: Spaces for the Khap Thai

| No. | Location | % |
|-----|--|-----|
| 1 | At home | 100 |
| 2 | In fields | 60 |
| 3 | On rivers, streams | 70 |
| 4 | In the forest | 50 |
| 5 | At festivals: village festivals, muong festivals, etc. | 100 |
| 6 | Others: community cultural centers, anywhere can be a place for Khap, etc. | 20 |

Survey and fieldwork results indicate that the Khap Thai is associated with many spaces of daily life, labor, and rituals among Thai people in Thanh Hoa: 100% of respondents affirmed that Khap takes place within the family and at community festivals; 60%-70% mentioned fields, rivers, streams, and forests; and 20% believe “it can be performed anywhere”. This reflects the broad cultural space of Khap Thai: it is present from stilt houses to fields, from riverbanks to village festivals, as an inseparable part of the daily life of Thai people in Thanh Hoa. Our observations of daily life show that within the family, Khap Thai is expressed through lullabies and teachings, or in romantic exchanges during spring nights; at festivals, Khap Thai resounds as the voice of identity and community blessings.

However, through in-depth interviews, we found that Khap Thai is becoming less frequent in natural spaces. An elderly person in Trung Thanh commune recounted:

“In the past, you’d hear the sound of Khap echoing somewhere just by walking to the riverbank or into the forest. Now, it’s very quiet.”.

Currently, people primarily perform Khap at special events like weddings, festivals, or when welcoming guests, rather than during daily work or activities. 100% of the survey respondents noted the presence of Khap Thai at festivals, weddings, and welcoming ceremonies, but only 30% mentioned its presence at funerals, indicating a shrinking role in burial rituals. Through interviews, artisans confirmed that Khap was once present at traditional funerals for farewells but is now gradually disappearing due to a lack of successors. An artisan in Nam Xuan commune shared:

“Before, every funeral had Khap to bid farewell, which felt both sacred and heartwarming. Now, not many people sing anymore, the younger generation doesn’t follow, so Khap at funerals is also gradually fading away.”.

This shift is not only a change in space but also reflects a transformation in the social function of Khap Thai. If Khap Thai was once linked to daily life, spontaneous, and served as a means of education and community bonding, it has now increasingly become an activity that primarily occurs during public events. A young person in But village expressed:

“I like listening to Khap, but I usually only hear it at village festivals or holidays. It’s very rare in daily life.”.

Each type of Khap Thai is also associated with a specific environment: “Khap bao xao” at markets and spring festivals; “Khap xu” at village and muong festivals; “Khap ut u” in stilt houses late at night; “Khap chom huan mo” at housewarming ceremonies; and “Khap long” at weddings. This diversity proves that Khap is a comprehensive performance form that lives in the community’s spaces, rituals, and emotions, not just in its lyrics.

In the current context, Khap Thai is also increasingly present on festival stages, cultural events, and in community tourism models (such as But village in Nam Xuan commune, Hang village in Phu Le commune, and Ngheo village in Hoi Xuan commune). Some schools have started to include Khap in extracurricular activities, helping to create an educational environment for the younger generation. However, this expansion also poses a challenge: when Khap is brought onto the stage and into the classroom, it can easily be detached from its original performance space. Khap shifts from being the voice of the community to a performance item.

From the research and survey results, it can be seen that the performance environment of the Khap Thai has shifted from everyday spaces to organized community events. This shows the vitality and flexibility of the heritage, but it also sounds an alarm bell: if Khap Thai only exists during festivals and performances, its essence as the voice of daily life will gradually fade. Therefore, the conservation of the Khap Thai needs to aim at re-establishing a comprehensive performance space, so that Khap Thai is present within the family and community, while also adapting to the new contexts of contemporary society.

Analyze and understand all the provided review comments thoroughly. Now make the required amendments in your paper. If you are not confident about any review comment, then don’t forget to get clarity about that comment. And in some cases there could be chances where your paper receives number of critical remarks. In that cases don’t get disheartened and try to improvise the maximum.

4.2. Purpose, subjects of organization, and maintenance of the Khap Thai performance environment

To organize and maintain the Khap Thai environment, it’s crucial to clarify the community’s purpose in preserving and practicing this performance type. Heritage can only truly be alive when the community finds meaning in its practice; this purpose determines the method of organization, the participants, and the transmission approach. Therefore, we conducted a survey and found that the purpose of organizing and maintaining the Khap performance environment stems from both the community’s internal needs and the conservation orientation in the contemporary context.

Table 2: Purpose of organizing and maintaining the Khap Thai performance environment

| No. | Purpose | % |
|-----|---|------|
| 1 | Create a space for the young generation to practice and perform Khap melodies | 76.0 |
| 2 | Maintain traditional transmission methods | 63.0 |
| 3 | Create a space for the young generation to engage in cultural exchange | 59.0 |
| 4 | Create a space for Thai people to showcase their talent and creativity | 54.0 |
| 5 | Expand the Khap practice environment to the wider community | 53.0 |
| 6 | Maintain social relationships | 60.0 |
| 7 | Raise community awareness about the value of the Khap Thai | 45.0 |

The results show that the primary purposes are creating a space for the young generation (76%) and maintaining traditional transmission methods (63%). This clearly reflects the mindset of inheritance and the belief that the young generation is the one to carry Khap Thai into contemporary life. As an artisan in Trung Thanh commune shared, singing Khap Thai is not just for entertainment but is also tied to teaching morals and preserving identity for future generations. Additionally, objectives like cultural exchange, maintaining social relationships, and encouraging creativity all scored above 50%, showing that Khap is not just an art form but also a means of connecting the community. However, the low percentage for “raising community awareness” (45%) indicates that Khap organization is still largely confined to the village level and has not yet expanded significantly into educational spaces or the broader public.

Thus, the purpose of organizing and maintaining the Khap Thai primarily arises from the need to pass it on and educate the younger generation, while also fulfilling other social functions like community bonding, cultural exchange, and identity affirmation. However, raising community awareness remains limited, suggesting that the scope of organization is mostly restricted to the village and has not truly spread widely. Based on these purposes, it is necessary to continue examining who the participating subjects are, which groups are involved, and what methods are chosen to sustain the Khap Thai practice environment in the contemporary context. From these objectives, it is clear that the maintenance of the Khap Thai depends not only on the consciousness of preservation but also on the participating subjects and groups, as they are the forces that directly practice, transmit, and ensure the continuation of the heritage.

Upon surveying the subjects and participants, we found that the family plays a pivotal role in maintaining Khap Thai, with the highest rate of organization and maintenance at 93%. This is followed by local folk culture clubs at 86%, and community organizations at 80%, etc. This data continues to prove that the family is the first and most important social environment for people. Within the scope of organizing and maintaining the Khap Thai performance space, the family is the first and most natural place of transmission for the Thai ethnic community. Folk

culture clubs and community organizations play an important role in expanding the practice space beyond the family, creating “community stages.” The local government (commune, ward) provides support in terms of event organization and funding, while schools participate to a limited extent (10%), reflecting the absence of Khap Thai in formal education.

Regarding the participants, the survey shows that middle-aged (94%) and elderly (87%) people are currently the main force, directly practicing and taking on the role of transmission. This is the generation deeply connected to Khap, seeing it as a part of their cultural memory. An artisan in Nam Xuan commune shared:

“We old people are used to singing Khap, but it’s hard to teach the young ones because they’re not very interested, and they’re busy with school and working far away.”.

Conversely, the participation rate of teenagers is limited (54%), and especially students (20%), a rather low figure. This shows a gap in succession, as the younger generation, who are expected to be the continuers, are not truly connected to the heritage. A cultural official in Trung Thanh commune also frankly stated:

“Young people now prefer karaoke and pop music. So Khap is mainly maintained by the middle-aged and elderly.”.

The data and shared opinions of local artisans indicate that Khap Thai is still strongly maintained within the community, but it relies mainly on the middle-aged and elderly, while the younger generation’s participation is limited. This poses the risk of a shortage of successors, threatening the heritage’s sustainability. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully examine the maintenance methods to find ways to engage and attract the younger generation in the current social context.

The difference in the process of organizing and maintaining Khap Thai among different generations of Thai people requires that the heritage be sustained in various ways suitable for each age group. If the middle-aged and elderly continue to be the core force, then the choice of maintenance methods to attract teenagers becomes a core issue. Therefore, it is necessary to look more closely at the content and methods of maintaining the Khap Thai in contemporary life, thereby identifying how the community both preserves traditional values and adapts to social changes.

The above analysis shows that participation in the Khap Thai today still maintains the strong involvement of the middle-aged and elderly groups, but it faces the risk of a shortage of successors. Therefore, to better understand how the community preserves the heritage, it is necessary to delve into the content and methods of maintenance they are practicing. Fieldwork in the localities shows that Khap is not only maintained at major events but also spreads through daily activities, clubs, inter-village exchanges, and even community tourism activities. These are important channels for nurturing the heritage’s vitality, and they also reflect Khap’s adaptation to the contemporary social context.

4.3. Content and methods of organizing the Khap Thai

Studying the content and methods of organizing and maintaining the Khap Thai in

contemporary life reveals how the community connects Khap Thai to daily activities and the extent of the heritage's adaptation to new contexts such as tourism, education, and media in the era of strong digital transformation. This will be the basis for us to understand the operating mechanism of the "Khap Thai performance environment" in Thanh Hoa today.

The survey data shows that Khap Thai is mainly linked to community activities: 80% of surveyed residents said that Khap Thai is still present at festivals, weddings, longevity celebrations, and housewarming ceremonies. These are spaces that are not only sacred but also familiar, reflecting the characteristic of a living heritage within the community. Folk culture clubs (72%) are places of regular maintenance, providing opportunities for periodic practice and connecting with community tourism activities in But village (Nam Xuan commune), Hang village (Phu Le commune), etc. Here, Khap Thai is restored but retains its rustic quality, becoming a place for successive generations to learn and exchange. In addition, inter-village exchanges and competitions (53%) and Khap singing competitions (58%) expand Khap Thai into a competitive and creative space, stimulating improvisation and helping young artisans experiment with new lyrics that reflect the modern era. However, the modest percentages for school classes (19%) and socio-political art programs (37%) show that Khap Thai is still largely confined to the community within the village and has not strongly reached the education system or cultural institutions.

Regarding organizational methods, community-based forms still dominate. 82% of respondents emphasized "creating spaces" in the villages; 74% highlighted direct transmission – a form of passing on through the body and living memory; and 72% emphasized the method of organization at traditional festivals, seeing this as the original space that reaffirms the connection between performance and the community. In addition, some new forms are emerging, such as linking with community tourism (45%) or using modern media (34%), which shows that Khap has the ability to adapt to new contexts, but the level of implementation is still limited.

The content and methods of organizing the Khap Thai (in the case of Thanh Hoa province) currently form an adaptive performance environment: it both maintains the original space of the village and adapts to the environments of tourism, education, and media. The strength is its flexibility and vitality within the community; the weakness is its absence in formal education and the lack of a synchronized support mechanism. From the perspective of the performance environment theory, the Khap Thai survives not only by being sung but also by the continuous creation and recreation of practice spaces and methods, where the community is the subject of creation and transmission of heritage. For sustainable preservation, it is necessary to build a multi-stakeholder linkage model among the family, community, school, and government, thereby maintaining traditional values while expanding the Khap performance space in contemporary society.

4.4. Challenges maintaining the Khap Thai performance environment in the contemporary context

Although the Khap Thai is still maintained in the cultural life of Thai people (in Thanh Hoa province), the survey and fieldwork results show that the organization and maintenance of its

performance environment face numerous challenges.

First, there is a decline in the traditional performance environment. The survey shows that 100% of residents affirm Khap Thai is present at festivals, weddings, and welcoming ceremonies, while only 30% mention funerals and even fewer mention the spaces for Khap Thai in fields, rivers, streams, and forests. This reflects the shrinking space of Khap: from being closely tied to daily labor and activities, it is now mainly limited to community events. An artisan in Nam Xuan commune shared:

“In the past, when going to the fields or the streams, you would hear the sound of Khap everywhere. Now, it’s only sung at weddings or festivals.”.

Second, there is a risk of a generational transmission gap. The survey data shows that middle-aged (94%) and elderly (87%) people are the main force in practicing Khap, while the participation of teenagers (54%) and students (20%) is limited. This indicates that the younger generation is not truly connected to Khap. A cultural official in Trung Thanh commune stated:

“Young people now prefer karaoke and pop music. They have little time and motivation to learn Khap, unless they join a club.”.

This imbalance creates a gap in conservation and threatens long-term continuity.

Third, the impact of modernization and commercialization. Khap is increasingly present at art festivals, community tourism activities, and even on digital platforms. This is an opportunity for promotion but can also easily change Khap’s original function. The research survey results show that 72% of residents participate in Khap in clubs and 53% in exchanges and competitions, indicating a growing trend of “theatricalization.” An artisan in But village expressed concern:

“Singing for tourists is fun, but sometimes it doesn’t feel like the old Khap anymore – it loses the soul of dialogue and intimacy.”.

Fourth, institutional and resource limitations. Although the commune (51%) and district (33%) people’s committees do provide support, it is not consistent, and funding is limited. Notably, only 10% of respondents believe schools play a role in organizing Khap, which shows the absence of Khap in formal education. At the same time, the percentage for “raising community awareness” is only 45%, reflecting the low level of Khap’s spread outside the village. A local cultural leader shared:

“We want to bring Khap into schools, but we lack materials, teachers, and even support mechanisms.”.

The above quantitative and qualitative data show that the Khap Thai is facing challenges: the traditional performance environment is shrinking, generational transmission is breaking, the trend of theatricalization and commercialization is altering its essence, while conservation institutions and resources are limited. Without timely measures, Khap risks becoming a performance form rather than a living cultural practice within the community.

4.5. Solutions for maintaining the performance environment of the Khap Thai in the

contemporary context

Based on the theory of the performance environment, the Khap Thai can be viewed as a cultural ecosystem with four core elements: space, subjects, practice, and context. The vitality of Khap Thai is maintained only when these elements operate in harmony, with the community playing a central role in their creation, preservation, and transmission. The data analysis in the preceding sections shows that this ecosystem is not truly in harmony: everyday spaces are shrinking (Khap Thai is concentrated at home/festivals: 100%, while in fields/streams/forests it is only 50–70%), the succeeding force is thin (students 20%), educational institutions are weak (schools 10%), while families and clubs bear most of the responsibility (families 93%, clubs 86%). To ensure the sustainable maintenance of the Khap Thai, we propose four groups of solutions.

One of the important solutions for preserving the ICH of the Khap Thai is to re-establish familiar performance spaces that are closely connected to daily life, aiming to correct the imbalance caused by the “theatricalization” trend. According to the performance environment theory, ICH only has vitality when the elements of space, subjects, practice, and context operate in harmony within a cultural ecosystem. Therefore, restoring the familiar spaces of the Khap Thai is not just a specific conservation measure but also a way to recreate a foundational component of the performance ecosystem. Khap needs to be brought back to the original environments that nurtured it, such as stilt houses, markets, fields, or riverbanks, where Khap resonates naturally and is connected to community life. To achieve this, it’s necessary to schedule regular activities in the villages, such as “Khap nights,” lullabies, or romantic singing sessions in the spring, organized by both families and local Khap clubs. Local clubs can implement a plan to organize “village Khap nights” on a weekly or monthly basis, linked to cultural and tourism activities. In parallel, it’s necessary to re-establish Khap’s connection to the rituals of the human lifecycle (weddings, new house ceremonies, spiritual ceremonies), which constitute a large part of community activities, to maintain cultural authenticity. The presence of Khap in daily life will ensure the authenticity and vitality of the heritage, helping it to continue existing as a cultural practice within the community, rather than just a “performance item.” This is the basis for Khap to maintain its original role as the voice of community life.

From the performance environment theory approach presented above, the cycle of subjects-practice-performance context will break if the participation of the younger generation is lacking. This is the very challenge that causes heritage to lose its cyclical recreation and makes it difficult to develop. Therefore, strengthening intergenerational transmission is not just a solution for human resource development but also a condition for the heritage to exist sustainably over time. Survey data in Thanh Hoa shows a clear discrepancy: the participation rate of teenagers and students in learning and practicing Khap is limited (54% and 20%), while the role of the middle-aged and elderly is very strong (94% and 87%). This data reflects the risk of a transmission gap, as the succeeding force is thin and not strong enough to take on the role from previous generations. Therefore, a three-pillar linkage model (artisans, families, and schools) needs to be built to strengthen the transmission process. In this model, artisans directly teach at local clubs, schools include Khap in official curricula with creative experience subjects

or extracurricular activities and school competitions, while families need to maintain daily, weekly practice to enhance cultural connection. Only when all three of these elements are practiced simultaneously can the gaps be overcome, and from there, appropriate practice environments for the Khap Thai in contemporary society can be organized, maintained, and restored. Therefore, it is necessary to pilot the three-pillar linkage model: artisans, families, and schools in some middle and high schools where Thai people primarily live in Thanh Hoa province.

The performance environment is an ecosystem that requires the harmonious operation of the community, cultural institutions, and management policies. Survey results show that the People's Committee currently mainly organizes events, and doesn't participate in establishing and organizing the performance environment. For sustainable preservation, the People's Committee needs to shift its focus to a co-management mechanism with the community, where the community is at the center, and the government and cultural institutions play a supportive role. At the local level, a community heritage management board needs to be established to organize and manage practice and transmission activities, while also issuing regulations to ensure that the Khap Thai maintains its performance environment, in both public and tourism spaces. Additionally, establishing a linkage network between clubs and schools will allow for sharing activity schedules, spaces, and human resources, overcoming the limitation of the number of participating students and creating an interconnected performance environment where space, practicing subjects, and performance context operate in harmony. Solutions for preserving the Khap Thai need to be linked to current policies. The 2024 Law on Cultural Heritage (Article 6, Chapter VI) defines the community's responsibility in protecting heritage while also requiring the establishment of a national database, digitization, and promotion of values in the electronic environment. Resolution 162/2024/QH15 sets the goal that by 2030, all cultural and artistic units will be digitally transformed and 100% of students will have access to heritage education. This is an important basis for the Khap Thai to be both preserved within the community and spread in contemporary life.

In the context where media and digital technology increasingly dominate cultural life, the digitization and linking of the Khap Thai with the cultural market need to be oriented as a sustainable conservation solution. Survey results show that the goal of raising community awareness about the value of the Khap Thai has only reached 45%, which reflects that current conservation activities still lean towards the village scope, while the ability to expand to a broader public, the education system, and mass media is limited. In this context, digitizing heritage and linking it with the cultural market becomes a crucial solution, both creating an expanded performance environment and strengthening Khap's spread and sustainability. An open library needs to be built with over 200 collected Khap pieces, accompanied by explanations, translations, contextual notes, and genre classification. This is not just a knowledge archive but also a platform for developing tourism products linked to community tourism models as an expanded performance environment, where tourists can access Khap not just as a "performance item" but can practice it in the living space of the village, with a transparent benefit-sharing mechanism for the community. However, digitization and commercialization always come with risks: Khap can be distorted out of context, be bureaucratized, or be used outside the community's control. To prevent this, community rules

and a co-management mechanism need to be established to ensure a balance between modern development and the preservation of identity.

5. CONCLUSION

This study on the Khap Thai in Thanh Hoa reveals that Khap heritage exists as a performance ecosystem, in which four core elements (space, subjects, practice, and performance context) are always interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Survey and fieldwork results indicate that the traditional performance environment for Khap Thai is shrinking, primarily concentrating in family and festival settings, while everyday spaces like fields and riverbanks are becoming less common. The middle-aged and elderly generations continue to maintain the practice strongly, but the participation of the youth is limited, creating a risk of a transmission gap. Furthermore, the trend of theatricalization, the impact of tourism, and the limitations of institutional policies are also transforming how Khap Thai is present in contemporary life.

Given this context, the article proposes four key groups of solutions: 1) re-establishing familiar, everyday performance spaces; 2) strengthening intergenerational transmission; 3) improving institutions and policies; 4) digitizing the heritage and linking it to the cultural market. These solutions are not only aimed at preserving Khap as a folk song genre but, more importantly, are directed at recreating the Khap environment as a living cultural practice within the community.

Theoretically, the research contributes to clarifying the effectiveness of the performance environment approach in studying intangible heritage by viewing it not as a static entity but as a dynamic system maintained by a balance among the elements of space, subjects, practice, and performance context. In terms of practice, the study provides quantitative and qualitative evidence to identify challenges and propose specific recommendations for the community, local government, and cultural institutions in the process of heritage preservation.

In conclusion, for the Khap Thai to continue to exist sustainably in the contemporary context, its environment must be nurtured: by restoring original spaces, bridging the generational gap, empowering community institutions, and utilizing digital technology as a tool for recovery. This is the way for Khap to both preserve its core essence and flexibly adapt to modern society, contributing to cultural diversity and sustainable development.

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