

Towards Sustainable Cultural Heritage Preservation and Management in the Digital age: Strategic Roles of Library

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Abstract

Challenges of the 21st century and the increase of cultural heritage have increased the need for further thinking of the preservation and management strategies of cultural heritage for sustainable development. Over the years the issue of preservation and management of cultural heritage have gained a lot of concern. This is because cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural heritage is today considered as an activity that has a far-reaching effect on both the economic and social development of any nation. This paper is an opinion based. It reveals extensively how the sustainability of cultural heritage preservation and management are being carried out in the digital age. The paper also went further to discuss the strategic roles of libraries in the preservation and management of cultural heritage for sustainable development which will serve as an indicator for future generation. Furthermore, the paper looked into the challenges facing libraries in the preservation of cultural heritage.

Introduction

Every society is endowed with a distinct culture; which is cherished by members of the society. The culture of a people is what distinguishes a society from other human societies in the family of humanity. Trying to settle on a simple definition of culture is not an easy task. This is because the idea of culture has changed many times over the centuries and scholars have made the idea more and more difficult to understand. Extant literatures have given different definitions of culture. Culture as defined by Idang (2015) is a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or societies. These peculiar traits go on to include the people's language, dressing, food, music, work, arts, religion, dancing, people's social norms, taboos and values. Aziza (2001:31) acknowledges that culture refers to the totality of the pattern of behavior of a particular group of people. It includes everything that makes them distinct from any other group of people for instance their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns, rites of passages from birth, through marriages to death, traditional occupations religious as well as philosophical beliefs. Culture being an identity of every nation is

passed from generation to generation and based on this, the acquisition of culture is as a result of socialization process. Fafunwa (1974: 48) carefully explained how culture is passed on from generation to generation. He writes:

The child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people. He imbibes it. Culture in the traditional society is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes, and mimics the action of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies; He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival, the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age groups or his relations in the activities. The child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environment. In order words every human being that grows up in a particular society is likely to imbibe the culture of that society.

Cultural heritage is one of the most valuable things in the world as it is the identity of every individual or nation. Cultural Heritage concept

offers a bridge between the past and the future with the application of particular approaches in the present. Due to its attached values for these groups or societies, UNESCO (2017) defined cultural heritage as the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Scholars have proved that the concept of cultural heritage is even wider than that, and has gradually grown to include all evidence of human creativity and expression: photographs, documents, books, manuscripts, and instruments, etc. either as individual objects or as collections. Today, towns, underwater heritage, and the natural environment are also considered part of cultural heritage since communities identify themselves with the natural landscape. Onyima (2016) gave the concept of cultural heritage to be cherished characteristic features of a society passed down from generation to generation through conscious preservation. Heritages refer to the riches of extinct and extant societies which are of historic, educational, recreational, and economic importance, preserved and handed over from one generation to another. Put differently, heritages are significant endowments emanating from man and nature. Following from the above, heritages could be categorized into two, based on their sources namely: ecological/natural heritages and cultural heritages. Having at one time referred exclusively to the monumental remains of cultures, cultural heritage as a concept has gradually come to include new categories. Today, we find that heritage is not only manifested through tangible forms such as artifacts, buildings or landscapes but also through intangible forms. Intangible heritage includes voices, values, traditions, oral history. Popularly this is perceived through cuisine, clothing, and forms of shelter, traditional skills and technologies, religious ceremonies, performing arts, storytelling. Today, we consider the tangible heritage inextricably bound up with the intangible heritage. In conservation projects we aim to preserve both the tangible as well as the intangible heritage. The tangible cultures are buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of arts and artifacts while the intangible culture traditions or living

expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants are such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. Intangible culture such as folklore, traditions, language, knowledge, and natural heritage are culturally significant landscapes and biodiversity.

The fact remains that the cultural heritage of a nation has a very high value and is unique. It is an identity that can be introduced to the world, the question is, why don't we value the natural heritage? Hence, they lack preservation and conservation; these two key words are used interchangeably. Conway (1996) defines Preservation as the acquisition, organization, and distribution of resources to prevent further deterioration or renew the usability of selected groups of materials. Alegbeleye (2002) asserts that preservation includes all the managerial and financial considerations, which includes storage and accommodation provisions, staffing levels, policies, techniques and methods involved in preserving library and archival materials and information contained in them. It is important to preserve our cultural heritage, because it keeps our integrity as a people. This is because there is a risk that our cultural heritage may die or disappear if not well preserved or managed. From all indication our natural heritage are not valued they lack the idea about the preservation, maintenance and conservation. Take for instance the African artifacts taken away by white men to their countries which are still being used by white men to make money today in their countries while Africans cannot make available the 1970s artifacts. Our caves are being destroyed and destruction of caves is a crime against nature. It is important to respect and safeguard all cultural heritages, through national laws and international treaties in order to check illicit trafficking of artifacts and cultural objects, pillaging of archaeological sites, and destruction of historical buildings and monuments which can cause irreparable damage to the cultural heritage of a country. This is why UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), founded in 1954, has adopted international conventions on the protection of

cultural heritage, to foster intercultural understanding while stressing the importance of international cooperation. Preservation of cultural heritage both tangible and intangible, becomes the duty not only of the governments in power but with more seriousness and purpose, by the people, civil and cultural organizations and those who have inherited them and are in charge of looking after and improving their condition. In doing this, it would not only result in feeling proud by more and more people of possessing such rich heritage but also create an opportunity to pass on the history of sorts to the younger generations to infuse a deep sense of belongingness in them. It will also help in generating love and respect for the roots of the land as people make their contribution to the culture of the world. Setshwane and Oats (2015) defined endangered society as one who loses its identity as a result of loss of its cultural heritage, and preserving cultural heritage of the communities serves for posterity and is a must for libraries as cultural heritage contains the strengths and weaknesses of the community served.

Management is considered crucial in the preservation and sustainability of cultural heritage. The Virtual heritage Cairo project emphasized that Managing cultural heritage in the digital age policy document provides the frameworks to support flexible yet sustainable development of the practical applications of virtual and digital heritage which helps in balancing both public and private interest and also in business objectives (www.virtualheritagecairo.com). Sustainability begins with preservation. Without digital preservation there is no digital sustainability.

It has long been the responsibility of libraries and archives to assemble organize, protect the documentation of human activity. Conway (1996) rightly relates the ethics of preservation as coordinate, conscious management, which is a mere recent phenomenon. He emphasized that librarians and archivists – like the clerks, and scribes, who went before them -have increased the chances that evidence about how we live, how we think, and what we have accomplished will be preserved. In this context one has to say that libraries all over the world have to provide unhindered and equitable preservation of information knowledge for library users.

Traditionally, libraries and archives are custodian of knowledge and cultural heritage. There is no doubt that libraries and librarians are meant to be in the forefront to inspire lifelong learning, advance knowledge and strengthen our communities to make sure that our national identity is not lost. Libraries are important cultural institutions that work not only to provide universal access to information and knowledge, but also preserve the cultural heritage and identity of the communities they serve. This is why libraries are evolving to something beyond the print media and collection management, there seems to be a need for the development of new librarian's skills and new ways of leading teams in this change. This is why IFLA (2017) urges policy makers to

- Support the inclusion of libraries in any global indicator measuring SDG target 11.4
- Recognize documentary heritage as part of essential part of our global cultural heritage, and establish concrete plans and make funding available for its preservation.
- Recognize libraries as crucial actors in the safeguarding of cultural heritage, and include librarians in relevant international and national efforts.
- Enable libraries to fulfill their mandate to safeguard and preserve documentary cultural heritage by ensuring appropriate legal framework for their activities as well as well as adequate resourcing.
- Include libraries and cultural heritage institutions in disaster risk reduction plans, and give them their due place in recovery programmes.

The main purpose of this study is to find out the issues militating against the preservation, management and sustainability of cultural heritage in the digital age and the strategic roles of the library. Specifically the study seeks to:

1. Highlight methods used in preserving, managing and sustaining cultural heritage in the digital age.
2. Consider strategic roles of libraries in the preservation, management and

sustainability of cultural heritage in the digital age.

3. Highlight the challenges faced by libraries in the preservation of cultural heritage in the digital age

Preservation, management and sustainability of cultural heritage in the digital age

The electronic and print materials are vital and delicate. The way they are handled can affect the life span of the record. These records must be preserved and managed in such a way that it will be used in the future. There is no doubt that the advancement in science and technology over the past two centuries, has brought about the transition from essentially output of information in paper format to output in a variety of media. Those information resources in an electronic era, ranging from simple text based files such as word processed files to highly sophisticated web-based resources such as data bases, website mails are preserved in a wide range of storage media such as flash drive, CD ROM and others. Murray as quoted in Iyishu et al (2013) explained that preservation is an indirect method of treatment in which the environment around an item is changed. This includes stabilizing, maintaining and monitoring temperature, humidity, light exposure, air pollution, dirt, dust and mold. Preservation also includes surveying the proper storage and handling techniques, security, including theft, vandalism, disaster prevention, education, training and outreach programs for staff, patrons, clients and the public.

Niconova and Biryucova (2017) affirm that experts determine two directions in the use of electronic technologies in the sphere of preservation of cultural heritage and they are:

- a) e-format (electronic copies) of traditional cultural storages (such as electronic museums, libraries, exhibitions, databases, etc.)
- b) electronic forms of new cultural objects (computer programs, networks, technologies, digital works of art etc), which may eventually become objects of cultural heritage, but according to the method of preservation are similar to the category of intangible heritage.

They further advised that for the analysis of electronic characteristics of perception of reality in the sphere of interpretation and actualization of cultural heritage one should apply to another area of modern technology, actively used in preservation of cultural heritage: 3D reconstruction (three –dimensional virtual historical reconstruction). Such involves the creation of some virtual objects, giving information and virtual material for exploring the history of heritage sites. It is very important to note that perseveration of cultural heritage should be captured in digital formats, for easy access and retrieval in the traditional library. Loach, Rowley and Griffiths (2017) suggest that cultural heritage sustainability has to become a priority within sustainable development agendas, which is now often depicted as a forth pillar, equal to social, economic, and environmental concerns. This is why the role of Museums and libraries cannot be overemphasized in cultural sustainability by preserving their communities.

Strategic roles of library management of cultural heritage in the digital age

Libraries are important cultural heritage institutions that work not only to provide universal access to information and knowledge, but also preserve, manage and sustain the cultural heritage of the people they serve. They provide enduring access to documentary heritage and serves as the permanent repository records to the government, as well as publications and records of historical or archival value. Libraries are charged with these responsibilities in the information age. This is why Conway (1996) acknowledged that digital image technologies present a similar situation for libraries that radio presented more generally for the corporate word some sixty years ago. Feather (1996) sees a situation where the preservation responsibility rest on libraries or information providers, who is the interface between the producer and the end- user, who needs only to contend with making his output media survive in usable condition when updated versions of the output would be produced .One can deduce that Libraries assuming the responsibility of preservation of information resources and services which are integral library operation can make libraries to remain perpetually useful especially in this information age. Information communication technology

(ICT) is used for the development of digital libraries with the aim of preserving, managing and sustaining cultural heritage. These technologies provide enticing opportunities to increase accessibility, maximizing public standing, decrease cost and preserve cultural heritage in new more affordable ways. Shaibu et'al as cited Igyuve and Sambe (2016) assert that Libraries are capable of providing a composite digital library that will network the individual traditional knowledge centers to provide a uniform system for organizing, disseminating and retrieving traditional knowledge across the whole world which can be accessible via the internet. The library of congress has carried out responsibilities using a variety of professionally accepted practices:

- providing adequate storage conditions (e.g proper environmental controls and appropriate binding and shelving);
- Reformatting materials from their original fragile formats and media to more stable media (e.g microfilming newspapers and brittle books, transferring audio recordings to more stable media, and copying content on nitrate and acetate film to more stable polyester film bases); and
- For small percentage of rare and unique materials with intrinsic value in their original formats, restoring originals through conservation treatments. (www.nap.edu/read/9940/chapter/6#113)

On the other hand Book and Vondracek (2006) highlighted several past involvements of libraries in the preservation of documents (reformatted or duplicated) to enhance access since medieval times when monks fastidiously transcribed documents by hand. They also indicated that libraries began massive newspaper microfilming and digitization projects to successfully reformat thousands of rare collections and crumbling newspapers are effective means of preserving print holdings. In the new age there is no doubt that digitization has played major role in the preservation of previous materials. Making high quality images available electronically which can reduce wears and tears of fragile items. This is the reasons why digitization of materials enhances access and improves preservation. Even though there

are advantages of ICT in the digital age. There is no doubt that a lot of challenges are faced by librarians in using information communication technology in the preservation and management of cultural heritage.

Challenges in the preservation of cultural heritage in the digital age

Libraries globally have always been at the forefront of efforts to safeguard, preserve and provide access to documentary cultural heritage. Cultural institutions, including libraries, archives, museums, and historical organization, face enormous challenges in preserving humanities collections that facilitate research, strengthen teaching, and provide opportunities for life-long learning. One of the aims of museums and libraries is to hold these cultural assets in trust for their communities but unfortunately, the challenges in the recent years have put a long-term survival of these institutions at risk, with implications for the sustainability of cultural assets within their care. Kazi (2012) maintains that both museums and libraries face an ongoing battle to justify their existence and secure their future. Iyishu, Nkanu and Ogar (Nd) acknowledge that the challenges of preserving or archiving digital information are not new. They cited several scholars and institutions, respectively, such as Garret and walter (1996), Lin, Ramah and Wal (2003), Caplan (2004), Wamukoga and Mutual (2005) and the National library of Australia (2003) have cited the following challenges to the preservation of digital materials:

- Technological Obsolescence;
- Continuous migration;
- Lack of legislation, policy and strategy;
- Lack of awareness;
- Lack of collaboration and partnership;
- Deterioration of the digital media;
- Disaster planning and recovery;

Kazi (2012) sees authenticity problem of cultural heritage preservation by digital means as the creators of digital reconstructions refusing to accept the fact of essential disadvantage of digital technologies. He further emphasized that the death of authenticity are leading to the problem of forgeries; plagiarism; and author's rights in the digital world. There

are still some challenges identified as hindrance to the effective preservation of cultural heritage there are ; poor physical planning mechanism, inadequate development control and enforcement, lack of defined limit to transformation in historical sites, poor popular participation, ineffective preservation policy and poor funding, trafficking and exportation of Nigerian arts, theft and looting of museums, vandalism, shortage of equipments.

Conclusion

Culture is the sum total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation. This is why the importance of culture cannot be overemphasized in our society. We cannot afford to lose or endanger our identity as a result of loss of its cultural heritage, and preserving cultural heritage of the communities serves for posterity and is a must for libraries as cultural heritage contains the strengths and weaknesses of the community served. Librarians cannot be left behind in this rapidly changing world especially in the preservation of cultural heritage. For these reason librarians, archivists and all stakeholders of cultural heritage should be prepared to join the band wagon in preserving, conserving and managing our cultural heritage for our future generation.

Recommendation

- There is need for Government to make effort in safe guiding our cultural heritage to avoid illicit trafficking of artifacts and cultural objects, pillaging of archaeological sites, destruction of historical buildings and monuments which cause irreparable damage to the cultural heritage of a country.
- Understanding the role of librarians in heritage management by not disregarding their roles in the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage sites.
- Giving financial and moral support to librarians in facilitating effective heritage management and conservation.
- Policy makers being willing and committed to engage in conservation and heritage practices.

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