Sustaining Folk Music in the 21st Century: A Thematic Review of Community, Education, Policy, and Technology (2020–2025)

Sustentando a Música Folclórica no Século XXI: Uma Revisão Temática sobre Comunidade, Educação, Políticas e Tecnologia (2020–2025)

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Abstract: This study reviews 40 peer-reviewed articles (2020–2025) on the sustainable development of folk music, analyzed through thematic coding in ATLAS.ti. Four thematic domains are identified: community and social mechanisms, education and knowledge transfer, policy and external environment, and technology and digital innovation. Findings indicate that sustainability has evolved beyond static "preservation" to dynamic processes of activation, re-creation, and re-contextualization. Community participation ensures resilience, but it also faces pressures from globalization and commodification. Education combines formal and informal modes, striking a balance between institutional recognition and cultural authenticity. Policy frameworks provide support, yet risk imposing top-down definitions, while digital innovation enhances access and creativity but raises ethical concerns regarding ownership and homogenization. The review argues that the sustainability of folk music must be understood as a systemic, participatory process shaped by the interplay of local agency, institutional governance,

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and technological mediation. Future research should strengthen dialogue with global theoretical frameworks, particularly the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) paradigm, which emphasizes safeguarding through community participation, and applied ethnomusicology, which advocates collaborative engagement between scholars and practitioners. Integrating these perspectives will help construct context-sensitive, ethically grounded models that ensure folk music thrives as both heritage and living practice in the digital age.

Keywords: Folk music, sustainability, community engagement, heritage theory, digital innovation

Resumo: Este estudo revisa 40 artigos revisados por pares (2020–2025) sobre o desenvolvimento sustentável da música folclórica, analisados por meio de codificação temática no ATLAS.ti. Quatro domínios temáticos são identificados: mecanismos comunitários e sociais, educação e transferência de conhecimento, política e ambiente externo, e tecnologia e inovação digital. Os resultados mostram que a sustentabilidade ultrapassou a noção estática de "preservação" e passou a envolver processos dinâmicos de ativação, recriação e recontextualização. A participação comunitária assegura resiliência, mas enfrenta pressões da globalização e da mercantilização. A educação combina modos formais e informais, equilibrando reconhecimento institucional com autenticidade cultural. Os marcos políticos oferecem apoio, mas correm o risco de impor definições de cima para baixo, enquanto a inovação digital amplia o acesso e a criatividade, mas levanta preocupações éticas relativas à propriedade e à homogeneização. A revisão argumenta que a sustentabilidade da música folclórica deve ser entendida como um processo sistêmico e participativo, moldado pela interação entre agência local, governança institucional e mediação tecnológica. Pesquisas futuras devem reforçar o diálogo com referenciais teóricos globais, particularmente o paradigma do Patrimônio Cultural Imaterial (PCI) da UNESCO, que enfatiza a salvaguarda por meio da participação comunitária, e a etnomusicologia aplicada,

que defende o engajamento colaborativo entre acadêmicos e praticantes. Integrar essas perspectivas ajudará a construir modelos contextualmente sensíveis e eticamente fundamentados, assegurando que a música folclórica prospere como patrimônio e como prática viva na era digital.

1. Introduction

In the context of accelerating globalization, the safeguarding, transmission, and sustainable development of cultural heritage face unprecedented challenges. As a vital domain of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), folk music has garnered increasing scholarly and policy attention for its role in preserving cultural identity, facilitating intergenerational continuity, and promoting cultural diversity (Grant et al., 2022). Yet the ecosystem of folk music is being reshaped by technological innovation, demographic shifts, and evolving cultural policies, making sustainability a pressing concern (Schippers & Grant, 2016).

Folk music functions not only as a medium of regional expression but also as a resource for social cohesion, cultural education, and community empowerment (Bithell & Hill, 2014). At the same time, modernization, urbanization, and cultural homogenization challenge its vitality and disrupt transmission processes across regions (Guo et al., 2020). Scholars therefore argue that sustainability requires negotiating the tension between authenticity and innovation, striking a balance between continuity and adaptation (Schippers & Grant, 2016). Heritage scholars further remind us that traditions must be understood not as static "objects" but as performances that are continually re-contextualized (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1996), while cultural theorists frame identity itself as a dynamic process of negotiation and transformation (Hall & Du Gay, 1996).

Against this backdrop, this study undertakes a systematic thematic review of recent scholarship on the sustainability of folk music (2020–2025). The objectives are threefold: (a) to identify key strategies currently employed for safeguarding and transmitting folk music; (b) to analyze the roles of education, cultural practice, and policy frameworks in advancing sustainability; and (c) to critically synthesize diverse perspectives to highlight debates, contradictions, and gaps. By mapping global trends, this review aims not only to document practices but also to engage with

broader theoretical discourses in ethnomusicology, cultural studies, and heritage theory. Ultimately, it provides a foundation for future research and policy design that supports the continuity, vitality, and intercultural resilience of folk music in contemporary society.

2. Materials and methods

The primary data for this study were obtained from two major databases: Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, which together provide extensive coverage of peer-reviewed international scholarship. A structured search was conducted using Boolean operators and truncation symbols with the following string: ("folk music" AND sustainab*) OR ("folk music" AND preservation) OR ("folk music" AND heritage).

Figure 1. Article Selection Procedure
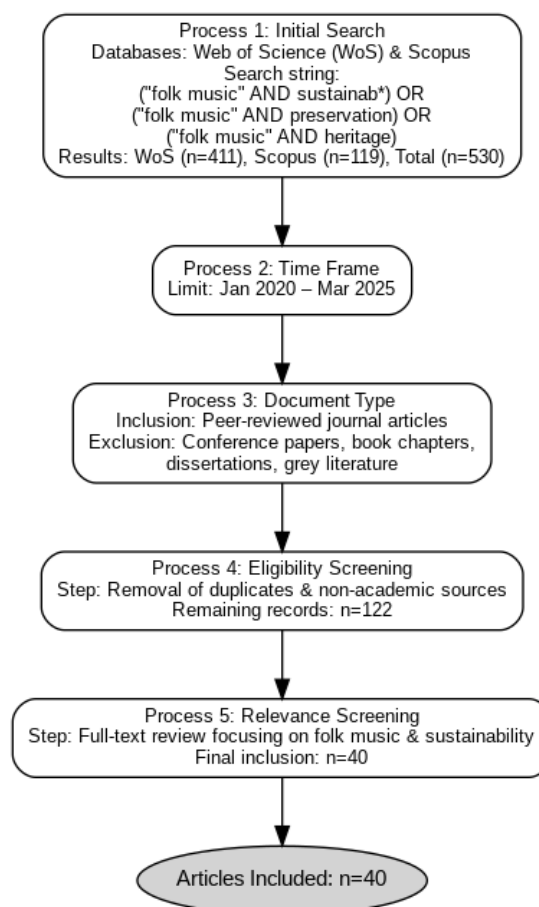
The query was applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords, and limited to publications between January 2020 and March 2025. Only peer-reviewed journal articles were included, while conference papers, book chapters, dissertations, and grey literature were excluded to ensure academic rigor and validity.

The initial search yielded 530 records (WoS: 411; Scopus: 119). After duplicate removal and elimination of non-academic items, 122 articles remained. These were further screened through a full-text relevance review, focusing on studies explicitly addressing the sustainability, safeguarding, or transmission of folk music. The final sample consisted of 40 high-quality articles, offering both geographical diversity and thematic depth. This number was considered both manageable for in-depth qualitative analysis and sufficiently representative to capture thematic diversity across regions and approaches, in line with best practices in thematic literature reviews. The article selection procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

This study employed thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase process: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. The selected articles were imported into ATLAS. Ti 23 and categorized by bibliographic attributes (author, year, journal, volume/issue, publisher), following Zairul's (2021) guidelines for systematic organization. Inductive coding was applied to relevant passages, with iterative refinement and selective double-coding to enhance reliability.

Importantly, the coding framework was informed by broader theoretical perspectives. The concept of sustainability was approached not only in terms of environmental or economic durability, but also in line with the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework, which emphasizes cultural diversity and intergenerational transmission. The notion of heritage was examined through Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1995) "heritage-as-performance", recognizing traditions as dynamic practices rather than static objects. Likewise, identity was understood as a process of negotiation, drawing on Hall's (1996) cultural identity theory,

while insights from Harrison's (2015) applied ethnomusicology highlighted the active role of scholars and communities in sustaining musical traditions.

The finalized codes were consolidated into four overarching themes: (1) community and social mechanisms, (2) education and knowledge transfer, (3) policy and external environment, and (4) technology and digital innovation. These themes provide the framework for presenting the findings in two complementary sections: a quantitative overview of publication trends and a qualitative synthesis of thematic insights. To ensure clarity and rigor, the main text emphasizes. At the same time, peer-reviewed sources are considered, while additional regional and non-core case studies are presented in Appendix A to illustrate broader geographical diversity.

3. Results and Discussion

This review examined the evolution of folk music transmission strategies over the past five years, with findings structured into two complementary parts: a quantitative overview and a qualitative thematic synthesis. The quantitative analysis mapped publication trends by year, journal, and geographical distribution, illustrating the growing but uneven global engagement with the sustainability of folk music. The qualitative study, based on coding all 40 selected articles, initially produced 20 categories that were then consolidated into four overarching themes (Table 1): (1) community and social mechanisms, (2) education and knowledge transfer, (3) policy and external environment, and (4) technology and digital innovation.

Rather than treating each study in isolation, the synthesis emphasizes points of convergence and divergence across the literature, as well as the gaps that remain. This approach highlights not only the diverse strategies employed for safeguarding folk music, but also the tensions between community practice, institutional frameworks, and technological interventions—issues explored in the following thematic sections.

Table 1. Thematic review of folk music and sustainability

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
● Community and Social Mechanisms	1	0	1	4	5	3	14
● Education and Knowledge Transfer	0	3	3	1	3	2	12
● Policy and External Environment	1	1	2	1	3	2	10
● Technology and Digital Innovation	0	0	1	3	3	2	9
Total	2	4	7	9	14	9	45

3.1 Quantitative results

The review of 40 peer-reviewed articles (2020–2025) revealed four overarching themes central to the sustainability of folk music. Among these, community and social mechanisms emerged as the most prevalent focus, with 14 articles (31.1%). Scholars consistently highlighted the significance of local participation, social networks, and intergenerational ties in sustaining musical practices. Notably, publications on this theme expanded sharply after 2022, peaking in 2024, which reflects a shift toward recognizing grassroots agency rather than relying solely on institutional or state-led initiatives. This emphasis, however, also revealed tensions: while some studies celebrated community resilience, others questioned the extent to which local practices can withstand pressures from commercialization and cultural homogenization.

Education and knowledge transfer (12 articles, 26.7%) represented another central strand, encompassing both formal curricula and informal learning processes. Although attention to this theme remained steady throughout the period, debates persist regarding the balance between integrating folk traditions into standardized music education and preserving their contextual authenticity. This demonstrates the unresolved tension between institutionalization and vernacular transmission, raising questions about how higher education can support sustainability without eroding local distinctiveness.

The theme of policy and external environment (10 articles, 22.2%) pointed to the enduring influence of cultural policy, legal frameworks, and international diplomacy. Peaks in 2022 and 2025 coincide with heightened global discourse on cultural heritage governance. Yet the literature also revealed divergences: some studies emphasized the positive role of state intervention in providing resources and recognition, while others warned that policy frameworks often impose top-down definitions of heritage that may clash with community priorities.

Finally, technology and digital innovation (9 articles, 20.0%) reflected the accelerating integration of digital platforms and media in heritage practice. From online archives to AI-assisted composition, these studies underscore technology's dual role as both an enabler of wider dissemination and a potential disruptor of traditional aesthetics. The surge of interest since 2022 aligns with global trends in digital humanities, but also exposes gaps in understanding how technological mediation affects notions of authenticity and cultural ownership.

Figure 2. Word cloud generated from 40 articles

A word cloud was generated to illustrate frequently occurring terms in the corpus (Figure 2). Dominant keywords—heritage, tradition, identity, festival, and community—reflect the prevailing

framing of folk music as intangible cultural heritage and a source of cohesion. Terms such as education and knowledge indicate sustained interest in intergenerational learning.

More critically, the visualization highlights a tension: folk music is invoked both as a marker of national identity and as a practice of community diversity. This duality highlights ongoing debates about whether sustainability should be advanced through top-down heritage frameworks or bottom-up community initiatives—a theme that is further elaborated in the following section on community and social mechanisms.

**Figure 3.** Articles based on the country of publication
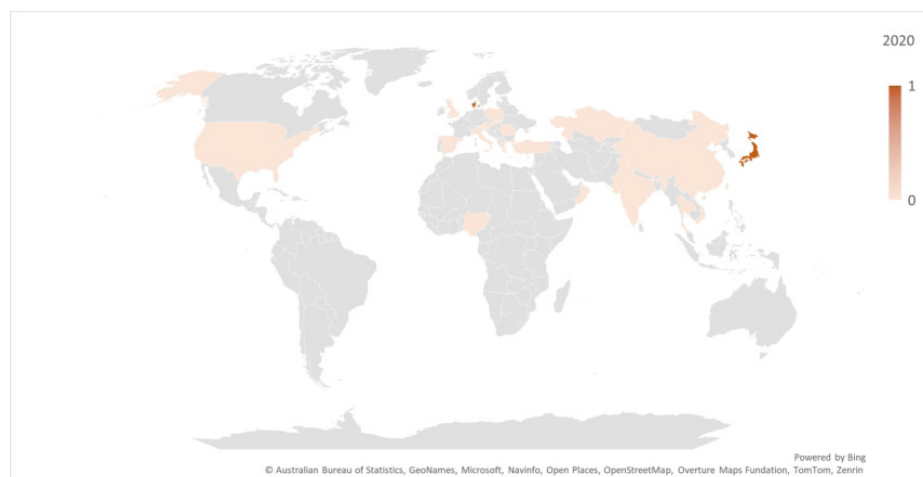
The geographical distribution of publications (Figure 3) shows that Japan, China, the United States, and Germany produce the highest volume of research, indicating relatively stronger institutional support and scholarly networks for folk music research. In contrast, emerging work from Vietnam, Slovakia, and India points to a growing diversification of perspectives. This uneven distribution highlights both regional concentrations of expertise and gaps in cross-cultural comparison, raising questions about how global discourse can be better integrated to encompass underrepresented contexts.

Figure 4. Articles per year of publication
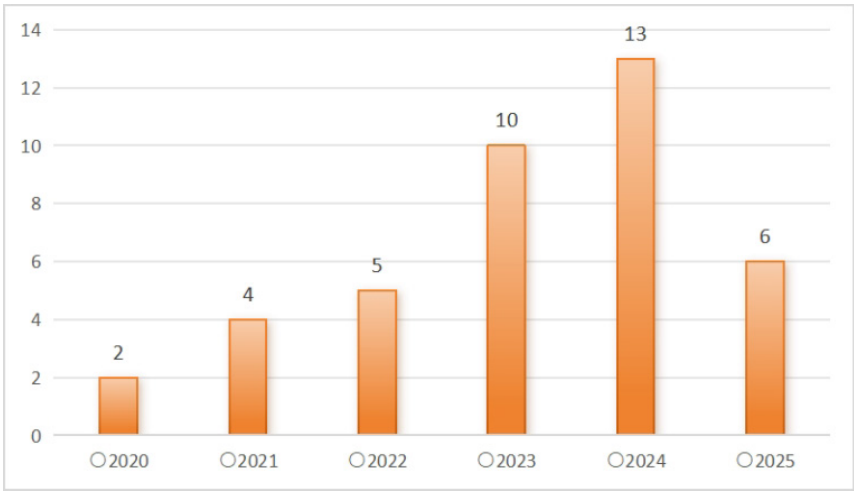
The publication trend on folk music sustainability shows a clear upward trajectory from 2020 to 2024, peaking at 13 articles in 2024 (Figure 4). Although a slight decline is visible in 2025, the year remains ongoing, suggesting continued growth in scholarly interest. This steady increase indicates that the topic has become a well-established area of academic inquiry, rather than a temporary concern.

Figure 5. Number of articles per periodical
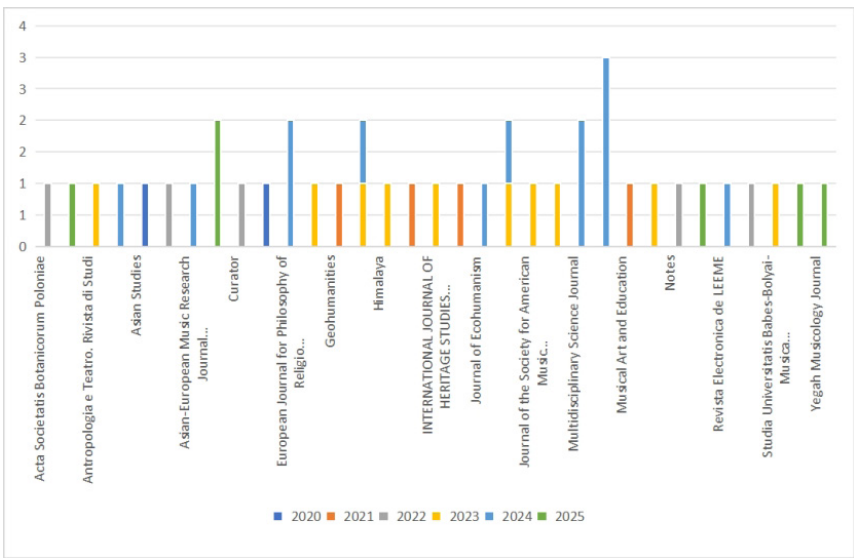
Journal distribution further highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Articles have appeared in leading outlets across music, heritage, and cultural studies, including the *Journal*
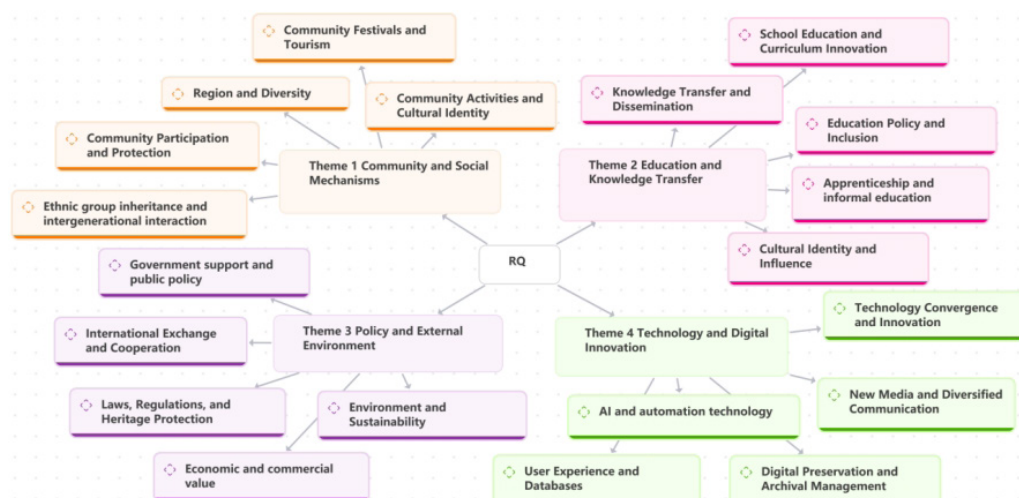
of the Society for American Music, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Popular Music*, *GeoHumanities*, *Curator,* and *Música Hodie*. However, most journals have published only a single article on the subject, underscoring the field's fragmentation and the absence of a dedicated scholarly forum. Additional outputs from regional or non-core journals are listed in the Appendix to illustrate broader geographical diversity.

3.2 Qualitative results

The qualitative analysis identified four interconnected themes (Figure 6). Rather than appearing in isolation, many studies linked multiple dimensions—for example, educational policy often intersected with community identity and digital dissemination. This reflects a shift toward viewing folk music transmission within interdependent socio-cultural systems.

The overlaps also reveal key tensions: digital innovation expands access but can challenge authenticity, while heritage policies may support preservation yet conflict with community priorities. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approaches to address the complexities of sustaining folk music today.

Figure 6. Overall network for folk music education

3.2.1 Community and Social Mechanisms

The sustainability of folk music is closely tied to community-based practices, including festivals, local traditions, and shared cultural memory. Across the literature, community participation and regional identity consistently emerge as crucial drivers of preservation. Yet scholars also debate the limits of community agency: while grassroots initiatives foster resilience and authenticity, they are often vulnerable to pressures of commercialization and external policy agendas. This tension highlights the importance of situating community mechanisms not only as cultural resources but also as sites of negotiation between local actors and broader social forces (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Network of the Community and Social Mechanisms

Community-based practices remain at the heart of sustaining folk music. Across contexts, scholars emphasize that traditions endure when they are embedded in everyday communal life, rituals, and local identity. For instance, Kuang (2022) demonstrates how grassroots participation, complemented by state-supported initiatives, revives endangered musical forms in China, while Hrvatin

(2020) illustrates how community associations in Japan sustain authenticity while accommodating innovation. Together, these cases highlight the negotiation between tradition and modernity, where local agency both preserves and reshapes cultural practice.

Tourism further complicates this dynamic. Studies in Appalachia (Chaney, 2025) and Ibiza and Formentera (Cirer-Costa, 2024) demonstrate how heritage festivals transform music into commodities that reinforce community identity and enable intergenerational transmission. Yet these findings also expose tensions: while tourism provides economic viability, it risks reframing heritage primarily for consumption, raising questions about authenticity versus market adaptation.

Within popular culture, Majsova and Šepetavc (2023) and Kouvarou & Papadakis (2025) reveal how folk-pop fusions in Slovenia and Cyprus reconfigure identity through multicultural interaction, suggesting that community is not bound by geography alone but also shaped by diaspora and media networks. Wagner (2023) extends this argument by demonstrating how the YouTube circulation of Gaddi music facilitates regional identity formation in India's digital diaspora. These studies collectively foreground the expanding arenas of "community"—from villages to festivals, and now to online platforms.

Overall, the literature converges on the idea that sustainability depends less on isolated preservation efforts than on multi-layered social processes involving intergenerational dialogue, community self-organization, and external collaborations. At the same time, unresolved tensions persist: how can communities strike a balance between authenticity and innovation, local control and state policy, and cultural values and economic imperatives? Addressing these contradictions remains crucial to advancing the sustainability of folk music. Additional regional and non-core case studies are presented in Appendix A to illustrate broader geographical diversity.

3.2.2 Education and Knowledge Transfer

Education remains a critical channel for sustaining folk music, linking cultural identity, intergenerational continuity, and curricular innovation. Across the literature, scholars agree that systematic educational initiatives—whether through schools, apprenticeship models, or community workshops—are essential for maintaining the relevance of intangible musical heritage in contemporary society (Figure 8). At the same time, debates persist: how can institutional curricula integrate folk traditions without eroding their contextual authenticity, and how can informal learning adapt to changing social environments? These questions reveal both the promise and the unresolved tensions of education as a vehicle for cultural sustainability.

Figure 8. Network of Education and Knowledge Transfer
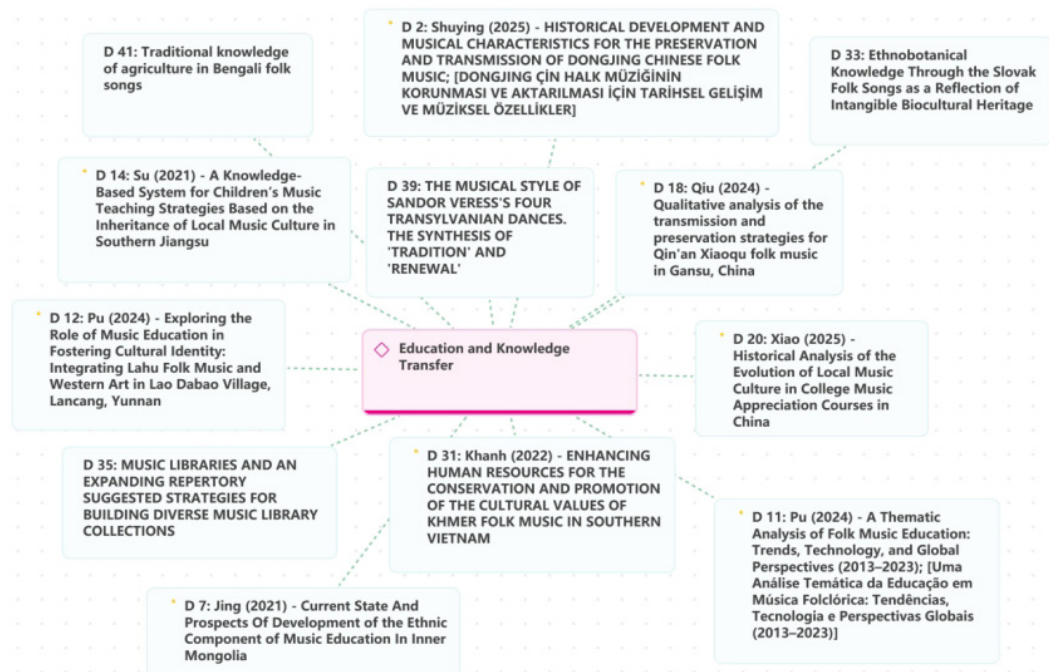
Education is widely regarded as a cornerstone of folk music sustainability, but the literature reveals significant divergences in how knowledge transfer is conceptualized and implemented. At the tertiary level, Xiao (2025) emphasizes the need for curricula to connect directly with local music history, while Qiu et al.

(2024) demonstrate that informal learning traditions, such as oral transmission, remain indispensable for preserving regional opera. These perspectives highlight a persistent tension between institutionalization and vernacular practice, raising questions about how formal education can support sustainability without undermining contextual authenticity.

Beyond pedagogy, systemic reviews point to broader transformations. Miao et al. (2024), in their thematic analysis of folk music education (2013–2023), identify cross-cultural and technological integration as emerging trends, calling for stronger links between digital archiving, teacher training, and intercultural awareness. Similarly, Khanh (2022) illustrates how training programs for Khmer music in Vietnam not only preserve heritage but also reproduce cultural values, positioning education as both a conservation tool and a site of cultural negotiation.

At the infrastructural level, Abbazio et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of diversified music libraries in expanding repertoires and supporting institutional continuity. Together, these contributions suggest that the educational domain is moving toward a multi-level model that bridges schools, communities, and archives.

Yet several gaps persist. While many studies affirm the role of education in revitalization, few address how digital and informal modes of learning intersect, or how cultural identity formation is mediated when folk traditions are absorbed into standardized curricula. Moreover, reliance on state or institutional frameworks risks sidelining community-led approaches, underscoring the need for more comparative and cross-contextual research.

3.2.3 Policy and External Environment

Policy frameworks and external structural forces form a crucial context for the sustainability of folk music. Legal protection, educational regulations, cultural diplomacy, tourism, and globalization together create the "external ecology" within which traditions evolve (Figure 9). Across the literature, scholars agree that

supportive policies can provide resources and recognition, yet they also caution that top-down frameworks often impose standardized definitions of heritage that may conflict with community priorities. This dual role of policy—as both enabler and constraint—emerges as a central theme in understanding how folk music is shaped within broader socio-political environments.

Figure 9. Network of the Policy and External Environment
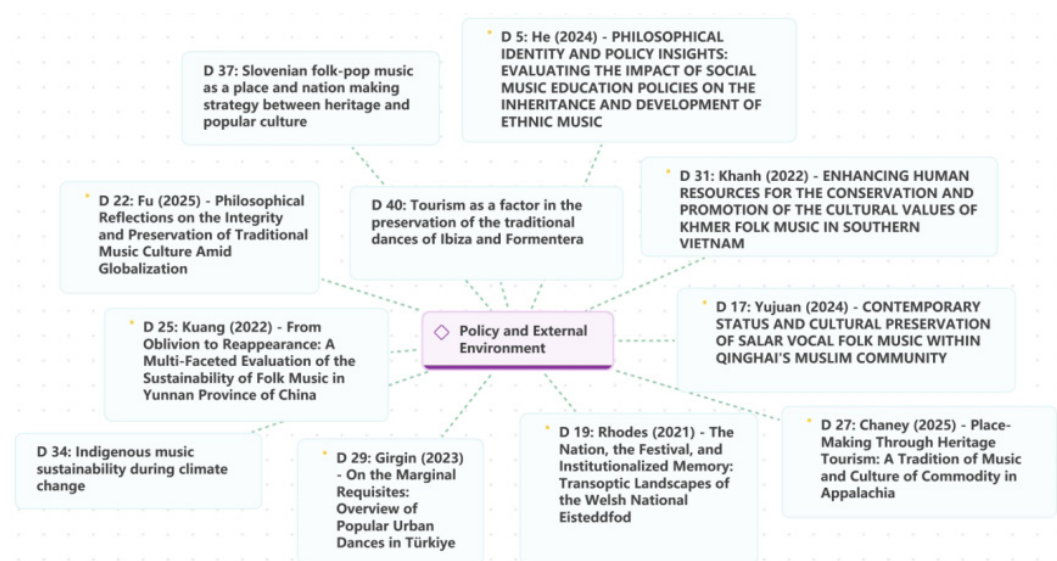
Recent research highlights that policy frameworks play a decisive role in shaping the sustainability of folk music, yet they serve as both enablers and constraints. He (2024) shows how sociocultural education policies legitimize minority musical traditions within formal systems, while Khanh (2022) demonstrates how capacity-building initiatives in Vietnam's Khmer community translate policy into concrete training and resource allocation. Together, these studies highlight the potential of policy to strengthen identity, though they also reveal that effectiveness often depends on its coordination with grassroots initiatives.

From the perspective of institutional culture, Rhodes (2021) illustrates how the Welsh National Eisteddfod institutionalizes collective memory, while Fu (2025) cautions that globalization

challenges cultural integrity, calling for diversity-oriented policy frameworks that prioritize resilience. These perspectives underscore the tension between policy as cultural empowerment and policy as standardization.

The economic dimension of policy is particularly evident in cultural tourism. Chaney (2025) and Cirer-Costa (2024) both show how tourism planning extends opportunities for cultural display but risks diluting authenticity, highlighting the fragile balance between economic viability and cultural preservation. Similarly, Kuang & He (2022) document the constructive role of government-led initiatives in Yunnan, but stress that outcomes hinge on their alignment with community agency—demonstrating the interdependence of top-down structures and bottom-up practices.

At a global level, Harrison (2020) argues that climate change poses a threat to Indigenous music systems, emphasizing the need for integrated environmental and cultural policies. Šepetavc & Majsova (2024) add that Slovenian folk-pop, supported by state and commercial policy, now serves as both a platform for national identity and international exchange. These findings suggest that the sustainability of folk music cannot be addressed through cultural policy alone, but requires cross-sectoral governance that links education, economy, environment, and diplomacy.

Taken together, the literature demonstrates that policy is not merely a regulatory framework but a platform of negotiation where authenticity, identity, and adaptation are constantly contested. Future work should further explore intersectoral governance models that can safeguard cultural specificity while ensuring adaptability to global pressures.

3.2.4 Technology and Digital Innovation

With the rapid advancement of technology, digital innovation has emerged as a transformative pathway for the transmission of folk music. Technology not only expands the tools available for preserving intangible cultural heritage but also reshapes the modes of music dissemination, re-creation, and education. Since

2020, studies have shown that emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence, digital archiving, online platforms, and algorithmic music generation—have become pivotal in promoting the sustainability of folk music across various regions worldwide (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Network of Technology and Digital Innovation
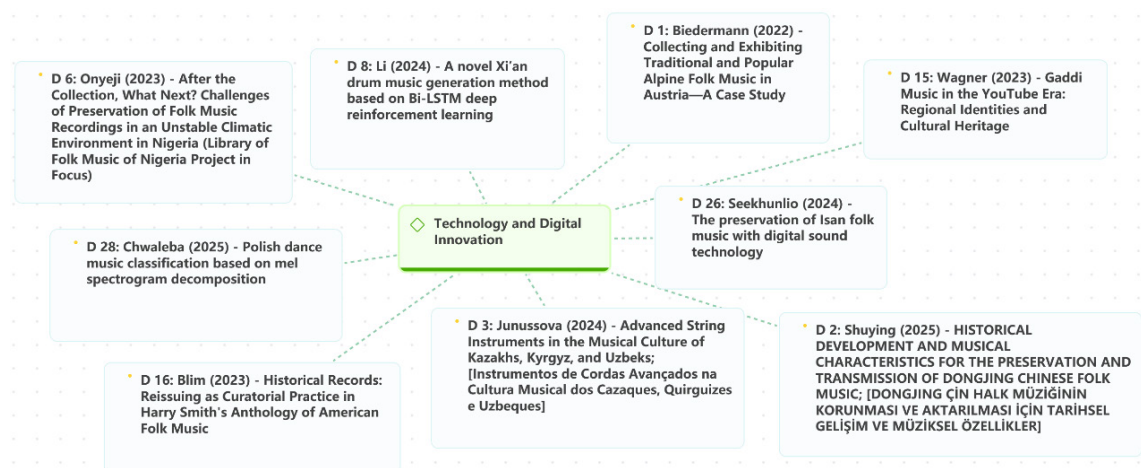
Digital innovation has become a transformative pathway in the sustainability of folk music, enabling new modes of preservation, dissemination, and creative reinterpretation. Several core areas of research stand out. In the field of artificial intelligence, Li et al. (2024) demonstrate how Bi-LSTM reinforcement learning can generate rhythm patterns for Xi'an drum music that retain stylistic authenticity while fostering exploratory creativity, suggesting future potential for "machine–human" collaboration.

In the domain of archiving and curatorial practice, Biedermann (2022) shows how digital exhibitions of Alpine folk music enhance public engagement, while Blim (2023) highlights how the digital restoration and reissue of Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music enable contemporary reinterpretations of historical recordings. These contributions underscore the growing role of digital platforms not only as storage media but also as interactive cultural spaces.

The role of online platforms has been particularly emphasized by Wagner (2023), who illustrates how YouTube circulation both expands access and fosters new forms of regional identity, while also raising questions of commodification and standardization. This reflects a recurring tension across the literature: technology can democratize access and stimulate innovation, yet it may simultaneously erode contextual authenticity and detach music from its socio-cultural roots.

Taken together, these studies reveal that technology is not a neutral tool but an active participant in shaping cultural dynamics. The "technological turn" in folk music research is thus characterized by cross-media integration, multi-stakeholder involvement, and platformization. Moving forward, scholars increasingly stress the need for ethically informed and context-sensitive frameworks that can balance innovation with cultural diversity, ensuring that digital strategies reinforce rather than undermine sustainable transmission.

3.3 Discussion

The four themes identified—community and social mechanisms, education and knowledge transfer, policy and external environment, and technology and digital innovation—are not discrete categories but interdependent dimensions of a broader sustainability framework. Community practices provide the cultural foundation for transmission, yet their vitality increasingly relies on educational systems, supportive policies, and technological mediation. Conversely, institutional curricula and state-led initiatives gain legitimacy only when they are grounded in local participation and community identity.

At the same time, these intersections expose critical tensions and contradictions. Educational standardization can preserve folk traditions, but it also risks eroding contextual authenticity. Policy frameworks may offer resources and recognition, yet impose top-down definitions that conflict with grassroots priorities. Digital

platforms democratize access but often commodify heritage or disconnect it from its socio-cultural roots. These findings suggest that sustainability is less a linear process of "preservation" than a dynamic negotiation among stakeholders operating at multiple levels.

What emerges is the need for a holistic governance model that integrates bottom-up and top-down strategies, balances authenticity with adaptation, and embeds ethical safeguards into technological innovation. Such a model would align with broader frameworks in ethnomusicology, heritage studies, and cultural policy, emphasizing that the long-term survival of folk music depends not only on protecting tradition but also on enabling creative, inclusive, and context-sensitive transformation.

4. Summarizing and future learning

This review synthesized recent scholarship (2020–2025) on the sustainable development of folk music, identifying four interrelated domains: community and social mechanisms, education and knowledge transfer, policy and external environment, and technology and digital innovation. Collectively, the findings confirm that the vitality of folk music cannot be understood in isolation but must be situated within broader socio-cultural dynamics.

First, community-based mechanisms remain indispensable, sustaining folk traditions through ritual, festivals, and participatory structures. Studies converge on the view that grassroots agency ensures resilience and authenticity; yet, they also highlight tensions that arise when community initiatives intersect with state agendas or tourism-driven commodification.

Second, educational pathways reveal a diversification of practices, ranging from school curricula to apprenticeship models and digital media. While formal education provides structure and legitimacy, it risks detaching traditions from their cultural contexts.

Conversely, informal and digital modes offer flexibility but often lack institutional recognition. Future work should explore how these modes can be better integrated to strike a balance between authenticity and accessibility.

Third, the policy environment emerges as a decisive external force. Supportive frameworks can provide resources and recognition, yet they also risk imposing top-down definitions of heritage that conflict with local practices. The literature reveals a gap in understanding how cultural policy can operate across sectors—linking education, environment, and economy—to support sustainability without constraining diversity.

Ultimately, technology and digital innovation are transforming the preservation and dissemination of information. Core studies show that AI, archiving systems, and online platforms democratize access and foster new identities, but they also expose traditions to risks of homogenization and commodification. The challenge lies not in the tools themselves but in developing ethically informed, context-sensitive strategies that align innovation with community priorities.

Taken together, these insights suggest that sustaining folk music requires a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach that bridges community agency, educational reform, policy design, and technological mediation. Future scholarship should move beyond descriptive documentation toward building integrated theoretical frameworks—drawing on ethnomusicology, heritage studies, and applied cultural policy—that can guide practice across diverse contexts. Such frameworks will be essential for ensuring that folk music not only survives but also thrives as a dynamic and adaptive cultural resource in the twenty-first century.

In aligning with broader theoretical perspectives, future research should also engage more explicitly with the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework, which emphasizes safeguarding through community participation, intergenerational transmission, and the recognition of cultural diversity. Embedding

folk music studies within this global paradigm would help to situate local practices within an international discourse of heritage sustainability. At the same time, drawing on the principles of applied ethnomusicology (Harrison, 2020), scholars can reframe folk music not only as an object of study but as a collaborative practice involving researchers, practitioners, and communities in co-creating strategies for resilience. By combining the normative orientation of UNESCO with the participatory ethos of applied ethnomusicology, future work can move beyond preservationist rhetoric toward the design of context-sensitive, dialogic, and ethically grounded models for sustaining folk music in the twenty-first century.

Building on the findings of this review, several directions emerge for advancing the sustainable development of folk music.

First, future studies should develop evaluative frameworks to assess the effectiveness of cultural policy. Multilayered models that combine longitudinal quantitative data with qualitative insights—such as content analysis and stakeholder interviews—would allow scholars to assess how grassroots initiatives interact with state-led interventions (He et al., 2024; Kuang & He, 2022). This line of inquiry could reveal not only the successes but also the unintended consequences of policy design.

Second, there is a pressing need to explore the dynamic relationship between artificial intelligence and cultural locality. While AI-driven tools, such as Bi-LSTM rhythm models (Li et al., 2024), demonstrate promising creative applications, they also risk algorithmic homogenization of musical traditions (Shuying & Chuangprakhon, 2025). Future research should critically examine how AI reshapes indigenous musical structures, meanings, and ownership.

Third, positioning folk music within the broader agenda of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers a valuable reframing. Beyond heritage preservation, folk music is understood to contribute to equitable education, inclusive cultural

participation, and resilient communities (Khanh, 2022, p. 202; Miao et al., 2024). Such an approach would integrate folk music research into global debates on sustainability and social equity.

Fourth, scholars must address issues of cultural data governance and digital ethics. As traditions increasingly circulate on platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, new challenges arise concerning visibility, representation, and cultural rights (Onyeji & Onyeji, 2023; Wagner, 2023). Developing ethical frameworks for multilingual, multiparty, and multi-platform contexts will be crucial in ensuring that digital strategies reinforce, rather than undermine, cultural diversity.

Finally, future work should be grounded in broader theoretical paradigms. The UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) framework offers a global perspective, emphasizing the safeguarding of cultural heritage through community participation, intergenerational transmission, and cultural diversity. Complementing this, the principles of applied ethnomusicology (Harrison, 2020) highlight collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and communities in co-creating strategies for resilience. Combining these perspectives would enable the design of context-sensitive, dialogic, and ethically grounded models that move beyond preservationist rhetoric and embrace creative transformation.

In sum, advancing the sustainable development of folk music requires a shift from fragmented interventions toward integrated, interdisciplinary, and participatory frameworks. By situating folk music within global sustainability agendas while remaining attentive to local cultural specificities, future scholarship can help ensure that these traditions not only survive but thrive as dynamic resources in the twenty-first century.

5. Conclusion

This review synthesized contemporary scholarship (2020–2025) on the sustainable development of folk music, identifying four interdependent domains: community, education, policy, and technology. Collectively, these studies show that sustainability is not a static act of preservation but a dynamic negotiation of continuity and change, shaped by cultural identity, institutional frameworks, and technological mediation.

At the community level, folk music sustains cohesion and a sense of belonging, although it is challenged by globalization and commercialization. Educational strategies recontextualize traditions in modern settings but risk standardization. Policy frameworks provide recognition and resources, yet may clash with grassroots practices. Digital innovation expands access and creativity while raising pressing concerns of ethics, ownership, and contextual integrity.

In conclusion, the sustainable development of folk music requires an integrated and participatory approach that bridges bottom-up agency with top-down structures, tradition with innovation, and local specificity with global agendas. Anchoring this effort in the UNESCO ICH paradigm and the collaborative ethos of applied ethnomusicology can guide the construction of living, co-creative, and ethically grounded ecosystems where folk music thrives as both cultural heritage and contemporary practice in the digital age.

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Appendix

Appendix A. (Supplementary Case Studies on Community and Social Mechanisms)

Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Key Focus
Lam (2023)	Preserving Folk Music in Community Cultural Events as a Method of Preserving Traditional Heritage: A Case Study of the Ta Oi Ethnic Group in Thua Thien-Hue Province, Vietnam	*Malaysian Journal of Music*	Community rituals and cultural continuity in Vietnam
Girgin (2023)	On the Marginal Requisites: Overview of Popular Urban Dances in Türkiye	*Musicologist*	Urban dance and community engagement
Shuying & Chuangprakhon (2025)	Historical Development and Musical Characteristics for the Preservation and Transmission of Dongjing Chinese Folk Music	*Yegah Musicology Journal*	Integration of ritual, education, and digital strategies in China
Yelemanova (2024)	Kazakh Traditional Song and Musical Heritage of Abay	*Música Hodie*	Cultural reforms and identity in Kazakh traditions
Alkiyumi (2023)	The Investigation of Psychological Motives of Creative Abilities in the Omani Musical Intelligence	*Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*	Psychological and spiritual motivations in community music-making

Appendix A. (Supplementary Case Studies on Education and Knowledge Transfer)

Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Focus
Su (2021)	Knowledge-Based System for Children's Music Teaching	*IJPRI/Pattern Recognition & AI*	Algorithmic approach to folk pedagogy
Jing (2021)	Ethnic Component of Music Education in Inner Mongolia	*Musical Art and Education*	Institutional development in minority education
Shuying & Chuangprakhon (2025)	Transmission of Dongjing Music	*Yegah Musicology Journal*	Blending ritual and education
Baránková (2022)	Ethnobotanical Knowledge through Slovak Folk Songs	*Acta Societatis Botanicorum Poloniae*	Cross-disciplinary case, plants music

Alam et al. (2024)	Agricultural Knowledge in Bengali Folk Songs	*Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*	Folk music as agronomic knowledge
Fekete (2023)	Musical Style of Sándor Veress	*Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Musica*	Fusion of folk idioms in conservatory teaching

Appendix A. (Supplementary Case Studies on Policy and External Environment)

Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Focus
Yujuan (2024)	Contemporary Status and Cultural Preservation of Salar Vocal Folk Music	*Regional journal*	Role of religion, language, and policy in Muslim minority communities
Girgin (2023)	Urban Fringe Dance Cultures	*Musicologist*	Call for inclusive policies to protect informal cultural spaces

Appendix A. (Supplementary Case Studies on Technology and Digital Innovation)

Author(s) & Year	Title	Journal	Focus
Onyeji (2023)	Challenges of Preserving Folk Music Recordings in Nigeria	*Fontes Artis Musicae* (library/archival, niche)	Issues of unstable environments and recording preservation
Chwaleba (2025)	Polish Dance Music Classification	*Advances in Science and Technology Journal*	AI classification using mel spectrogram
Junussova (2024)	Advanced String Instruments in Central Asia	*Música Hodie*	Regional innovation in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek string instruments

Seekhunlio (2024)	Preservation of Isan Folk Music with Digital Sound Technology	*Multidisciplinary Science Journal*	Applied sound technology case
Shuying (2025)	Transmission of Dongjing Music	*Yegah Musicology Journal*	Combination of ritual and digital approaches

Research ethics committee approval

This study was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards and no participant data or private information was involved throughout the study.

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