

# LOCAL COMMUNITY STRATEGIES FOR SAFEGUARDING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES IN KYRGYZSTAN

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## INTRODUCTION

This article examines examples of initiatives undertaken by visionary local community leaders and activists in collaboration with traditional culture custodians, as well as local and international organizations, aimed at preserving both cultural and natural heritage.

An analysis of these strategies highlights the importance of integrating cultural heritage into contemporary socio-economic systems, contributing to the preservation of identity and continuity of traditions. These strategies strengthen local communities, promote leadership development among women and youth, and serve as a source of cultural and economic resilience, inspiration, and collective responsibility.

The initiatives undertaken demonstrate a balance between preserving cultural traditions and adapting to modern realities. They underscore the inseparable link between cultural heritage and environmental sustainability, helping to maintain equilibrium in both cultural and ecological systems. In the context of globalization and climate change, which lead to the loss of natural heritage and the erosion of cultural diversity, these strategies contribute to broader sustainable development goals and societal well-being.

The study of these local initiatives provides deeper insights into the mechanisms for preserving cultural landscapes amid rapid environmental and social changes. These findings offer valuable experience and perspectives not only for local initiatives but also for global efforts in heritage conservation and the achievement of sustainable development goals.

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## KYRGYZSTAN: BIODIVERSITY AND CULTURAL CROSSROADS

### Fostering Enduring Bonds with Nature

Kyrgyzstan is a country located in the north-eastern part of Central Asia, nestled within the massive mountain systems of the Tian Shan and Pamir-Alay ranges. Over 93 percent of its territory lies at elevations ranging from 1,000 to 7,400 metres above sea level, with 4 percent covered by glaciers. This creates a unique environment for diverse ecosystems. Kyrgyzstan is home to about 1 percent of all known rare, endemic, and endangered plant and animal species on the planet (UNCCD, 2014, pp. 10–13). The preservation of biodiversity is not only directly linked to the well-being of local communities and their access to natural resources but also ensures the continuation of traditional livelihood practices and the preservation of the distinctive culture of the Kyrgyz people.

Pastures are the most significant natural resource. Kyrgyz nomads referred to their lands as *'mal kindiktüü jer,'* which literally means 'land and livestock connected by an umbilical cord.' This metaphor provides insight into the local context. The traditional worldview was holistic, perceiving the entire world as a single organism where all species (including humans) coexist and thrive. Sacred cultural symbols such as *Jer-Ene* (Mother Earth), *Ot-Ene* (Mother Fire), and *Bugu-Ene* (Mother Deer) reflect the inseparable bond between Kyrgyz nomads and Nature. At the core of the nomadic worldview lies the belief that all living beings share one father—the Sun, one mother—the Earth, one blood—Water, and one soul—Air.

In the process of adaptation to the natural and climatic conditions of the habitat, nomadic Kyrgyz have accumulated unique knowledge about natural phenomena and cycles, stars and phases of the moon. And also include pastoral knowledge, including and traditional classification of livestock, ways of their care and treatment; traditional classification of pastures, indicators of evaluation and measures for their improvement; behaviour of wild animals and birds of prey, technologies of processing wool, leather and much more (Doolbekova, 2017). This knowledge, tested by time and practice, became an integral part of their spiritual culture.

Along with this, the system of spiritual and moral values, norms of behaviour, beliefs, rituals and customs provided mechanisms of rigorous adherence, safeguarding and transmission of information. These served as a unifying core and a powerful source, strengthening their spirit and providing resilience and well-being for millennia. This vividly illustrates the concept of traditional ecological knowledge, which encompasses 'knowledge, practices, and beliefs developed through adaptive processes and passed down through generations via cultural transmission' (Berkes, 2012, p. 7).

During the Soviet Era, those who sought to promote Kyrgyz traditions were often accused of nationalism or separatism. Informal educational system, such as the master-apprentice model, were ignored or forgotten. Traditional ecological knowledge about the natural world—including soil diversity, plant seasons, pasture sustainability, medicinal herbs, and more—was dismissed as outdated and primitive.

## **Contemporary Challenges to Cultural and Natural Heritage**

The natural and cultural heritage of Kyrgyzstan is under significant pressure from numerous internal and external threats, driven by socio-economic problems, political instability, and deepening environmental and spiritual crises. The post-Soviet transition, accompanied by the shift to a market economy, has intensified the strain on ecosystems and traditional cultural practices, exacerbating their erosion, which began during the Soviet era.

One of the most pressing threats is the rise in poverty and labour migration, particularly in rural regions, where 65 percent of the population resides (National Statistical Committee, 2024). These trends negatively affect the preservation of traditional culture and the sustainable use of natural resources. Political instability, evidenced by three revolutions (2005, 2010, and 2020), has heightened social tensions and hindered the development of long-term strategies for managing cultural and natural heritage. The reduction of agricultural land is driven not only by soil degradation, salinization, and pasture depletion but also by the alienation of fertile lands for private commercial purposes.

Kyrgyzstan, as part of the Central Asian region, faces extensive environmental challenges, including:

- the reduction of wildlands and the loss of biodiversity, including endemic species of flora and fauna;
- accelerating climate change, manifesting in glacier retreat, deforestation, and desertification;
- the negative impact of extractive industries, particularly mining.

According to the Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting over the past 70 years, the area of glaciers in Kyrgyzstan has decreased by 16 percent.<sup>2</sup> According to the country's Fourth National Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, about 40 percent of pastures under pressure (UNCCD, 2014, p.24). Moreover, the intensive exploitation of natural resources by both local and foreign companies poses significant threats to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cabar.asia/en/kyrgyzstan-lost-over-16-per-cent-of-glaciers-in-the-last-50-years-drought-risk-gets-real-to-the-whole-region>

ecosystems and the access of local communities to their ancestral lands. A particularly pressing issue is the reclamation of radioactive sites left after the extraction of rare earth metals during the Soviet period.

Threats to cultural heritage are both internal and external. Key factors include the growing influence of radical Islamist ideologies, particularly among socially vulnerable and marginalized youth, and the spread of religious fundamentalism, which is often promoted as a solution to spiritual and economic challenges.

The collapse of the Soviet Union created an ideological vacuum that became a foundation for the revival of religious identity as a unifying factor. At the same time, globalization and the influence of mass and pop culture further intensify pressure on Kyrgyzstan's traditional cultural identity, leading to its gradual erosion.

Thus, preserving Kyrgyzstan's natural and cultural heritage requires a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that considers socio-economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions. Long-term strategies are needed to promote sustainable resource management, support traditional practices, and address modern challenges, including climate change and social-economic instability.

### **The Significance of Cultural Landscapes**

The cultural landscapes of Kyrgyzstan reflect unique forms of human interaction with the natural environment, shaped by a traditional way of life rooted in centuries-old ancestral experience. This experience encompasses efficient land and natural resource management, the traditional social organization of communities, profound spiritual culture, and adherence to customs and beliefs. Such interaction not only fostered harmonious relationships with nature but also contributed to the development of sustainable practices for utilizing diverse landscapes, from semi-desert and steppe areas to high-altitude pastures and alpine meadows.

The practice of seasonal migration and adherence to principles of sustainable natural resource use ensured the preservation of biodiversity and ecological balance. Today, pastures and livestock farming continue to play a pivotal role in the national economy and culture, remaining a critical factor in the local and national socio-economic development of Kyrgyzstan.

The cultural landscapes of Kyrgyzstan hold not only ecological but also profound spiritual significance. The symbolism and sacredness of these places are embodied in features such as *mazars* ('*mazar*' from Arabic 'place that is visited'). In Kyrgyz the term has been 'applied broadly to sacred sites of all kinds including springs, trees and rock formations' (Aitpaeva, 2008, p.66). Long-term research

conducted by the Cultural Research Center 'Aigine' has documented 1,176 sacred sites and classified them according to traditional classification (Aigine, 2015).

These locations, where pilgrimages, rituals, and ceremonies are conducted, represent a living testimony to ancient spiritual practices that continue to play an important role in the cultural life of the Kyrgyz people. For example, the largest high-altitude lake, Issyk-Kul, holds special spiritual significance for local communities, who refer to it as the 'third eye of the planet' (Samakov & Berkes, 2016, pp. 213–214). This unique lake is fed by numerous mountain rivers, yet it remains endorheic and does not freeze in winter. Interestingly, the lake's shape resembles an eye, further enhancing its symbolic meaning. Surrounding the lake are many sacred sites, most of which are natural features such as springs, mountains, streams, and trees.

Cultural landscapes have also become spaces for the creation of masterpieces of Kyrgyz culture. These include *yurts*<sup>3</sup> (nomadic dwelling), *shyrdaks* and *ala-kiyiz*<sup>4</sup> (traditional felt rugs), musical instruments, oral epics such as *Manas*,<sup>5</sup> and many other cultural artifacts. These elements illustrate a unique harmony between functionality and aesthetics, rooted in an enduring connection with nature. For example, the *shyrdak* symbolized family well-being and prosperity. Through its ornamentation—comprising several hundred patterns, including zoomorphic, plant-based, and geometric designs—the craftswoman conveyed messages and blessings. *Shyrdaks* were crafted by artisans not for sale but for domestic use (as part of the interior decor of yurts) and were passed down from generation to generation as a family or clan heirloom (CACSARC-kg, 2015, p. 255).

The significance of Kyrgyzstan's cultural landscapes extends far beyond their natural and cultural diversity. They are an embodiment of the unique identity of the Kyrgyz people, reflected in traditional practices such as animal husbandry, hunting, crafts, and music. Their value lies in demonstrating to the world an example of a sustainable way of life, grounded in traditional ecological knowledge and harmonious coexistence with the environment.

With the advent of independence, Kyrgyzstan entered a new phase of recovering the lost meanings of its traditional culture, leading to its renewal and development. At the core of the Kyrgyz traditional culture is intangible cultural heritage (ICH) 'traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants' (UNESCO, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> Traditional knowledge & skills in making Kyrgyz and Kazakh yurts inscribed in 2014 on the ICH List

<sup>4</sup> Art of Kyrgyz Traditional Carpets (knowledge, skills, diversity, the semantics of ornamentation, & the ceremonies of creating carpets) inscribed in 2012 on the ICH List in need of urgent safeguarding

<sup>5</sup> Kyrgyz Epic Trilogy inscribed in 2013 on the ICH List

Despite the rapid processes of globalization and political fluctuations, local communities in Kyrgyzstan have preserved their cultural identity and uniqueness. Today, there is a noticeable increase in the activity of local communities leading the revival of cultural and spiritual practices, values, and the wisdom of the nomadic heritage, even amidst the accelerating trends of globalization and cultural homogenization.

## **VISIONARY COMMUNITIES IN SAFEGUARDING ICH**

Local communities, their leaders, and active advocates, in alliance with cultural practitioners and traditional knowledge bearers, are revitalizing the profound meanings of their heritage. They weave together tradition and innovation, fostering intergenerational connections through collaborative efforts. These communities serve as hubs of cultural renewal, linking traditional practices with contemporary needs and creating a vibrant continuum of cultural expression.

By their nature, these communities are ‘visionary’ as they safeguard traditional knowledge and skills not in isolation but through collective action. They form community organizations, networks, and cooperatives, working closely with cultural practitioners, spiritual leaders, and local and international organizations to protect and enrich ICH in Kyrgyzstan (Taalim-Forum, 2021).

Visionary communities embody the core values of their ancestors, with a profound understanding that preserving and developing natural and cultural heritage remains a cornerstone of sustainable socio-economic development and community well-being. They view cultural heritage not just as a legacy to be preserved but as a dynamic and powerful economic and social resource. This heritage is a unifying force, utilized to drive local development, create employment, generate income and enhance environmental protection.

Local-level development, rooted in the interplay of social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors, significantly improves the well-being of communities by enabling individuals to realize their full potential. Visionary communities act as genuine leaders in safeguarding ICH, leveraging their deep understanding of the importance of continuity and unity to integrate cultural heritage into modern life in ways that align with principles of sustainability.

These communities not only cherish and take pride in their cultural heritage but also enrich it by preserving its profound meanings while discovering new forms of expression. They actively seek allies and garner support from local civil society organizations, drawing the attention of international donors to open new opportunities for income-generating activities. In doing so, visionary communities exemplify how cultural heritage can serve as a foundation for innovation and

sustainable development, ensuring the continuity and relevance of traditions in contemporary society.

### **Local Communities of the Southern Shore of Ysyk-Köl**

One of the striking examples of visionary communities in Kyrgyzstan is the local communities living along the southern shore of Lake Ysyk-Köl (translated from Kyrgyz as ‘hot lake’). The lake plays a crucial role in the region’s ecosystem, supporting biodiversity that includes rare species of animals, birds, fish, and plants. This region is rich in natural landmarks such as glaciers, canyons, waterfalls, hot springs, and alpine meadows. However, the growth of tourism and the impacts of climate change raise concerns about the need for environmental conservation and sustainable management of natural resources.

Local residents primarily engage in transhumant livestock farming, horticulture, traditional crafts, and ethno-tourism. For instance, the village of Kyzyl-Tuu is renowned for its artisanship, with over 100 craftsmen dedicated to producing traditional yurts. According to field research by the public foundation ‘Kiyiz Duino’, the number of *yurt-makers* in the village increased from 126 in 2013 to 167 in 2019. Of these artisans, 10 percent are from the older generation, 60 percent are middle-aged, and 30 percent are young craftsmen.

Field studies conducted by the Taalim-Forum Public Foundation (2020–2021) reveal that *yurt-makers* in the region continue to employ ancient techniques in their craft. Aspiring artisans often learn through workshops and training sessions. However, many still follow the traditional method of apprenticeship, living with a master (*ustat*) to gain comprehensive training and practical experience. Upon completing their training, the *ustats* bless their apprentices (*shakirt*) and ceremonially present them with a piece of the *yurt*’s wooden framework. This relic symbolizes the responsibility to preserve and pass on the heritage, craftsmanship, and traditions of *yurt-making* to future generations.

The artisans of Kyzyl-Tuu village have restored the region’s reputation as the home of the finest *yurt-makers* in Kyrgyzstan. In 2019, the World Crafts Council recognized Issyk-Kul as the ‘World Yurt Capital.’<sup>6</sup> Craftsmen from the region were honoured with the title ‘*Ysyk-Köl Region—Homeland of the Yurt*,’ and six women artisans of the region received UNESCO’s prestigious Seal of Excellence.

The communities of Issyk-Kul exemplify the seamless integration of tradition and modernity. Their work not only preserves an essential element of Kyrgyz cultural heritage but also supports sustainable economic development, ensuring that their

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wccinternational.org/craft-cities/craft-cities-asia-pacific>

unique knowledge and skills remain relevant and celebrated in a rapidly changing world.

The following case studies highlight innovative and community-driven strategies for safeguarding Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and cultural landscapes. Each example illustrates how tradition and modern needs intersect to promote sustainable socio-economic development, environmental stewardship, and cultural continuity. Together, they demonstrate the profound potential of local initiatives in addressing global challenges, such as cultural erosion, economic marginalization, and ecological degradation.

### **Case Study 1: The Eagle People—Identity and Way of Life**

The Eagle People of Bokonbayev village preserve the traditional Kyrgyz practice of falconry, a centuries-old cultural tradition intertwined with the region's identity and natural heritage. This case study exemplifies how the community has transformed heritage conservation into a source of education, economic opportunity, and cultural pride.

*Salbuurun*<sup>7</sup>—traditional complex hunting system of Kyrgyz people, as a living model of coevolution and collaboration between people, hunting birds ('falconry', 'falconer' and 'falcon' covers the use of all species of birds of prey (raptors), such as falcons, eagles, hawks buzzards, etc.), hunting dogs (*taigan*) and horses on landscapes of the Northern and Inner Tien Shan. Today, around 30 families (approximately 50–60 people) in the village keep hunting birds and breed *taigans*. Of these, 85 percent are young people aged 12 to 26, while 15 percent are from the older generation aged 40–60 (Taalim-Forum, 2021).

The leader of this community is hereditary *bürkütchi* (*falconer*; *bürküt*—golden eagle) Almaz Akunov. He established the Salbuurun Ordo—*yurt* camp, which includes five *yurts*, an interactive museum of traditional hunting, a training ground, and the falconry school 'Salbuurunchu Mektebi.' The school employs traditional teaching methods that involve direct interaction between students and master hunters.

This approach helps young people not only master the techniques of traditional archery on horseback or on foot and learn to care for birds of prey but also gain a deeper understanding of the philosophy, worldview, and cultural values of their ancestors. Students at the school learn to observe nature and the behaviour of birds of prey and actively participate in traditional festivals. The training is

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<sup>7</sup> *Salbuurun* (Kyrgyz: Салбуурун) originates from the nomadic tradition of hunting and safeguarding herds from predators, including wolves.



enriched with fascinating stories from the masters, legends, live music, and cultural practices, fostering a sense of pride in their culture and identity.

More than 10 years ago, Almaz Akunov founded the Salbuurun Federation is an association of stewards of traditional falconry. Today, the Federation has over 200 members, including around 30 women from all corners of the country. Members actively revive forgotten traditions, organize festivals, including archery competition, *taigan* races and horse games, and engage youth through informal education to pass down their heritage.

At the initiative of Almaz Akunov, performances by hunters with birds of prey and *taigans*, as well as traditional archery techniques, were included in the program of the World Nomad Games<sup>8</sup> in 2014. Young members of the Federation have successfully represented Kyrgyzstan at these games held in the country, Turkey, and Kazakhstan, earned numerous awards.

The Federation actively collaborates with local and international tourism companies to organize annual festivals, which contribute to the development of ethno-tourism and increase the income of local communities. Support from government bodies, such as the Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology, plays a vital role in its activities. Additionally, the Federation has established ties with Central Asian unions of traditional hunting enthusiasts and international organizations like the International Association for Falconry (IAF).

The case study demonstrates how traditional practices can be revitalized to inspire young generations, foster community cohesion, and contribute to cultural tourism. Their efforts showcase the potential of cultural heritage to generate sustainable livelihoods while preserving ecological balance and cultural identity. The clear vision and successful strategies of the Salbuurun Federation significantly contribute to the preservation, development, and promotion of Kyrgyz intangible cultural heritage at local, national, and international levels.

## **Case Study 2: An Inspiring Ethno-Village ‘Almaluu’**

Almaluu Ethno-Village combines the preservation of traditional crafts with modern tourism, creating a unique model for cultural and economic development. This initiative highlights how Kyrgyz communities are leveraging their rich heritage to build resilient, self-sustaining economies.

Jyldyz Asanakunova, the founder of the ethno-village ‘Almaluu,’ leads a unique

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<sup>8</sup> *Salbuurun* is one of the World Nomads Games’ disciplines; <https://worldnomadgames.com/en/>

initiative to revive and promote traditional Kyrgyz crafts. The complex consists of 22 *yurts*, each decorated using ancient techniques and handmade materials. This *yurt* village has become a popular tourist destination for hiking and horseback tours, birdwatching, and masterclasses featuring guardians and practitioners of traditional knowledge. The ethno-village collaborates with 24 tourism companies, attracting 2,000 to 3,000 tourists annually. This generates income for local artisans, traditional music performers, and service staff.

One of the village's key endeavours is the development of a felt studio and workshop, which has established local production of felt products, including traditional Kyrgyz felt carpets known as *shyrdak* and *ala-kiyiz*. To support this production, 15–20 tons of wool are purchased annually and processed locally, benefiting local farmers. To improve the livelihoods of women in nearby villages, educational programs were launched, engaging 1,500 participants. As a result of these initiatives, trained women have created eight cooperatives, which not only preserve traditional crafts but also provide a stable income: 10–15 percent of participants receive regular orders while working from home.

For interested locals and tourists, the ethno-village offers educational programs encompassing fifteen thematic areas dedicated to elements of traditional culture inscribed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Jyldyz Asanakunova is also actively engaged in preserving the natural heritage of the southern shore of Lake Ysyk-Köl. In partnership with local and international organizations, the National UNESCO Committee, and local authorities, she is developing the idea of creating the 'Teskei' Geopark.<sup>9</sup> This initiative brings together community members and youth leaders, fostering continuity in preserving natural and cultural heritage.

Traditional knowledge and practices passed down through generations, along with new forms of cultural expression, strengthen a sense of identity, pride in culture, and collective responsibility. These initiatives foster community cohesion, supporting resilience in a modern world. The development of ethno-tourism stimulates craftsmanship, encourages locals to learn hospitality and marketing skills, and strengthens the economic self-sufficiency and sustainability of local communities.

The Almaluu Ethno-Village exemplifies the transformative power of cultural heritage as an engine for innovation, empowerment, and environmental sustainability. By integrating traditional crafts into global tourism, it bridges cultural preservation with economic resilience.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://teskei-geopark.com/en>

## **ICH MATTERS TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

### **Connection to SDG 11.4**

Strategies implemented by local communities serve as an effective tool for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11.4, which calls for strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. Successful examples of initiatives aimed at reviving and developing traditional crafts, ethno-tourism, and ecological practices demonstrate how local actions and initiatives contribute to addressing national goals and challenges in Kyrgyzstan while making significant contributions to global goals.

The initiatives not only help preserve cultural landscapes and intangible cultural heritage but also play a key role in enhancing community resilience in the face of changes such as globalization, climate challenges, and migration processes. Such approaches create models of sustainable development in which cultural heritage functions not only as a value of the past but also as an active tool for addressing contemporary issues. Engaging youth and women, enhancing their roles in decision-making and in creating sustainable economic models, shows that preserving traditions can be closely linked to empowering local communities.

Collective Impact of Case Studies of the Eagle People and the Almaluu Ethno-Village illustrate the dynamic relationship between cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable development. By safeguarding Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage, these communities not only celebrate their traditions but also create adaptive models for addressing contemporary socio-economic and environmental challenges. Their work serves as an inspiring example of how grassroots initiatives can contribute to the global goals of cultural and natural heritage preservation, particularly in alignment with SDG 11.4.

### **Local Strategies for Safeguarding Cultural Landscapes**

Collective Impact of Case Studies Together, the case studies of the Eagle People and the Almaluu Ethno-Village illustrate the dynamic relationship between cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable development. By safeguarding Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage, these communities not only celebrate their traditions but also create adaptive models for addressing contemporary socio-economic and environmental challenges. The cases 'demonstrate capacity to safeguard and promote local cultural values, become a cultural and educational centre and contributed to the well-being' (Osmonova & Doolbekova, 2022, pp.42–43).

Their work serves as an inspiring model of how grassroots initiatives can

**Table 1** Key strategies as models

Key strategies	Initiatives	Model potential
Revitalizing Traditional Practices	Case Study 1 showcases how communities can keep ancient practices alive while engaging youth and modern audiences.	Nations with heritage practices at risk of fading (e.g., indigenous hunting or craftsmanship) could replicate apprenticeship models and interactive educational programs that emphasize cultural pride and economic opportunities.
Blending Heritage with Economic Development	Case Study 2 demonstrates how cultural heritage can be integrated into tourism, creating sustainable income streams.	Developing countries could adapt this strategy by promoting community-led heritage tourism initiatives, focusing on empowering local artisans and small businesses.
Women's Empowerment in Heritage Preservation	Case Study 2 highlights the role of gender-inclusive strategies in safeguarding cultural heritage.	Similar programs can be implemented in other regions to involve women in heritage preservation, fostering social cohesion and economic resilience.
Community-Led Conservation	Case studies 1 and 2 exemplify the power of grassroots efforts in sustainable natural resource management.	This approach can inspire other nations to encourage local stewardship of natural landscapes, balancing traditional knowledge with modern conservation science.

contribute to the global goals of cultural and natural heritage preservation, particularly in alignment with SDG 11.4 (see Table 1).

The revival of traditional crafts, such as *yurt*-making and felt production, anchors cultural sustainability by preserving identity and ensuring the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. These practices, when integrated into local economic models, strengthen cultural landscapes and cultivate pride in heritage. Educational programs and cooperative initiatives, particularly for women, drive economic opportunities and empowerment, reducing poverty while fostering resilience. Similarly, engaging youth in environmental education and conservation nurtures future leaders committed to safeguarding both cultural and natural resources.

By inspiring collective responsibility, these initiatives unite communities to tackle shared challenges, adapt to changes, and sustain their unique traditions. Moreover, they serve as best practices and scalable model for other regions, showcasing how grassroots efforts can contribute to achieving national and global sustainable development goals. The findings of the research 'demonstrate that traditional knowledge, skills and experience help local communities survive today's rapidly changing world. ICH has become a source of cultural resilience, inspiration, consolidation, and collective responsibility' (Osmonova & Doolbekova, 2022, p.41).

The proactive strategies of Kyrgyz communities emphasise the indispensable role of cultural and natural heritage in sustainable development frameworks. By preserving traditions while innovating to meet modern demands, these communities pave the way for a future where heritage and progress coexist harmoniously, offering enduring sources of inspiration, resilience, and prosperity.

Visionary local communities in Kyrgyzstan play a crucial role in safeguarding cultural landscapes through innovative and sustainable strategies. By intertwining cultural heritage with economic development and social empowerment, they create resilient systems that address both contemporary challenges and the need to preserve traditions. These initiatives highlight the value of traditional knowledge, community cooperation, and environmental stewardship as key elements in fostering sustainable development.

Like Kyrgyzstan, many nations with significant cultural landscapes face the dual challenges of preserving their heritage while addressing contemporary socio-economic and environmental pressures. The strategies implemented by Kyrgyz communities offer adaptable frameworks for nations grappling with these issues. A robust approach to safeguarding Kyrgyzstan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and cultural landscapes requires integration of cultural and ecological conservation strategies, along with strong support for local, national and international stakeholders.

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<sup>10</sup> Research on ICH Contribution to SDGs – Education and Community Development (FY 2020 – FY 2021) implemented by International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO (IRCI).

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