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Ethical and Philosophical Debates on Commodifying Cultural Heritage via NFTs

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ABSTRACT

The rise of the Non-Fungible Tokens or NFTs has revolutionized the ownership, representation, and preservation of cultural heritage in the digital age to some degree. Using blockchain technology, it is now possible to tokenize both physical artifacts and intangible elements of cultural heritage, so that NFTs create opportunities for wider outreach of museums, galleries, archives, and other cultural institutions as well as for collecting money for the preservation of culture. However, the deeper NFTs become embedded into the field of cultural heritage, the more serious ethical concerns emerge as well—about commodification, ownership, authenticity, and commercialization.

This paper looks closely at the discussions about turning cultural heritage into something tradable through NFTs by weighing both the possibilities and the barriers tied to adopting them. Using ideas from cultural heritage scholarship, commodification studies, digital capitalism, and authenticity debates, the analysis considers whether NFTs act mainly as instruments for preservation, or instead whether they shift heritage into speculative digital assets. A key focus sits on the tension between heritage as a shared human legacy and heritage being treated more and more like a market good inside online economies.

The paper further digs into the tangle of questions around copyright, who owns what, financialization, and even the possible fading of authenticity that can come with digitization and tokenization of cultural artifacts. In a way, NFTs do seem to open innovative pathways for safeguarding and publicizing cultural heritage, but at the same time, they trigger some pretty basic concerns: like who actually controls cultural memory, how heritage should be appraised or valued, and whether market-based approaches match up with the public and shared character of cultural heritage. All things considered, the research concludes in a dualist approach where NFTs are seen as both an opportunity and a threat and, as such, require an approach that is more nuanced and focused on preservation, accessibility, and ethical stewardship.

KEYWORDS

Non-fungible tokens (NFTs), cultural heritage, commodification, blockchain technology, financialisation, digital heritage, preservation of culture

INTRODUCTION

Fast development of digital technologies has influenced cultural heritage preservation, dissemination, and somewhat experience. The term "cultural heritage" refers to tangible objects, such as monuments, artifacts, and archaeological sites, as well as intangible aspects, including traditions, ritual practices, languages, and performing arts, which represent some kind of communal memory and identity of people. In the past, cultural heritage preservation was considered to be a public issue that required not only national but also international collaboration to transfer it to the next generation.¹

Recently, blockchain has emerged as a new hope for protecting and distributing cultural heritage. One of the most notable moves here is the rise of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), which are singular digital assets stored on a blockchain and used to confirm ownership, authenticity, and provenance. At first they got popular mostly via digital art and collectibles, but now museums, galleries, libraries, archives, and other cultural organizations are paying more attention because they think NFTs might help in new ways to protect materials and also engage people with cultural content.² The proponents believe that NFTs can assist in digital preservation, increase access for people, generate funds for conservation, and even establish various connections between cultural institutions and people across the world.³

Though there might be such advantages, the application of NFTs to the field of cultural heritage has raised many philosophical, ethical, and legal questions. The critics state that NFTs contribute to the commodification of cultural heritage because cultural objects and practices are converted to digital tradeable assets, which become subjected to market influence.⁴ These kinds of worries bring up key questions about how cultural value and economic value connect, who owns shared cultural resources, and how heritage is getting

¹UNESCO (1972) *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO. UNESCO (2003) *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

² Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

³ Affini, A. and Ndou, V., 2025, June. *NFTs Opportunities and Challenges for Cultural Heritage Sector: Insights from a Multiple Case Study Perspective*. In the International Conference on Extended Reality (pp. 267-281). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

⁴ Poposki, Z., 2026. *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age*. Thesis Eleven, 192(1), pp.207-228. Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit*. Leisure Studies, pp.1-17.

increasingly financialized inside digital economies. On top of that, problems around copyright authenticity, commercialization, and unequal access have made the conversation more heated about whether it is even right to attach market-based technologies to cultural resources that are often treated as common human inheritances.⁵

The controversy around NFTs is especially important because cultural heritage sits in a kind of unique place in society. It is not like typical stuff that you just buy and resell; heritage derives its worth not only from its market price but also from its historical, educational, symbolic, and social importance. International heritage frameworks stress that cultural heritage should be protected for all humanity, while many scholars maintain that heavy commercialization might hollow out the cultural meanings tied to heritage.⁶ For this reason, introducing NFTs in cultural heritage is a fundamental contradiction between preservation and commodification, innovation and authenticity, and individual ownership and collective stewardship.

This research is a critique of the philosophical and ethical arguments about the commodification of cultural heritage through NFTs. This paper will explore the opportunities offered by NFTs in terms of preservation, accessibility, and public participation and problems associated with financialization, commercialization, ownership, authenticity, and copyright. Utilizing the concepts of cultural heritage, critical theory, digital capitalism, and international heritage studies theories, the aim is to explore whether NFTs should be considered the means of cultural preservation or ways to commodify heritage. The paper claims that despite having an enormous potential for cultural heritage preservation and promotion, the application of NFTs must be done in accordance with the principles of cultural value and ethics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Cultural Heritage

The idea of cultural heritage has transformed through different periods because it now includes more than just monuments and artifacts and historical locations. Heritage is not just

⁵ Çağlayan Aksoy, P. and Özkan Üner, Z., 2021. *NFTs and copyright: challenges and opportunities*. Journal of Intellectual Property Law and Practice, 16(10), pp.1115-1126.

⁶ UNESCO 1972 Convention; Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hewitt, B., 2007. *Heritage as a commodity: are we devaluing our heritage by making it available to the highest bidder via the internet?*. Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions, pp.194-208.

some fixed thing handed down from before. It seems more like a process where people and communities put together their own cultural meanings. Nic Craith, in *Cultural Heritages: Process, Power, Commodification*, wrote about this in 2007, and so did Kockel in *Reflexive Traditions and Heritage Production*. They regard it as a process of interpretation by societies that constantly repeats itself. The definition goes further than just the material aspect; it also refers to practices, languages, and collective memory. This definition is quite complicated because of its multifaceted nature. Contemporary scientists interpret heritage as the process of its active social construction that includes material objects as well as intangible components like traditions and ceremonies and verbal and linguistic heritage and collective memory. Heritage exists as an active process that communities use to determine their valuation of cultural assets instead of being a fixed legacy from historical times.⁷ The theory shows how power relations, together with identity construction and representational systems, decide which cultural elements survive and which communities maintain their traditions. The theory demonstrates how power systems, together with identity dynamics and representational mechanisms, decide which cultural elements survive through time.

Global heritage industry has been able to develop their heritage understanding framework through international collaboration. This includes the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1972 that is concerned with cultural and natural heritage sites with universal importance to everyone and the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention of 2003 that ensures the protection of living heritage and practices.⁸ These existing frameworks have proven the fact that heritage is viewed as common human inheritance, with more value than money.

2. NFTs and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Mezei and Lapatoura in *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market* looked into NFTs for cultural heritage after the market issues. Their 2024 paper points to blockchain helping with documentation at museums and similar places. Authentication comes up too and it seems like sharing assets could work better in some cases. Affini and Ndou from 2025 mention accessibility as a big factor along with public engagement. Value creation shows up in their view of the heritage

⁷Nic Craith, M., 2007. *Cultural heritages: process, power, commodification*. Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions, pp.1-18. Kockel, U., 2007. *Reflexive traditions and heritage production*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 19-33). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

⁸ UNESCO (1972) *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO. UNESCO (2003) *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

sector. Some of these overlaps with the earlier points but it is not totally clear how everything lines up once the market problems are factored in. This might be useful overall. The blockchain system which powers NFTs enables users to verify digital asset authenticity while tracking ownership history through its built-in digital asset ownership system.⁹ Digital cultural organizations now reach audiences through blockchain-based NFTs which establish digital content authenticity.¹⁰ Supporters of NFTs claim that these NFTs assist in protecting cultural heritage which is present physically as well as digitally, while simultaneously ensuring global accessibility to the museum's collection.¹¹

NFT adoption by galleries, museums, and libraries and archives reflects the rising popularity of blockchain technology in the management of heritage assets. It is thought that NFTs would create novel means of engagement with cultural activities, thanks to their decentralized nature and the way in which they provide access to heritage assets.¹² Organizations make use of digital preservation strategies to safeguard heritage assets in cases where war and environmental damage lead to political instability.¹³

Pros of using NFTs as means of preservation have yet to be established by academic research. Therefore, there is constant controversy regarding their efficiency in preserving digital assets for future generations. People discuss whether it will be possible to achieve sustainable technology and preserve digital assets from becoming obsolete, inaccessible, and whether tokenization will help in preserving culture or creating its replicas.¹⁴

3. Commodification and Financialisation of Cultural Heritage

NFTs seem to push art and culture into digital assets that can be bought and sold more directly. Poposki brings this up in his 2026 work, *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the*

⁹ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

¹⁰ Affini, A. and Ndou, V., 2025, June. *NFTs Opportunities and Challenges for Cultural Heritage Sector: Insights from a Multiple Case Study Perspective*. In International Conference on Extended Reality (pp. 267-281). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

¹¹ Affini, A. and Ndou, V., 2025, June. *NFTs Opportunities and Challenges for Cultural Heritage Sector: Insights from a Multiple Case Study Perspective*. In International Conference on Extended Reality (pp. 267-281). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

¹² Siliutina, I., Tytar, O., Barbash, M., Petrenko, N. and Yepyk, L., 2024. *Cultural preservation and digital heritage: challenges and opportunities*. Amazonia Investiga, 13(75), pp.262-273.

¹³ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024)

¹⁴ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age. It feels like an extension of how things get turned into commodities. Hutchins and Fordyce make a similar point in their work, *Financializing leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles, and commodification without limit.* Their point of emphasis is on how the act of collecting becomes more of an act of speculation, which generates income, than the act of acquiring items for their own sake. As per Eldho's perspective as highlighted in his book *Art in the Age of Digital Capitalism: A Marxist Critique of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*, this entire discussion revolves around digital capitalism, whereby the exchange value becomes more important than any form of cultural value. Some parts of the argument feel like they could go further but stop short. Research shows that Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) establish a system that enables the market to control the valuation of cultural and artistic works instead of following their natural worth.¹⁵ The system treats heritage as a marketable commodity, which produces financial returns through investment opportunities and speculative activities.

Research studies about digital collectible commercialization show that NFT markets use storytelling to make speculative trading seem normal because they compare tokenized assets to conventional collector activities.¹⁶ These procedures make it possible for financial systems to include leisure and culture in their functions and thus transform them from individual identity and social relations into the assets of the financial market system.¹⁷

NFTs are examined using approaches from Marxist and critical theories, which evaluate the whole system of digital capitalism to which the assets belong. Digital capitalism uses blockchain technology that acts as a way of commodification of cultural value within the entire system of digital capitalism.¹⁸ The development of these assets creates a risk that cultural heritage will move from its educational and historical value to marketable assets, which would destroy their community-based worth.¹⁹

4. Authenticity, Ownership, and Legal Concerns

¹⁵ Poposki, Z., 2026. *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age.* Thesis Eleven, 192(1), pp.207-228.

¹⁶ Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit.* Leisure Studies, pp.1-17.

¹⁷ Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit.* Leisure Studies, pp.1-17.

¹⁸ Eldho, J.J., 2024. *Art in the Age of Digital Capitalism: A Marxist Critique of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs).* In *Intimate Capitalism: Political Economy of Labour and Culture in Creative Industries* (pp. 75-91). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

¹⁹ Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification.* In *Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions* (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Researchers have dedicated their efforts to study multiple aspects of cultural authenticity and ownership rights and legal protection systems which operate in the modern world. Walter Benjamin developed his influential "aura" theory which demonstrates how modern technology has taken away the special time and place value from cultural artifacts.²⁰ The NFT approach makes one wonder whether tokenized heritage retains its value or simply creates digital replicas of authentic heritage assets.

There have been several issues highlighted by legal experts in the way that individuals comprehend copyright protection using the NFT process. The acquisition of an NFT fails to establish copyright ownership because it creates questions about the legal rights which apply to digital cultural assets.²¹ The three ownership structures create major problems for cultural heritage because they tend to clash when it comes to decision-making and resource distribution. Heritage objects contain cultural values which belong to the public domain so their sale through NFTs creates ethical dilemmas for private owners and public organizations.²²

RESEARCH GAP

Existing academic works show an increasing number of researchers who study the connection between NFTs and cultural heritage. Blockchain technology gets the focus of scholars studying its capacity to secure assets, while allowing individuals to connect with digital content, although some of them also look at the ways blockchain technology creates financial markets systems that will undermine ownership rights. The research studies have proved their significance, but scientists still should continue researching the effect of NFT applications on cultural heritage in relation to philosophy, ethics, and law through multidisciplinary approaches. The current academic research dedicates its focus to two separate areas which study technological progress and market behavior yet it fails to study how cultural worth stands against economic worth in society. The research project aims to study NFT technology for its ability to protect cultural assets without creating market-based commercial value for these assets.

²⁰ Benjamin, W., 2018. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In *A museum studies approach to heritage* (pp. 226-243). Routledge.

²¹ Çağlayan Aksoy, P. and Özkan Üner, Z., 2021. *NFTs and copyright: challenges and opportunities*. Journal of Intellectual Property Law and Practice, 16(10), pp.1115-1126.

²² Hewitt, B., 2007. *Heritage as a commodity: are we devaluing our heritage by making it available to the highest bidder via the internet?*. Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions, pp.194-208.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative methods together with doctrinal analysis to study the philosophical and ethical disputes which arise from using Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) to commercialize cultural heritage assets. The research study is highly dependent on secondary data sources that have been acquired by researchers from various academic journal papers, books, and international laws concerning protection of cultural heritage, blockchain technology, and intellectual property rights.²³

The study employs a doctrinal approach to analyze the legal systems that are international and safeguard cultural heritage through the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection Convention (1972) and the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Convention (2003).²⁴ These conventions offer the necessary normative basis for cultural heritage as a shared asset that should be preserved and stewarded responsibly.

Qualitative research will be conducted in this research paper in order to explore different perspectives that scholars have proposed in their research. Scholars have considered how NFTs can help individuals in conserving cultural heritage in an easy-to-access way as well as authenticating it.²⁵ There exists opposition between critical theorists and cultural heritage scholars due to their concern over the negative impact of commercialization on heritage by way of monetary considerations and disputes over ownership and authenticity.²⁶ This research examines various perspectives on how market-driven blockchain networks affect cultural heritage operations through the impact on ethics and philosophy.

The research includes theoretical frameworks from cultural heritage studies together with critical theory and Marxist digital capitalism critiques and Walter Benjamin's authenticity

²³ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Routledge 2006); Regina Bendix, Aditya Eggert and Arnika Peselmann (eds), *Heritage Regimes and the State* (Universitätsverlag Göttingen 2012).

²⁴ *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (adopted 16 November 1972, entered into force 17 December 1975) 1037 UNTS 151; *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (adopted 17 October 2003, entered into force 20 April 2006) 2368 UNTS 3.

²⁵ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024). Affini, A. and Ndou, V., 2025, June. *NFTs Opportunities and Challenges for Cultural Heritage Sector: Insights from a Multiple Case Study Perspective*. In the International Conference on Extended Reality (pp. 267-281). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

²⁶ Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit*. Leisure Studies, pp.1-17.

theory which explains cultural object "aura" phenomena.²⁷ These theoretical constructs will be used to evaluate whether cultural heritage tokenization using NFTs preserves cultural heritage or turns it into products of the market that work via the financial system.

The methodology of this research involves the interdisciplinary study of the issue by combining the legal analysis with philosophy and cultural heritage studies in order to fully explore the challenges of NFTs to the cultural heritage protection and market development. This research project is dedicated to descriptive analysis of existing literature and legislation without any data collection.

NFTs AS TOOLS FOR PRESERVATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Interest in Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) has been gained by the cultural heritage industry due to the fact that NFTs have innovative solutions for the protection and dissemination of cultural heritage assets. Due to the fact that the digital archive that is built on the principles of the blockchain is capable of creating immutable records of the ownership and full history of the provenance and authenticity of the asset, this was discovered and has inspired museums to explore NFTs for the protection of their assets.²⁸

Supporters of NFT adoption argue that blockchain technology can significantly enhance accessibility to cultural heritage. People throughout history have experienced restricted access to heritage resources because of three main obstacles which include location-based restrictions and financial constraints and organizational rules. People can now access virtual exhibitions and digital collections and online archives because digital technology has eliminated some of the obstacles which used to exist. The platform enables users to access cultural content through decentralized systems while it tracks each item's genuine origin and complete ownership background.²⁹

The protection of intangible cultural assets stands as a major opportunity which NFTs can help preserve through their technology. The preservation of physical artifacts and monuments

²⁷ Benjamin, W., 2018. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In *A museum studies approach to heritage* (pp. 226-243). Routledge.

²⁸ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasuries? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

²⁹ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasuries? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

has been the main focus of traditional preservation work but scientists have struggled to capture and protect oral traditions and rituals and performing arts and community knowledge. The process of tokenization enables digital practice documentation which users can access through distributed storage systems to reach bigger audiences.³⁰ The system operates according to UNESCO standards which state that nations must safeguard their cultural identity through active protection of intangible heritage elements.³¹

The implementation of NFT initiatives will establish fresh financial opportunities which cultural institutions will be able to use. Multiple museums together with heritage organizations encounter ongoing financial obstacles which particularly affect their operations in developing countries. Organizations can generate funds through NFT distribution which links to their collection items and cultural experiences to support their preservation work and restoration activities and educational programs.³² from this perspective, NFTs function as a novel system which enables financial support for preservation activities.

However, these benefits should not be accepted uncritically. Organizations need digital tokens to create permanent records which maintain their operational value. Digital tokens function to prove ownership of digital items yet they do not retain original cultural artifacts together with their complete historical background. Organizations should maintain their current heritage conservation methods while using NFTs as additional tools for preservation.³³

³⁰ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

³¹ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

³² Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024). Affini, A. and Ndou, V., 2025, June. *NFTs Opportunities and Challenges for Cultural Heritage Sector: Insights from a Multiple Case Study Perspective*. In International Conference on Extended Reality (pp. 267-281). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. UNESCO (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

³³ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024). Affini, A. and Ndou, V., 2025, June. *NFTs Opportunities and Challenges for Cultural Heritage Sector: Insights from a Multiple Case Study Perspective*. In International Conference on Extended Reality (pp. 267-281). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. UNESCO (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

COMMODIFICATION AND FINANCIALISATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

In spite of their ability to preserve information, however, NFTs have been heavily criticized for exacerbating the commodification of cultural heritage. Commodified resources are those that have been converted from a cultural or symbolic form into a commodity that can be exchanged via markets.³⁴ Scholars in heritage studies have long disputed whether cultural heritage is something that should be valued on the market since excessive commodification may erode its cultural significance.

NFTs increase such concerns by integrating processes of commodification into areas typically reserved for non-economic valuation. This occurs as cultural heritage acquires significance not through its economic value but through its significance for historical understanding, education, or symbolism. In NFT markets, however, objects are often valued based on their scarcity and economic worth, putting at risk their cultural value.³⁵

This critique is directly related to the phenomenon of financialisation. Researchers analyzing NFT economies propose that tokens are progressively becoming a form of investment rather than cultural assets. Discourses in regards to tokenized items usually highlight scarcity, profitability, and development prospects. These discourses prompt the individuals involved in the project to see heritage as an object of investment, thus overlooking its cultural and historical value.³⁶

³⁴ Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit*. Leisure Studies, pp.1-17. Poposki, Z., 2026. *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age*. Thesis Eleven, 192(1), pp.207-228. Eldho, J.J., 2024. *Art in the Age of Digital Capitalism: A Marxist Critique of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. In Intimate Capitalism: Political Economy of Labour and Culture in Creative Industries (pp. 75-91). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

³⁵ Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit*. Leisure Studies, pp.1-17. Poposki, Z., 2026. *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age*. Thesis Eleven, 192(1), pp.207-228. Eldho, J.J., 2024. *Art in the Age of Digital Capitalism: A Marxist Critique of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. In Intimate Capitalism: Political Economy of Labour and Culture in Creative Industries (pp. 75-91). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

³⁶ Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit*. Leisure Studies, pp.1-17. Poposki, Z., 2026. *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age*. Thesis Eleven, 192(1), pp.207-228. Eldho, J.J., 2024. *Art in the Age of Digital Capitalism: A Marxist Critique of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. In Intimate Capitalism: Political Economy of Labour and Culture in Creative Industries (pp. 75-91). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

The financialisation of heritage brings up some ethical issues. In case the main goal of tokenisation is to earn money, the goal of preserving might come in second place. Heritage organizations might be under pressure to prioritize profitable artifacts and experiences in favor of less commercial but equally culturally valuable elements. Thus, financial benefits can impact what is being preserved, displayed, and promoted.³⁷

In terms of Marxism, NFTs can be considered the peak of commodification. As critical scholars note, with the help of blockchain technology, cultural artifacts are able to penetrate capitalism even deeper and become tradeable assets on the market.³⁸ Therefore, cultural value in this process can be subordinated to the exchange value, which means that heritage starts being perceived in economic terms rather than cultural or historic terms.

AUTHENTICITY, AURA, AND CULTURAL VALUE

Issues surrounding the question of authenticity represent yet another contentious issue. The advocates often point to the increased level of authenticity provided by the NFTs through immutable recording of ownership and provenance via blockchain technology. Practically speaking, this makes it possible for institutions and collectors to ensure the authenticity of the origin of digital artifacts while mitigating fears of forgery and reproductions.³⁹

However, cultural heritage can never be reduced to merely a matter of verification and authenticity. Cultural heritage is important due to its historical context and connection to particular communities and cultures. Walter Benjamin's concept of the "aura" appears

³⁷ Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit*. Leisure Studies, pp.1-17. Poposki, Z., 2026. *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age*. Thesis Eleven, 192(1), pp.207-228. Eldho, J.J., 2024. *Art in the Age of Digital Capitalism: A Marxist Critique of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. In Intimate Capitalism: Political Economy of Labour and Culture in Creative Industries (pp. 75-91). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

³⁸ Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit*. Leisure Studies, pp.1-17. Poposki, Z., 2026. *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age*. Thesis Eleven, 192(1), pp.207-228. Eldho, J.J., 2024. *Art in the Age of Digital Capitalism: A Marxist Critique of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. In Intimate Capitalism: Political Economy of Labour and Culture in Creative Industries (pp. 75-91). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

³⁹ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasuries? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

especially pertinent here. According to Benjamin, technological reproduction reduces authenticity and presence of the original work of art.⁴⁰

Applying the above concept to NFTs reveals one of their weaknesses. Namely, although NFTs might help authenticate a digital representation of an object, they will never be able to reproduce the context and aura of the original item. An NFT linked to the image of an ancient manuscript or monument will have a vastly different experience from viewing such an object in person.⁴¹

The issue takes on greater significance in regard to cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is more than objects; it is an intricate system of meaning, memory, and social relations. An overreliance on digitization can foster a perception of heritage based on reductionist ideas in which ownership and authenticity of cultural heritage will depend upon the technology itself.⁴²

It must also be acknowledged, however, that digitization is not without its value. Digitization has made access to culture possible like never before and has become increasingly important in preserving cultures in danger of being lost because of war, natural disasters, or climate change. What must be understood is that while there is an intersection between digital authenticity and cultural authenticity, they are two different ideas.

OWNERSHIP, COPYRIGHT, AND ETHICAL CONCERNS

Ownership is one of the most complicated topics that relate to NFTs and cultural heritage. Tokenization of heritage creates complications about who has the power to digitalize and tokenize heritage and to use it for commercial purposes. Such problems arise even more often in cases when the heritage is of a communal, indigenous, or national nature.

It is often falsely assumed that buying an NFT implies owning the original piece of art. However, in practice, most transactions usually transfer ownership of the token itself and not

⁴⁰ Benjamin, W., 2018. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In *A museum studies approach to heritage* (pp. 226-243). Routledge.

⁴¹ Benjamin, W., 2018. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In *A museum studies approach to heritage* (pp. 226-243). Routledge. Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In *Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions* (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026.

⁴² Benjamin, W., 2018. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In *A museum studies approach to heritage* (pp. 226-243). Routledge. Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In *Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions* (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026.

the copyright on the associated material.⁴³ Therefore, it is ambiguous what rights come with the ownership of such cultural heritage converted into an NFT.

Apart from legal issues, there are ethical considerations of the concept of cultural ownership. Usually, the value of heritage is not tied only to ownership. That is why objects of indigenous culture, holy objects, and any heritage items are not owned not just by individuals but also by certain communities.⁴⁴ This leads to the situation in which tokenization results in commercial use of heritage without community consent.

These ethical aspects become even more complex due to the fact that cultural heritage may be seen as the human legacy and should belong to everybody. According to the recommendations of UNESCO, the main goals regarding cultural heritage are conservation, accessibility, and passing from one generation to another.⁴⁵

BALANCING PRESERVATION AND COMMODIFICATION

Therefore, it can be concluded that NFTs have an ambivalent status in the realm of cultural heritage because although NFTs offer the chance to preserve something, provide access to it, interact with it, and even earn money with it, the NFTs become a part of the processes of commodification and financialization that may put cultural values of heritage in danger.

This means that the answer to the question concerning NFTs should not be focused on whether they are going to be used or not; instead, it has to be based on how the use of NFTs should take place. In order to ensure balance, legislation, ethics, and organizations that would protect and promote cultural heritage, but not trade it, should be introduced.

Thus, to conclude, it has to be stated that NFTs should not be considered solutions; they are only tools. The main question here is why the NFTs are required and how the process is regulated. When used correctly, NFTs can contribute to the preservation and distribution of cultural heritage; otherwise, they would cause its financialization and commodification.

DISCUSSION

⁴³ Çağlayan Aksoy, P. and Özkan Üner, Z., 2021. *NFTs and copyright: challenges and opportunities*. Journal of Intellectual Property Law and Practice, 16(10), pp.1115-1126.

⁴⁴ Hewitt, B., 2007. *Heritage as a commodity: are we devaluing our heritage by making it available to the highest bidder via the internet?*. Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions, pp.194-208.

⁴⁵ UNESCO 1972 Convention and UNESCO 2003 Convention.

The results of the current study reveal that the relation between NFTs and cultural heritage involves both opportunities and challenges. The adoption of blockchain technology in cultural heritage suggests a growing readiness to try new ways of protecting and disseminating cultural resources. At the same time, the application of NFTs brings up philosophical, ethical, and legal issues concerning heritage monetization and the ability of culture and markets to coexist.⁴⁶

Firstly, there are many advantages of using NFTs in relation to cultural heritage. In particular, NFTs allow documenting heritage through proving its ownership, authenticity, and origin. Blockchain technologies make it possible to protect and disseminate both physical and digital assets related to cultural heritage.⁴⁷ Moreover, NFTs provide museum collections and other cultural items with greater visibility as the mentioned technologies enable reaching the widest audience through the Internet.⁴⁸ Lastly, generating extra income through NFT-related activities allows museums and other cultural organizations to raise additional funds for protecting and restoring heritage.

On the contrary, the tokenization of cultural heritage gives rise to issues of commodification and financialization. Traditionally, cultural heritage has had importance in terms of historical, educational, symbolic, and social value. On NFT markets, the emphasis on scarcity, property rights, and profitability puts into question the possibility that heritage may be measured according to economic standards.⁴⁹ This supports the view expressed by many academics that NFT technology reflects the larger tendency towards commercialization of culture in the digital capitalist economy.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Hutchins, B. and Fordyce, R., 2026. *Financialising leisure: Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), collectibles and commodification without limit*. Leisure Studies, pp.1-17. Poposki, Z., 2026. *Critical theory for crypto art: Exploring the impact of non-fungible tokens on the commodification of art in the digital age*. Thesis Eleven, 192(1), pp.207-228.

⁴⁷ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasuries? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market (July 15, 2024).

⁴⁸ Affini, A. and Ndou, V., 2025, June. *NFTs Opportunities and Challenges for Cultural Heritage Sector: Insights from a Multiple Case Study Perspective*. In International Conference on Extended Reality (pp. 267-281). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

⁴⁹ Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hewitt, B., 2007. *Heritage as a commodity: are we devaluing our heritage by making it available to the highest bidder via the internet?* Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions, pp.194-208.

⁵⁰ Eldho, J.J., 2024. *Art in the Age of Digital Capitalism: A Marxist Critique of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)*. In Intimate Capitalism: Political Economy of Labour and Culture in Creative Industries (pp. 75-91). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

This topic is also made complicated by issues of authenticity. It is true that NFT technology is able to authenticate an artifact; however, such a technology is unable to recreate its original context and materiality. According to Benjamin's concept of the “aura,” the reproduction of heritage by technical means is always limited and does not fully correspond to the experience of encountering an authentic piece of art or cultural heritage.⁵¹ Thus, technical authenticity should not be mixed up with cultural authenticity.

Lastly, it is important to examine the ethical and legal considerations of using NFTs in heritage projects. Concerns related to intellectual property rights, ownership, engagement, and cultural sensitivity have been left unresolved in most instances.⁵² It is true that heritage is not only owned by organizations; in some cases, it can be associated with people or cultures that consider it to be a part of their identity. Hence, in any attempt to tokenize heritage, ethical considerations must be taken into account.

In conclusion, it would be misleading to regard NFTs as a solution or a problem. The way they will impact the future of cultural heritage will depend greatly on how they are used. If they are managed in accordance with best practices, NFTs can contribute greatly to preserving and distributing culture.⁵³

CONCLUSION

The advent of Non-Fungible Tokens has brought about new ways of preserving, documenting, and promoting the dissemination of cultural heritage. Blockchain technologies used in creating non-fungible tokens can help with establishing provenance, increasing accessibility, and providing more opportunities for interaction between cultural institutions and their global audience.⁵⁴ This capacity of non-fungible tokens has made cultural institutions start using them in their digital preservation processes.⁵⁵ However, their growing

⁵¹ Benjamin, W., 2018. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In *A museum studies approach to heritage* (pp. 226-243). Routledge.

⁵² Çağlayan Aksoy, P. and Özkan Üner, Z., 2021. *NFTs and copyright: challenges and opportunities*. *Journal of Intellectual Property Law and Practice*, 16(10), pp.1115-1126. UNESCO (2003) *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

⁵³ *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972); Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)*.

⁵⁴ Mezei, P. and Lapatoura, I., 2024. *Not for treasures? The role of NFTs in the preservation of cultural heritage following the collapse of the NFT market*. *The Role of NFTs in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage Following the Collapse of the NFT Market* (July 15, 2024).

⁵⁵ Affini, A. and Ndou, V., 2025, June. *NFTs Opportunities and Challenges for Cultural Heritage Sector: Insights from a Multiple Case Study Perspective*. In the International Conference on Extended Reality (pp.

popularity in the field of cultural heritage has raised several philosophical, ethical, and even legal issues associated with the use of NFTs in such processes.

The transformation of tangible or intangible cultural heritage into non-fungible tokens has raised important issues related to commodification and commercialization of cultural heritage in general and its digital versions in particular. In addition to preserving cultural heritage, NFTs can make such heritage a tradable digital asset with the value defined by demand, rarity, and speculations of the market.⁵⁶ These tendencies represent a bigger trend associated with the financialization of cultural heritage due to increased commercialization of contemporary digital environments.⁵⁷

It is worth noting that the presented study once again confirms the problem of authenticity as one of the key issues in NFTs heritage projects. While the blockchain system allows one to confirm the ownership and provenance of digital artworks, it does not enable one to create a certain cultural context that is connected to the heritage objects in question.⁵⁸ Moreover, issues related to copyright, ownership rights, and involvement of communities reveal the importance of the regulation in question and ethical issues connected to it.⁵⁹

To summarize, when discussing the use of NFTs for cultural heritage, it is crucial to understand that one cannot make a clear choice in favor or against NFTs. While NFTs have a lot of opportunities to contribute to the field of heritage and preservation, these opportunities should be balanced with negative aspects that may arise from the high commercialization of the heritage in question. In other words, the place that NFTs will occupy within the cultural heritage will depend on the way how certain ethical norms will be implemented.

267-281). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. UNESCO (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

⁵⁶ Gill-Robinson, H., 2007. *Culture, heritage and commodification*. In Cultural heritages as reflexive traditions (pp. 183-193). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Hewitt, B., 2007. *Heritage as a commodity: are we devaluing our heritage by making it available to the highest bidder via the internet?* Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions, pp.194-208.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, W., 2018. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In A museum studies approach to heritage (pp. 226-243). Routledge.

⁵⁸ *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)*; Hewitt, B., 2007. *Heritage as a commodity: are we devaluing our heritage by making it available to the highest bidder via the internet?* Cultural Heritages as Reflexive Traditions, pp.194-208.

⁵⁹ *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)*; *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)*.