

# JURNAL KAJIAN BALI

## *Journal of Bali Studies*



Rethinking the Rejuvenation Pathway: Rural Digital Nomadism as  
an Exploratory Strategy Amidst Bali's Overtourism Pressures  
**Fransisco Situmorang**

Overtourism as Urban Overdevelopment: Social Representations  
and Adaptive Governance in Bali  
**I Nyoman Darma Putra, Putu Devi Rosalina, I Ketut Nama,  
Paul Green, Michael Hitchcock†**

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# Rethinking the Rejuvenation Pathway: Rural Digital Nomadism as an Exploratory Strategy Amidst Bali's Overtourism Pressures

Fransisco Situmorang\* 

Komaling Consulting, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Overtourism threatens destination sustainability, accelerating stagnation or decline within the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), as Bali's ecological stress, cultural commodification, and governance fragility illustrate. This study explores rural digital nomadism as an exploratory strategy for sustainable rejuvenation in Kelelung Eco Village, Tabanan, Bali. Using a longitudinal single-case design (2020-2026), it draws on 22 interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and a feasibility survey of 85 respondents. Integrating co-living, co-working, and authentic cultural experiences initially extended visitor stays, diversified household income, and repositioned the village within global flows. Constrained by weak marketing, living-wage pressures, and institutional resistance, the village strategically refocused on its edu-ecotourism model while keeping rural digital nomadism as its main future direction. Theoretically, the study extends TALC to the Global South through participatory nomadism, distinguishing community-embedded models from urban nomad bubbles. Practically, it shows that rejuvenation depends on formal institutional and financial support.

**Keywords:** digital nomadism; overtourism; rejuvenation; rural tourism; slow tourism; tourism area life cycle (TALC)

## 1. Introduction

Tourism has rebounded strongly in the post-pandemic era, driven by low-cost carriers, digital booking platforms, and destination amplification through social media. However, this resurgence has reignited concerns about overtourism, where destinations are pushed beyond ecological, socio-cultural, and institutional thresholds. Scholars increasingly highlight that overtourism is not merely a matter of visitor numbers but a manifestation of governance failures that undermine resilience and expose destinations to systemic decline

\* Corresponding author's email: [fransisco@komalingconsulting.id](mailto:fransisco@komalingconsulting.id)

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(Butler & Dodds, 2022; Milano et al., 2024). Well-documented cases such as Venice, Barcelona, and Santorini illustrate how unchecked development produces congestion, ecological degradation, and cultural commodification, with governance inertia often playing a decisive role (Back et al., 2025; Blázquez-Salom et al., 2023; Boháč & Drápela, 2022; Drápela et al., 2025). These examples highlight the need to rethink tourism not only as growth management but also as a systemic redesign that prioritizes ecological thresholds, social equity, and institutional capacity. The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) framework remains a useful tool for diagnosing stagnation, decline, or rejuvenation, but outcomes increasingly depend on governance choices rather than raw visitor numbers (Adiputra et al., 2018; Salam et al., 2024). This debate is particularly urgent in the Global South, where weaker institutions and higher dependence on tourism magnify the risks of overtourism.

Bali exemplifies this paradox well. Tourism, which accounts for over half of Bali's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Antara & Sumarniasih, 2024; Bali Provincial Government, 2021), embeds the island in a fragile mono-sectoral economy acutely vulnerable to shocks. The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic dramatically exposed this dependence, with employment evaporating overnight and communities left without safety nets. Today, signs of stagnation are clear, including water shortages (Handayani et al., 2021b), rising carbon emissions (Kembali Becik, 2023), coastal erosion (Hastuti et al., 2024), waste mismanagement (Bali Partnership, 2019), agricultural land conversion (Indrawan et al., 2022), cultural commodification (Gorda et al., 2023), and widening inequality. However, stagnation is not uniform across the island. Southern Bali's Kuta–Seminyak–Canggu corridor mirrors European hotspots, where congestion, speculation, and gentrification displace residents and intensify ecological pressures (Back et al., 2025). In contrast, peripheral villages retain agrarian and cultural assets that could anchor the renewal. However, these assets are increasingly damaged by farmland transfers to outside investors and youth disengagement from agriculture, confirming the importance of governance in shaping TALC trajectories (Artini et al., 2020; Suyadnya, 2021).

New mobility patterns, such as digital nomadism, have emerged amid these pressures. Enabled by digital infrastructures and normalized by remote work post-pandemic, digital nomads relocate for extended periods, seeking affordability, authenticity, and immersion while sustaining professional activity remotely (Cook, 2023; Hannonen, 2024). More than a lifestyle trend, digital nomadism represents a structural shift in mobility that merges labor flexibility with slower, deeper forms of tourism. When integrated into rural areas, nomadism has the potential to redistribute flows away from saturated

hubs, extend visitor stays, and diversify household economies (Amaral et al., 2024; Bosworth et al., 2023; Klarin et al., 2023). These dynamics strongly reverberate across the principles of slow tourism, which emphasizes immersion, reciprocity, and deseasonalization (Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023; Lonardi et al., 2024; Situmorang, 2022). European initiatives, such as coworking hubs in Valsugana, Italy, and on Croatian islands, show that embedding slow-tourism values into rural destinations can lengthen stays, stabilize incomes, and even secure sustainability certification (Lonardi et al., 2024).

However, there are significant research gaps. Most digital nomadism studies are concentrated in Global North urban contexts (Amaral et al., 2024; Hannonen, 2024), while rural Global South applications remain largely underexplored despite facing more acute challenges of overtourism, fragile infrastructure, and weak institutional safeguards (Bozzi, 2024; Gumilang, 2024; Henkens, 2025). Existing scholarship has not systematically examined how digital nomadism interacts with rural communities in overtourism-affected destinations or how it may contribute to TALC rejuvenation under the conditions of dispossession and governance fragility. Bali illustrates this research gap vividly: while its peripheries hold potential for diversification, they are simultaneously constrained by land conversion, limited infrastructure, and uneven governance issues.

To address this gap, this study examines the Kelecung Eco Village, the site of Indonesia's pioneer rural digital-nomad initiative launched in 2021, as a longitudinal social laboratory. Crucially, while the macro-destination of Bali is currently grappling with TALC stagnation, Kelecung operates at the micro-level development stage, making it a critical site to test whether rural digital nomadism can redirect peripheral areas away from premature decline. Through a longitudinal design (2020–2026), this study analyzes how rural digital nomadism interacts with overtourism dynamics and whether it can reposition peripheral areas within TALC trajectories. This contribution is twofold. Theoretically, it extends the TALC framework by embedding digital nomadism and slow tourism as exploratory strategies for rejuvenation in Global South contexts, dimensions overlooked in the current literature dominated by Global North cases. Empirically, it provides rare longitudinal evidence of the inherent fragility of grassroots innovations. It illustrates how governance, infrastructure, and community agency condition these outcomes, ultimately exposing the vulnerability of self-funded initiatives when operating without systemic institutional scaffolding. Accordingly, this study asks: (1) how overtourism affects Bali's sustainability within the stagnation phase of the TALC; (2) how rural tourism–digital nomadism integration supports sustainable rejuvenation; and (3) what enabling and constraining factors, particularly operational fragility

and governance, shape these rejuvenation outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Overtourism and Bali's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)

Overtourism occurs when visitor numbers surpass a destination's physical, ecological, social, and economic capacities, resulting in environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and socioeconomic disruption. While often associated with the growth of mass tourism, scholars increasingly underline governance failures and uneven development as the underlying drivers (Back et al., 2025; Butler & Dodds, 2022; Milano et al., 2024). Bali illustrates these dynamics with clarity. Tourism contributes more than 54% of the provincial GDP, yet development is heavily concentrated in the south. The Kuta–Ubud corridor dominates employment and infrastructure, whereas the northern and eastern regions remain marginalized, reinforcing spatial inequality (Antara & Sumarniasih, 2024; Yahya, 2021). This imbalance deepens social vulnerability: traditional workers are displaced, gentrification drives up land prices, and households face structural dependence on tourism revenues (Antara & Sumarniasih, 2024; Negara et al., 2024; Situmorang & Nugroho, 2020). The pandemic further exposed these risks, collapsing supply chains, and leaving many without safety nets.

Environmental pressures further exacerbate this problem. Water demand in Badung rose by more than 300% between 1988 and 2013, with tourists consuming up to 16 times more than residents, leading to chronic water shortages in the SARBAGITA (Denpasar, Badung, Gianyar, and Tabanan) region (Yamamoto et al., 2021; Handayani et al., 2021b). Energy demand is expected to grow by nearly 50% by 2030, with tourism already responsible for the majority of emissions and electricity consumption (Adiputra et al., 2018; Diwanda et al., 2021). Solid waste surpasses 1.6 million tons annually, with 20% composed of plastics and an estimated 11% leaking into rivers and seas (Bali Partnership, 2019; Global Institute for Tomorrow, 2023). Land conversion intensifies these challenges: more than 6,200 hectares of rice fields were lost between 2002 and 2016, while built-up areas in Badung expanded from 17.9% to 30.7% between 2010 and 2020 (Indrawan et al., 2022; Utama & Suryawan, 2023). These changes weaken food security, leaving agriculture increasingly reliant on smallholder farmers and aging laborers (Handayani et al., 2021a; Kusumawati et al., 2024). Collectively, these indicators reveal that Bali has exceeded its sustainability thresholds.

Socio-cultural impacts are equally severe across the island. Sacred rituals such as *melukat* (a Balinese Hindu self-purification ritual using holy water to cleanse the body and mind and draw closer to God) and *Nyepi* (the Balinese Hindu Day of Silence marking the Saka New Year, when the entire island suspends work, fire, travel, and entertainment for a day of introspection) have

been commodified, temples have been transformed into ticketed attractions, and traditional performances such as Barong dances have been staged primarily for tourist consumption (Gorda et al., 2023; Narottama, 2016; Pradnyadari & Putra, 2025). These practices blur the line between cultural preservation and commercialization, undermining authenticity and weakening the agency of the community. Rising tourism-related crimes, immigration violations, and deportations highlight the strain on governance created by the unchecked visitor flows (Detik Bali, 2024, 2025). Together, these dynamics illustrate how overtourism erodes not only environmental resources but also the symbolic and institutional resilience underpinning Bali's global appeal.

The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), developed by Butler (1980), provides a conceptual lens for interpreting these processes. The framework identifies six phases: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and the eventual divergence between decline or rejuvenation (Butler, 2024; Salam et al., 2024). In Bali, exploration began in the early twentieth century when anthropologists and artists first popularized the island (Anom et al., 2017). By the 1970s, Kuta residents had initiated the involvement phase by providing basic accommodation (Salam et al., 2024). Development accelerated through the 1980s–2000s, driven by international investment, airport expansion, and farmland conversion (Rimba et al., 2020). Since the early 2000s, consolidation has entrenched tourism as the backbone of the economy, even as growth rates have slowed (Bali Provincial Government, 2021). As a result, the island is now experiencing stagnation, characterized by traffic congestion, water scarcity, environmental decline, and socio-cultural tensions (Salam et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2024; Suyadnya, 2021).

At this stage, the TALC underscores the urgency of decisive intervention. Without structural reforms, Bali risks sliding into decline, a path characterized by shrinking tourist numbers, deteriorating infrastructure, and irreversible ecological loss (Adiputra et al., 2018). However, rejuvenation remains possible if tourism is restructured to balance growth and sustainability. Community-based initiatives, ecotourism projects, and slow tourism models can help redistribute visitor flows beyond saturated hubs, diversify income streams, and protect cultural and environmental assets (Blázquez-Salom et al., 2023; Lane et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2024). Emerging practices such as rural digital nomadism have the potential to support rural economies while mitigating urban congestion (Klarin et al., 2023). However, these solutions carry their own risks, including rural gentrification, seasonal volatility, and additional ecological pressure. Such complexities call for anticipatory governance rather than reactive policy.

Institutional frameworks are beginning to acknowledge these challenges. Bali Provincial Regulation No. 5/2020 explicitly promotes sustainability and

cultural authenticity as guiding principles for tourism. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, limiting its effectiveness (Sari et al., 2024). Scholars argue that genuine rejuvenation requires not only regulation but also deeper governance reforms, such as the strict enforcement of carrying capacities, diversification beyond tourism, and stronger community participation in decision-making (Adiputra et al., 2018). Within the TALC, this represents a crucial distinction between decline and rejuvenation phases. Business-as-usual trajectories will almost certainly lead to deterioration, whereas bold structural changes could reposition Bali as a model for sustainable tourism.

In conclusion, Bali’s experience demonstrates how overtourism accelerates stagnation within the TALC framework (Figure 1). This extends the foundational TALC analysis of Bali by Putra and Hitchcock (2006), who plotted international arrivals from 1921 to 2004 and found an island still propelled by developmental momentum that had not yet reached consolidation; two decades on, that momentum has matured into the structural saturation characteristic of stagnation, as environmental overshoot, cultural commodification, and economic dependence converge to create systemic crises. This is not merely a question of destination capacity but of governance: how institutions, policies, and communities respond to mounting pressures. The lessons extend well beyond Bali, underscoring the global relevance of treating overtourism as a governance challenge rather than a numerical one. For Bali, the path forward requires systemic reform, equitable redistribution, and cultural preservation. Its future competitiveness, and indeed its identity, will depend on whether it chooses to decline or embrace rejuvenation.

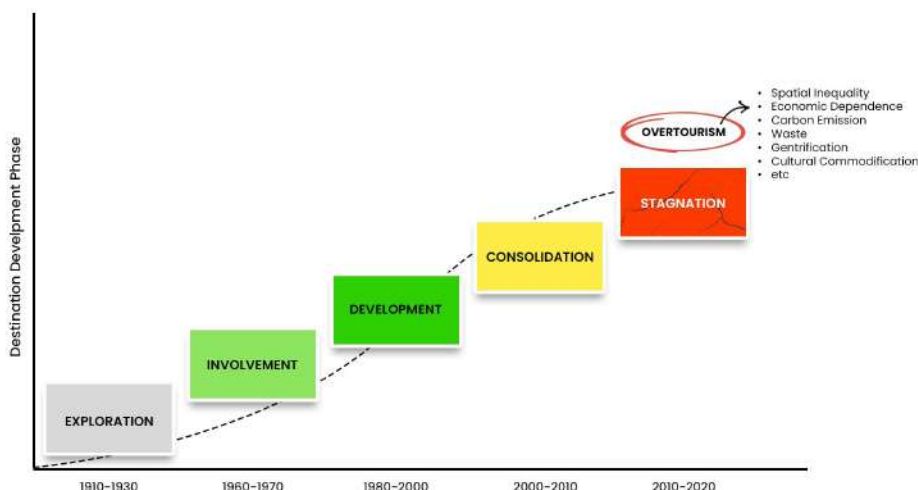


Figure 1. Bali’s Tourism Area Life Cycle, adapted and extended from Butler (1980) (Author’s elaboration, 2025)

## ***2.2 Digital Nomadism in Rural Tourism: Trends, Potentials, and Challenges toward Sustainable Tourism***

Digital nomadism has expanded rapidly in the post-pandemic era, blending remote work with extensive travel and long-term stays. Enabled by digital technologies, this allows individuals to sustain professional activities while immersing themselves in diverse destinations and lifestyles (Cook, 2023; Hannonen, 2024; Situmorang & Karthana, 2021). This phenomenon reflects structural shifts in global mobility, shaped by the rise of remote work and the growing demand for authentic, personalized, and long-term travel experiences beyond crowded urban centers (Amaral et al., 2024; Cook, 2023). Within the context of tourism development, the integration of digital nomadism with rural tourism offers a promising synergy, linking natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and rural lifestyles with new opportunities for community well-being, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation (Lonardi et al., 2024).

Rural tourism is multidimensional, encompassing agritourism, ecotourism, cultural and heritage-based practices, and adventure-oriented activities. It is typically characterized by strong local ownership and participatory governance, making it central to sustainability strategies (Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). Beyond tourism practices, rural tourism reflects the dynamics of “everyday rurality,” embedding livelihoods and landscapes into broader developmental goals. It sustains balance across environmental, social, economic, and cultural dimensions while reinforcing resilience (Klarin et al., 2023; Lane et al., 2022; Lonardi et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). When combined with digital nomadism, rural tourism resonates with the principles of slow tourism by emphasizing low-carbon mobility, immersive experiences, and deeper forms of community participation (Huang et al., 2023; Klarin et al., 2023; Lane et al., 2022). Extended stays by nomads contribute to deseasonalization, providing continuity for local businesses. Initiatives such as co-working spaces help anchor these flows, supporting sustainable economies and providing hubs for innovation and entrepreneurship (Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023; Lonardi et al., 2024). In this sense, rural digital nomadism represents not only an alternative travel model but also a strategic pathway to decentralize visitor flows, strengthen rural resilience, and facilitate rejuvenation within the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) framework.

From a multidimensional perspective, rural digital nomadism generates significant benefits for the host destination. Economically, it diversifies rural livelihoods through demand for homestays, gastronomy, and cultural experiences, which are reinforced by the extended duration of stays (Amaral et al., 2024; Mao & Xu, 2024). Investments in digital infrastructure, such as co-working hubs, not only attract nomads but also facilitate local knowledge exchange and create a more equitable income distribution compared to

investor-driven mass tourism (Artini et al., 2020; Bosworth et al., 2023). Socially, community engagement initiatives fostered cohesion and meaningful interactions between visitors and residents. Italy's *Comunità Ospitali* program exemplifies how embedding nomads in local networks reduces isolation and strengthens relationships (Serpa et al., 2024). Culturally, nomads can contribute to the revitalization of festivals, gastronomy, and handicrafts, provided that authenticity is preserved and excessive commodification is avoided (Amaral et al., 2024; Bosworth et al., 2023; Lonardi et al., 2024). Environmentally, the emphasis on longer stays and low-carbon practices aligns with community-based conservation efforts that support ecosystem resilience (Gede et al., 2021; Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023). Taken together, these dimensions illustrate the holistic value of rural digital nomadism as a sustainable-tourism strategy.

International case studies further highlight its potential as a rejuvenation strategy to improve stagnating tourist destinations. In Valsugana, Italy, the establishment of co-working spaces combined with collaborative governance helped reposition the destination, mitigating stagnation and creating year-round activities (Lonardi et al., 2024). In Croatia, investments in digital infrastructure have reduced rural depopulation and seasonal dependency while strengthening economic viability (Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023). In Bali, the island's cultural appeal, favorable climate, affordability, and growth of co-working hubs, such as Sanur's Intaran Village, have created employment opportunities, reinforced cultural identity, and supported economic regeneration (Gede et al., 2021; Wibowo, 2024). Collectively, these examples demonstrate how integrating digital nomadism with rural tourism can reposition stagnating destinations within the TALC framework, while also offering transferable lessons for Bali and other regions facing overtourism.

Despite its promise, rural digital nomadism is not without risk. Economically, it may contribute to gentrification, rising housing costs, and renewed seasonal dependency, as observed in Canggu, Bali (Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023; Negara et al., 2024; Wibowo, 2024). Socially, weak integration risks creating exclusive "nomad bubbles," leading to lifestyle clashes, displacement, and community segregation (Amaral et al., 2024; Cook, 2023; Hannonen, 2024; Jiwasiddi et al., 2024). Culturally, the unregulated commercialization of rural traditions may fuel commodification, erode authenticity, and create community conflict (Amaral et al., 2024). Environmentally, excessive visitation and resource demand can strain rural ecosystems, increasing waste, pollution, and degradation if not carefully managed within carrying capacity limits (Amaral et al., 2024; Henkens, 2025; Serpa et al., 2024; Wibowo, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). Without proper governance, nomadism risks replicating the negative externalities of overtourism in new forms.

Therefore, ensuring long-term sustainability requires integrated, community-based approaches. Infrastructure investment must be aligned with local priorities, and co-working hubs should function as cultural commons, fostering collaboration between residents and nomads rather than isolation (Bosworth et al., 2023). Cooperative or village-based ownership models can ensure that revenues are retained locally and reinvested in community needs. Capacity-sensitive planning is essential, with thresholds for water, energy, and waste, and low-carbon standards for co-living facilities (Gede et al., 2021; Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023). Social and cultural programming, including workshops, residencies, and volunteering, can prevent segregation and promote social cohesion (Serpa et al., 2024). At the policy level, Bali's Provincial Regulation No. 5/2020 reinforces sustainability and authenticity, although enforcement remains uneven (Sari et al., 2024). Conceptually, embedding digital nomadism within the TALC model extends it by identifying new rejuvenation pathways. Empirically, Bali's Kelecung Eco Village serves as a critical case study illustrating both the potential and the vulnerability of community-driven models. It demonstrates how rural digital nomadism acts as an exploratory strategy for rural transformation, highly contingent upon systemic governance and financial backing. Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework that integrates digital nomadism and rural tourism for sustainable tourism.

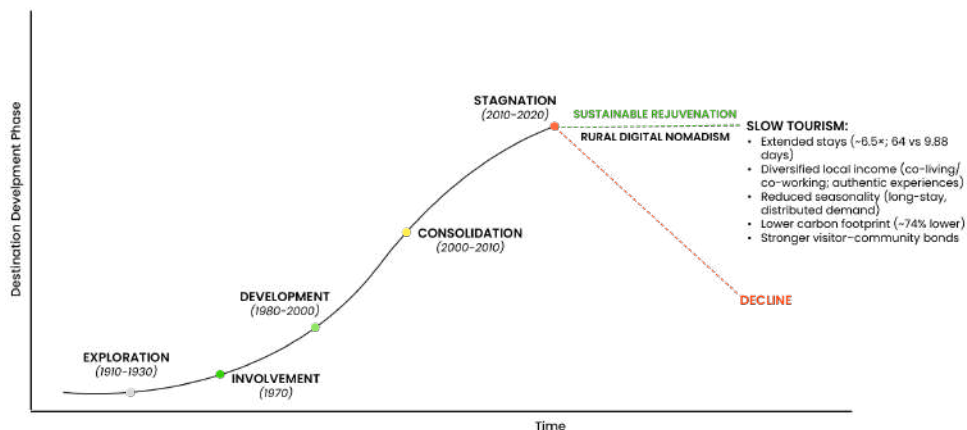


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Digital Nomadism and Rural Tourism Integration for Sustainable Tourism (Author's elaboration, 2025)

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This research employed a single embedded case study design with a longitudinal and participatory approach. Referring to Yin (2018) and supported by Diop and Liu (2020), selecting a single-case design is methodologically

justified when examining a “longitudinal” and “revelatory” case. Kelecong Eco Village meets both criteria perfectly, as it offered a unique chance to witness structural transformations across an extended duration (2020–2026), following the community’s path from pre-pandemic eco-tourism, through the trial phase of digital nomadism, to its post-pandemic structural difficulties. Furthermore, as Indonesia’s pioneer of rural digital nomadism initiatives, Kelecong provides unparalleled, inherent access to examine the micro-level tension between grassroots slow tourism innovation and the macro-level forces of overtourism and agricultural land conversion. Moreover, as emphasized by Râbu and Binder (2025), a qualitative single case study serves as a crucial bridge between research and practice, allowing for a detailed examination of developmental processes and relationship dynamics within specific contexts. Based on Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), this qualitatively-driven case study was embedded with supplemental descriptive quantitative data to achieve methodological “complementarity.” While a purely qualitative approach provides contextual depth, the embedded quantitative survey (N=85) established a necessary macro-level baseline of market feasibility, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

### 3.2 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted from April 2020 to May 2026 across four phases:

1. Contextual exploration (2020–2021) through literature review, an initial feasibility survey of 85 respondents conducted by the Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University (Tjampan et al., 2021), village mapping, and informal discussions.
2. Planning and initiation (2021–2022), marked by a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with local stakeholders to formulate rural digital nomadism concept;
3. Implementation (2022–2023), involving five months of full residency for participatory observation of co-living, co-working, and cultural activities;
4. Evaluation (2024–2026) through follow-up interviews, longitudinal analysis, and member checking to validate findings and assess continuity.

A purposive sampling approach was used to select 22 informants (Table 1). Instead of pursuing statistical representativeness, this approach focused on uncovering “information-rich” cases (Patton, 2015). The informants included individuals who had direct, lived experiences of the initiative, such as government

officials, platform founders, village leaders, youth representatives, homestay operators, community figures, Radiant Co-Space members, digital nomads from France, Canada, Australia, and Singapore, and two remote workers from Hong Kong (Table 1). The interviews lasted 45–90 minutes, with several informants interviewed multiple times, while the FGDs involved nine participants (INF-04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12). Moreover, the primary researcher's role as the initiator of the rural digital nomadism concept, which partnered with Kelecung Eco Village (led by its founder, INF-06) to pilot the model enabled a thorough participant-observation methodology (Yin, 2018). This insider role provided access to spontaneous, informal conversations and underlying community interactions that often stay hidden from outside observers.

All participants took part voluntarily and gave informed consent prior to data collection, including consent for the use of their anonymized excerpts. To protect their privacy, informants are identified throughout the paper only by code (INF-01 to INF-22) and by role or position; no real names are used.

Table 1. List of Informants (n=22)

| Code   | Role / Position                                                             | Gender | Frequency & Duration | Year(s)    |
|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------------|------------|
| INF-01 | Deputy of Destination Development, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy | Male   | 1 × 90 minutes       | 2022       |
| INF-02 | Founder of nomads.com (Online)                                              | Male   | 1 × 45 minutes       | 2021       |
| INF-03 | CEO, Tour Trekking Operator                                                 | Female | 2 × 45 minutes       | 2021       |
| INF-04 | Head of Pokdarwis Kelecung                                                  | Male   | 2 × 60 minutes       | 2021, 2022 |
| INF-05 | Head of Traditional Village of Kelecung                                     | Male   | 1 × 45 minutes       | 2022       |
| INF-06 | Project Lead (Initiator)                                                    | Female | 5 × 60 minutes       | 2021–2024  |
| INF-07 | Head of Karang Taruna (Local Youth Association)                             | Male   | 2 × 45 minutes       | 2021, 2022 |
| INF-08 | Member of Karang Taruna (Local Youth Association)                           | Female | 2 × 45 minutes       | 2021, 2022 |
| INF-09 | Youth Association Member                                                    | Male   | 2 × 60 minutes       | 2022, 2023 |
| INF-10 | Pokdarwis Member                                                            | Male   | 2 × 45 minutes       | 2021, 2022 |
| INF-11 | Homestay Operator                                                           | Female | 1 × 60 minutes       | 2021       |
| INF-12 | Homestay Operator                                                           | Female | 2 × 45 minutes       | 2021, 2022 |
| INF-13 | Community Figure                                                            | Female | 4 × 60 minutes       | 2021–2024  |
| INF-14 | Radiant Co-Space Member                                                     | Male   | 2 × 60 minutes       | 2021, 2022 |
| INF-15 | Radiant Co-Space Member                                                     | Female | 2 × 60 minutes       | 2021, 2022 |
| INF-16 | Digital Nomad Tourist (France)                                              | Male   | 2 × 90 minutes       | 2022, 2023 |
| INF-17 | Digital Nomad Tourist (Canada)                                              | Male   | 1 × 60 minutes       | 2022       |
| INF-18 | Tourist (Australia)                                                         | Male   | 1 × 45 minutes       | 2021       |
| INF-19 | Tourist (Australia)                                                         | Female | 1 × 45 minutes       | 2021       |
| INF-20 | Tourist (Singapore)                                                         | Female | 1 × 60 minutes       | 2022       |
| INF-21 | Remote Worker (Hong Kong)                                                   | Female | 2 × 60 minutes       | 2025       |
| INF-22 | Remote Worker (Hong Kong)                                                   | Male   | 2 × 60 minutes       | 2025       |

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Qualitative materials, including field notes, observation records, and insights from unstructured interviews, were examined through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). As envisioned by its main advocates, Braun and Clarke (2019), RTA was intentionally selected over stricter qualitative frameworks due to its strong emphasis on researcher subjectivity and deep field immersion as an analytical resource rather than a bias to be eliminated. Operationally, the examination deliberately avoided automated, software-based coding. Instead, it adopted a cooperative and reflective theme development approach. Familiarization occurred through the main researcher's prolonged field engagement and active peer-debriefing with the RADIANT Co-Space field team. Initial surface-level and underlying codes were produced dialogically, deriving meaning directly from natural, real-time discussions with nomads and villagers. These codes were continuously reviewed, debated, and clustered to construct broader themes, balancing inductive realities of grassroots fragility with deductive dimensions of the TALC framework.

### **3.4 Validity and Reflexivity**

To ensure methodological rigor, the study relied on the triangulation of evidence and rigorous member checking (Yin, 2018). Emerging themes and operational assumptions were validated through casual conversations with various stakeholders, gathering both supportive and critical perspectives. Considering the primary researcher's integrated position as the initiator of the rural digital nomadism concept and a partner to the village whose community-based tourism initiative is led by its founder (INF-06), ongoing reflexivity was upheld to reconcile active involvement with analytical detachment. As highlighted by Råbu and Binder (2025), the concept of the "researcher as instrument" utilizes deep contextual awareness and empathy to support the qualitative analysis of field interactions. This ongoing comparative process significantly reduced possible participatory bias, guaranteeing that the developed themes truly reflected the community's shared reality. Ultimately, aligned with Yin's (2018) case study principles, this research does not aim for statistical generalization but pursues analytic generalization, seeking to expand theoretical propositions regarding TALC rejuvenation mechanisms in vulnerable Global South contexts.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

This section presents and discusses the study's findings in an integrated manner. It first traces the historical evolution of Kelecung Eco Village (4.1) and the impacts of overtourism on Bali's TALC trajectory (4.2), before examining

how rural tourism and digital nomadism were integrated for sustainable rejuvenation (4.3), including the operationalization of the model (4.3.1), the human dimensions of community and nomad experiences (4.3.2), and rural digital nomadism as an exploratory pathway to rejuvenation (4.3.3). It then analyzes the factors that enabled and constrained these outcomes (4.4).

#### ***4.1 Historical Evolution of Kelecung Eco Village***

To fully grasp the complexities of rural tourism rejuvenation addressed in this study, it is essential to first understand the historical evolution of the selected case. Kelecung Eco Village is a tourism initiative and brand of Banjar Adat Kelecung Kelod in Tegalmengkeb Village, Tabanan Regency, Bali. The initiative later led to the legal recognition of Tegalmengkeb as an official Tourism Village. Tourism development in Kelecung began in 2014, initiated by the project's founder (INF-06), a local woman who was then living in Surabaya. During one of her visits home, she felt deeply saddened to see local children being chased away by villa managers for "disturbing" the comfort of guests. The scene was painful because it took place on the same beach where she had once played freely as a teenager, a public space that had now been privatized. Her concern deepened when she discovered that around 85% of agricultural land in the coastal area had been sold to outside investors, raising fears that future resort developments would permanently displace local residents from their ancestral land and livelihoods.

Motivated by these threats, the project lead began commuting every two weeks from Surabaya to Kelecung to develop a community-based tourism (CBT) model that could protect local ownership and empower villagers. Her early efforts focused on engaging women and children, teaching them English and encouraging them to maintain village cleanliness, host guests, and manage their own homes as homestays. In 2016 she intensified these efforts while still commuting, and in 2018 she settled permanently in Bali with her family to strengthen community participation. She began promoting the village homestays through Airbnb and established collaborations with international travel agents to attract student and youth groups from Taiwan and Japan for study tours and voluntourism programs. These small-scale exchanges generated direct income for local families while nurturing a sense of pride in maintaining authentic cultural practices.

The development of Kelecung Eco Village also emerged as a quiet antithesis to Bali's mass tourism, which often commercializes culture and equates "authenticity" with luxury. In contrast, Kelecung's tourism philosophy emphasizes simplicity, sincerity, and cultural integrity. As one villager expressed *"We develop tourism in Kelecung with what we have. We don't force*

*ourselves to perform grand dances or entertain guests. We just wear our simple clothes and live as we truly are"* (INF-04, interview, July 5, 2021).

By 2019 the village operated ten homestays, of which eight ran regularly and two were used only when groups arrived. Rooms were priced at around IDR 200,000 to IDR 250,000 per night, and educational and eco-tourism groups from Japan and Taiwan usually stayed two to three nights. On this basis, community-based tourism had become a significant contributor to the local economy by 2019, generating about IDR 450 million in net income. A target of IDR 600 million was set for 2020 but was not reached, because the COVID-19 pandemic halted all group visits. This brought economic stagnation and pushed the community to rethink its approach. The community realized that its dependence on visitor numbers made it highly vulnerable to external crises such as pandemics, political shifts, and natural disasters. Rather than viewing the crisis as a setback, they began to interpret it as an opportunity to rethink what kind of tourism truly aligned with their values. Local discussions throughout 2020 and early 2021 revealed a shared concern: dependence on visitor quantity was unsustainable, while the pursuit of meaningful, smaller-scale tourism seemed more compatible with village life and balance. In early 2021, the project lead held an informal discussion with several students from the Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University, one of whom had previously completed a six-week community empowerment program in the village in 2019 and had supported her in several programs and competitions since 2020. During the conversation, their shared reflections led to a pivotal question that became the foundation of Kelecung's next transformation: *"Could tourism be redesigned to strengthen community resilience while maintaining authenticity?"*

This pivotal question, along with the examination of rural digital nomadism, provides the essential background for the following analysis of the macro-level effects of overtourism in Bali, the operationalization of this new model, and the factors shaping its outcomes.

#### ***4.2 The Impacts of Overtourism on Bali's TALC Trajectory***

Overtourism in Bali illustrates the paradox of tourism development in the Global South: rapid expansion may deliver short-term prosperity but steadily erodes it. As Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) framework suggests, destinations that exceed ecological, socio-cultural, and institutional thresholds inevitably enter stagnation, where future trajectories hinge less on visitor numbers than on governance capacity to steer decline or rejuvenation (Butler & Dodds, 2022; Milano et al., 2024). The findings affirm this interpretation. Bali's stagnation is not merely about declining visitor satisfaction but also about deeper structural vulnerabilities, ecological degradation, cultural commodification,

and widening inequality. Heavy reliance on mass tourism has created a fragile mono-sectoral economy, which was starkly exposed during the COVID-19 collapse (Antara & Sumarniasih, 2024).

Stagnation is also unevenly distributed. Southern Bali, particularly the Kuta–Seminyak–Canggu corridor, experiences congestion, water scarcity, and gentrification, echoing hotspots such as Barcelona and Venice (Back et al., 2025). Real estate speculation and infrastructure pressures have displaced residents and reshaped landscapes, intensifying inequality and ecological strain. In contrast, peripheral villages such as Kelecong still hold agricultural and cultural assets that could support renewal. However, the empirical findings reveal that these assets are highly fragile and directly threatened by spillover of macro-level overtourism. As detailed in Section 4.1, these pressures were already visible in Kelecong by 2014, when much of the coastal farmland had passed to outside investors and previously public spaces were being privatized. These dynamics confirm that youth disengagement from farming and the transfer of coastal farmland to external investors decrease agrarian resilience and community agency, reversing the synergies between agriculture and tourism (Artini et al., 2020). Taken together, these findings extend the TALC debates by showing that stagnation in Global South contexts is shaped not only by resource strain but also by dispossession and governance failures. Bali's trajectory will hinge less on tourist volumes than on whether governance can convert stagnation into innovation rather than into inertia.

#### *4.3 Integrating Rural Tourism and Digital Nomadism for Sustainable Rejuvenation*

To address the structural vulnerabilities exposed by overtourism and the stagnation phase of the TALC, the integration of digital nomadism with rural tourism emerged as a strategic pathway for sustainable rejuvenation (Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023; Lonardi et al., 2024). Unlike conventional mass tourism, which often prioritizes rapid turnover and high visitor volume, rural digital nomadism inherently aligns with the principles of slow tourism (Huang et al., 2023; Klarin et al., 2023; Lane et al., 2022). It encourages longer stays, deeper community engagement, and a significantly lower ecological footprint, offering a counter-narrative to the extractive models seen in southern Bali (Amaral et al., 2024; Gede et al., 2021; Serpa et al., 2024).

##### *4.3.1 Operationalizing the Rural Digital Nomadism Model*

The feasibility of this integration was initially explored through a baseline exploratory survey conducted by the Faculty of Tourism team at Udayana University during the exploration phase. Among 85 domestic travelers surveyed, 87% identified

as remote workers, and 55 of them expressed strong interest in living and working from Kelecung Eco Village (Tjampan et al., 2021). The survey also identified distinct psychographic segments: Social Nomads (Gen Z) seeking peer interaction, Family Nomads (Gen Y) prioritizing homey facilities, and Well-being Nomads (Solo) seeking privacy. These findings confirmed that Kelecung possessed the social and spatial capacity to accommodate a community-integrated digital nomad model.

Armed with this quantitative validation, the concept of rural digital nomadism was formally introduced to the community during a pivotal Focus Group Discussion on June 12, 2021 (Figure 3). Organized in collaboration with students from the Faculty of Tourism at Udayana University participating in the UNWTO Students League Competition, the session formally introduced the concept of rural digital nomadism. The discussion drew from global literature predicting that remote work would continue to expand, with an estimated one billion digital workers by 2035 (Cook, 2023; Situmorang & Karthana, 2021). It also recognized Bali's unique position as one of the world's top digital nomad destinations, known for its low living costs, tropical climate, and strong sense of community (Cook, 2023; Situmorang & Karthana, 2021).



Figure 3. Focus Group Discussion on June 12, 2021 (Photo by Josua Manggaprou, 2021)

Unlike urban hubs such as Canggu or Ubud, Kelecung sought to offer an alternative model rooted in rural authenticity. Instead of isolating nomads in private villas, the community envisioned a setting where digital workers could live and work alongside local families, sharing spaces, routines, and values. This model resonated with the emerging concept of slow tourism, emphasizing longer stays, deeper engagement, and minimal environmental impact. As one informant stated: *"We don't want to depend on group tours anymore. It's better to have only 10–30 guests per month who stay longer, and whose spending goes directly to local households"* (INF-06, FGD, June 12, 2021). Another informant highlighted the potential based on past guest experiences: *"The rural digital nomadism idea is promising, as some of our homestay guests are digital workers, like a 3D designer for NASA, who said he was inspired while working in the peaceful and lush Kelecung"* (INF-11, FGD, June 12, 2021).

Building upon this validated concept and the resulting grassroots enthusiasm, the community and student's volunteers officially launched RADIANT Co-Space in April 2022 under the tagline *"Work Productively, Live Authentically."* The initiative marked a significant milestone, formalizing Kelecung's transformation from community-based tourism to a hybrid model that integrates digital productivity with cultural immersion. Radiant Co-Space was operationalized around three interconnected pillars:

- **Co-living spaces** were developed by adapting local homestays into shared arrangements that balanced privacy with integration into host families (Figure 4). Rooms were modest but clean, supported by reliable Internet, and complemented by communal kitchens, terraces, and gathering areas. Many nomads described their stay as a familial experience, with one reflecting, *"I came back here (Kelecung Village) because I am treated as family and I felt like I was coming home"* (INF-16, interview, August 10, 2023).



Figure 4. Local Co-Living Space in Kelecung Eco Village (Photo by Azka Sofyan, 2022)

- **Co-working spaces** were developed by converting a hydroponic training center and mushroom house into a semi-open hub surrounded by gardens, as shown in Figure 5. Built with local materials such as bamboo, black sand, and reclaimed wood, the space could accommodate around ten people across large tables, a high table, and floor seating. Guests often combined work with agricultural activities, such as harvesting vegetables or preparing meals, enjoying a tranquil rural setting that contrasts with Bali's urban nomad hubs, such as Canggu and Ubud.



Figure 5. Local Co-Working Space in Kelecung Eco Village (Photo by Azka Sofyan, 2022)

- **Authentic experiences** were another key element, with visitors invited to join daily life in the village, including farming, shopping at traditional markets, making offerings, and participating in ceremonies or family events (Figure 6). Additional activities, such as trekking, yoga, and spa services, were offered on a non-commercial basis to support household incomes.



Figure 6. Rural daily life reflecting the authentic experiences offered to visitors (Photo courtesy of Kelecung Eco Village, 2018)

To assess economic opportunities without triggering overtourism, RADIANT Co-Space developed a tiered market projection to set realistic targets. The Total Available Market (TAM) was based on a population of 11.1 million global digital nomads (MBO Partners, 2022). The Serviceable Available Market (SAM) is a reachable market based on active members on *nomads.com* listings, which is estimated at over 4 million. The Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM), reflecting realistic capacity, was set at 360 people per year (10 homestays  $\times$  3 guests/month  $\times$  12 months). A stay limit of 15 days per month was imposed to ensure experience quality, host privacy, and cultural balance, while avoiding economic dependency.

Based on observations of digital nomads' spending patterns in Kelecung, they spent IDR 350,000–500,000 per day ( $\approx$ IDR 15 million/month or USD 918), which was well below the Bali average of USD 1,793/month. This positioned Kelecung as a competitive small-scale rural digital nomad destination with a significant local economic impact, while sustaining sociocultural and environmental integrity. Moreover, the extended stays fostered by this model resonated with the principles of slow tourism, emphasizing deeper engagement, reduced mobility frequency, and lower ecological pressure compared with short-term mass-tourism visits. As one digital worker noted, *"Kelecung became my favorite place to work because it was peaceful and authentic. I was more productive here, even though the internet was slower compared with the city"* (INF-17, interview, July 2022).

Overall, Radiant Co-Space positioned Kelecung as a small but competitive rural digital-nomad destination. The model emphasizes inclusive local benefits, slower rhythms, and deeper engagement. These extended stays also align with slow tourism principles by reducing mobility frequency and lowering ecological pressure compared with mass tourism. These findings indicate that rural digital nomadism offers a diversification pathway for vulnerable tourism-dependent communities and illustrates how rural destinations can strategically position themselves within global debates on sustainable and slow tourism futures.

#### 4.3.2 Human Dimensions: Community and Nomad Experiences

The development of rural digital nomadism in Kelecung Eco Village was not only a managerial initiative but also relied heavily on the active participation of the local community. Homestays were primarily managed by women who had already gained experience through previous edu-ecotourism activities, ensuring high standards of hospitality and cleanliness. To support these hosts, Radiant Co-Space focused on improving digital promotion, such as assisting homestay owners with professional photos for social media, since the inflow of digital nomads remained modest, averaging fewer than three nomads

per month. Youth involvement was also prioritized through targeted training, including a barista program and hydroponic produce packaging. The barista training lasted about three months, held irregularly one or two times, involving three young men, though only one continued working daily at the co-working space from its soft launch in August 2022. However, this barista eventually left in December to accept a hotel job in Seminyak, citing a more stable income and better opportunities:

*“I only worked in the co-working space until December 2022 because I got a job offer in a hotel in Seminyak. I chose that because there were few customers here, and I felt guilty being paid while the project operated at a loss.”* (INF-09, interview, January 2023).

Similar challenges were observed in the bouquet training program, which engaged two young women, but was discontinued due to limited marketing capacity and weak demand, leading them to return to urban jobs as the economy recovered post-pandemic.

From the perspective of digital nomads, Kelecong represented an alternative to Bali’s established urban hubs, such as Ubud and Canggu, appealing to those seeking peace, authenticity, and immersion in local life. Visitors, typically aged between 28 and 43 years, generally came from Western countries and worked as freelancers, creatives, or remote professionals. They mostly found the village through Airbnb listings, which consistently received positive reviews despite not ranking high on Google searches, thereby reducing initial doubts about the destination’s reliability. Nomads highlighted that the quiet rural environment allowed them to focus on their work while building emotional connections with their host families. As one guest explained, *“Kelecong became my favorite place to work because it was peaceful and authentic. I was more productive here, even though the internet was slower compared with the city”* (INF-17, interview, July 2022).

A homestay operator recalled feedback from a guest who worked as a 3D designer: *“Some of our homestay guests are digital workers, like a 3D designer for NASA, who said he was inspired while working in the peaceful and lush Kelecong”* (INF-11, FGD, June 12, 2021). These perspectives underline how authenticity and tranquility outweighed infrastructural shortcomings, even though Internet speeds of only 20–30 Mbps remained a limitation for some.

Beyond work-related experiences, sociocultural interactions between nomads and villagers added further value. Guests were regularly invited to participate in farming, market visits, firewood cooking, temple clean-ups (*gotong royong* or cooperative volunteering), and even local weddings. These engagements fostered intimacy and reciprocity, creating bonds that extended

beyond economic exchanges. Villagers often expressed a preference for long-staying individual guests, such as digital nomads, over short-stay groups, since interactions were deeper and more personal. As one villager noted,

*“We prefer guests who stay longer in small numbers because we can communicate more intensely. We can share Balinese culture and involve them in community activities that they would not experience elsewhere in the world. At the same time, we also learn from their backgrounds and cultures”* (INF-04, interview, August 2022).

Nevertheless, the small number of nomads meant that these advantages remained uneven and overshadowed by the reliance on student group tourism, which continued to be the primary source of revenue.

#### 4.3.3 Rural Digital Nomadism as an Exploratory Sustainable Rejuvenation

Ultimately, the integration of rural tourism and digital nomadism offers a potential pathway out of stagnation, although it remains contingent and context-specific. Prior studies have highlighted slow tourism, co-working hubs, and authenticity as strategies to extend the TALC cycles (Lonardi et al., 2024; Situmorang, 2022). The findings from Kelecong reinforce these insights. Digital nomads in the village stayed for an average of 64 days, about six and a half times longer than conventional tourists, providing a steadier income, reducing seasonal vulnerability, and fostering stronger host–guest ties. Their extended stays embodied the slow tourism values of immersion, low-carbon mobility, and cultural reciprocity. Similar patterns are found in Valsugana, Italy, where co-working hubs lengthen stays and enable GSTC certification (Lonardi et al., 2024).

Simultaneously, Kelecong challenges dominant assumptions. While Amaral et al. (2024) suggest that digital nomads typically cluster in urban hubs, the findings show that authentic co-living, cultural immersion, and reliable Internet can make rural margins equally attractive. This reframes digital nomadism from a lifestyle trend into a strategic instrument for rural sustainability, capable of redistributing flows from saturated southern Bali to marginalized hinterlands. However, this promise is conditional: without proactive and capacity-aware planning, rural areas will risk forming “nomad bubbles,” straining fragile environments and replicating overtourism’s dynamics in miniature.

To explicitly address how this integration supports sustainable rejuvenation within the TALC framework, its impacts must be evaluated across three sustainable dimensions:

*Ecological dimension.* Rural digital nomadism generates both opportunities and risks for rural revitalization. Longer stays reduce travel frequency and

per capita emissions, while participation in farming and rituals strengthens environmental awareness. In Kelecong, activities such as rice planting and temple clean-ups reinforced stewardship values, consistent with the findings of Situmorang and Karthana (2021). However, extended stays also increase the demand for water, energy, and waste services, stretching rural infrastructure. As Suyadnya (2021) cautions, commodification and farmland transfers to external investors undermine ecological resilience. Anticipatory governance, through stay caps, carrying capacity assessments, and stricter enforcement of safeguards, is therefore essential to ensure that nomadism contributes to ecological rejuvenation rather than depletion.

*Socio-cultural dimension.* Rural digital nomadism fosters meaningful cultural exchange but also raises the risks of commodification and exclusion. In Kelecong, women-led homestays enabled visitors to participate in ceremonies, cooking, and farming experiences that villagers valued more than conventional short-stay tourism. This resonates with Lonardi et al. (2024), who argue that embedding visitors in community networks enhances cohesion. However, farmland transfers to outside investors have weakened community agency and agrarian resilience, confirming Suyadnya's (2021) concerns about gentrification. The potential for "nomad bubbles" further complicates these optimistic narratives. Cultural rejuvenation is possible only when reciprocity, authenticity, and local control are actively protected.

*Economic dimension.* Rural digital nomadism helps diversify household income but also exposes structural weaknesses in the economy. In Kelecong, nomads spend IDR 350,000–500,000 per day, with most of this expenditure going directly to the households. This supports Artini et al.'s (2020) argument that community-based models distribute benefits more equitably than do mass tourism. However, weak marketing, reliance on Airbnb, volunteer dependency, and limited access to capital constrain local economic growth. Youth migration to urban areas has further reduced local capacity. Although household-level advantages are tangible, scaling them requires professional management, institutional investment, and stronger policy support.

#### ***4.4 Enabling and Constraining Factors Shaping Rejuvenation Outcomes***

While the integration of rural digital nomadism presents a viable rejuvenation pathway, its implementation at the grassroots level is highly complex. The trajectory of RADIANT Co-Space exposes several critical enabling and constraining factors that dictate whether a destination achieves sustainable rejuvenation or collapses under the pressures of the TALC.

#### 4.4.1 Constraining Factors: Operational Fragility and Institutional Resistance

Despite its potential, the initiative encountered severe structural and practical barriers. Operationally, the project relied heavily on a small team of local tourism managers and university volunteers from Udayana University who lacked prior experience in the digital nomad market. Many were enthusiastic but lacked the experience and reference points to guide the implementation of digital nomad programs in rural settings. Comparable models were almost nonexistent, and references to Ubud's nomad ecosystem became less relevant after Hubud, the island's pioneering co-working space, closed during the pandemic. The market profile of Canggu, where nomads later concentrated, was also significantly different from that of Kelecung's rural character. These gaps made it difficult to identify and reach the right audience for the village's offerings. As one project member reflected: *"We had enthusiasm, but lacked the technical skills and references to understand how to sell the product to the right market. We also needed income to support ourselves after graduation"* (INF-15, interview, 2022). These inexperienced volunteers revealed the structural fragility of the project from its inception.

Another major barrier was the weak marketing strategy, which severely constrained the reach of Radiant Co-Space. The team attempted several approaches, including online collaborations, promotional posts on Facebook and LinkedIn, and informal outreach to digital communities, but none of this generated sustainable traction. Pandemic travel restrictions further complicated these efforts, leaving the village without a critical mass of nomads to sustain the initiatives. Marketing relied almost entirely on the Airbnb listing of Kelecung Eco Village, which had existed since 2016 but had never been optimized for nomad-oriented markets. This meant that only a few individual travelers discovered the destination, mostly through organic searches and word-of-mouth. As one team member recalled, *"We tried to promote and market it online, but we didn't know which channels or communities to target rightly"* (INF-14, interview, 2022). This lack of strategic targeting left co-living and co-working facilities underutilized, reinforcing the perception that demand was too small to justify the investment. The absence of strong branding or community-based promotion also limited visibility compared to better-known hubs such as Ubud and Canggu. To overcome this "digital divide," rural destinations cannot rely solely on passive platform listings.

This lack of strategic visibility was further compounded by a gap in product packaging. While the Kelecung Eco Village emphasized 'authenticity' as the primary appeal, qualitative feedback from a recent remote worker (INF-21, a remote worker from Hong Kong) revealed that professional nomads require more than just spontaneity. Evaluating the program in October 2025,

she noted a critical friction point: *“Most tourists would still prefer to have some kind of loose structure or idea of it beforehand... Clearly presenting options would help tourists make informed decisions”*. This suggests that professional nomads do not seek total spontaneity; they prefer ‘curated flexibility’, a clear framework of options that was missing from the village’s initial offer.

Financial constraints and team sustainability emerged as the most pressing issues, highlighting the vulnerability of completely self-funded grassroots initiatives. At the outset, the project was supported by university volunteers and local managers. However, without external capital, covering operational expenses became a personal burden for the project leadership. The employment of a local barista vividly illustrates this dynamic. Hired during the pandemic as a social safety net when he was unemployed, the barista was paid IDR 500,000 per month out of the Project Lead’s personal funds (INF-06). While this embodied the ethos of community support during a crisis, it could not compete with post-pandemic realities. As tourism recovered, the barista naturally left for a better salary with at least a minimum-wage job (IDR 2.6 million) in Seminyak, a decision dictated by economic necessity. Ultimately, this financial shortfall contradicts the core idea of ‘sustainable rejuvenation.’ When a self-funded model cannot provide a competitive living wage, it unintentionally reinforces the systemic inequality it aimed to solve, driving local youth back to urban enclaves.

Finally, the lack of consistent government support exacerbated these constraints. Attempts to secure international funding stalled after local village officials expressed skepticism and proved highly uncooperative. The Project Lead recalled: *“When we proposed international grants, some village officials questioned the feasibility and said it was too idealistic”* (INF-06, interview, 2023). This disconnect stranded the initiative without structural backing, proving that grassroots innovation cannot scale when local governance acts as a bottleneck rather than an enabler. As a cumulative result of these financial, operational, and institutional barriers, the village pragmatically refocused on its established edu-ecotourism model. The following subsection examines this decision and the village’s current standing.

#### 4.4.2 Enabling Factors and Strategic Implications for Governance

By 2025 the village’s edu-ecotourism model had recovered strongly. It hosted more than 50 educational groups a year from Japan and Taiwan and earned about IDR 50 million per month in revenue, operating 15 homestays that accommodate more than 30 guests, with rooms priced at IDR 300,000 to 500,000 per night and a net margin of about IDR 150,000 to 200,000 per room. The benefits reached a wide part of the community, involving around 25 women, about 10

youth guides, and 7 daily workers, with roughly 40 residents benefiting directly and an estimated 80 percent of the 144 residents benefiting in some way. This work also drew external recognition. In 2024 the village was chosen as a national pilot for the Women-Friendly and Environmentally Conscious Tourism Village program run by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of Indonesia, and its leader received the ROLES Foundation's Business Owner of the Year award. In 2025 it was named The Most Bali Impact-Tourism Village by MarkPlus Tourism and the Bali Tourism Board, after winning the People-Centric, Green Village, and Partnership Excellence categories. In 2026 it received a Silver Award in the Local Economic Benefit category at the Responsible Tourism Awards Southeast Asia.

The community refocused on the group market because it was more effective and more stable than the digital nomad experiment had been. This was a practical decision and not a change of vision. The village still wants to move toward tourism that values quality over quantity. It does not regard the current market as a weakness. Its goal is to gain greater economic benefit from authentic experiences, careful attention to carrying capacity, and a better visitor experience. Rural digital nomadism therefore remains the main direction for future development, to be revived and strengthened as capital, skilled people, and governance support become available.

This direction is tied to the community-managed communal forest. The forest began in 2022 with a grant from the Women Earth Alliance and was planted using the Miyawaki method together with agroforestry, starting with about 200 seedlings and training for 24 residents. By 2026 it held more than 1,000 trees across about 375 species, with a survival rate of about 95 percent. It conserves threatened endemic Balinese tree species, allows visitors to offset the carbon of their travel by planting trees, and produces harvests that benefit women and youth. The project leader plans to expand it toward decarbonization, carbon offsetting, and carbon trading that the community would own and manage.

Governance is the decisive factor that dictates whether a destination achieves sustainable rejuvenation or simply collapses under the pressures of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) (Butler, 2024; Lonardi et al., 2024). As the indicators above show, Kelelung is navigating the Development stage of the TALC, with steady growth in its homestays, the communal forest, visitor numbers, and community participation. However, this grassroots momentum is fragile because the local government is unable to enforce existing regional regulations and mitigate overtourism symptoms. The systemic pressure of mass overtourism is already spilling over from Southern Bali, a region currently grappling with the Stagnation phase of the TALC (Sari et al., 2024; Salam et al., 2024). This is evidenced by the fact that external investors have

quietly purchased over 85% of Kelecung's coastal agricultural land, echoing widespread empirical concerns over gentrification, socio-economic inequality, and spatial displacement caused by unchecked land-use changes and foreign takeovers (Salam et al., 2024; Wibowo, 2024; Gumilang, 2024). Furthermore, local enforcement actively contradicts sustainability goals; the village currently allows disruptive ATV and dirt bike attractions on Kelecung Beach, directly threatening designated turtle conservation areas.

As of early 2026, the homestays are reserved mainly for group visitors, whose numbers stayed adequate and fairly stable through 2025. In 2026, however, the village recorded at least six group cancellations by May, which it attributed to rising airfares. Bookings through online travel agencies were not affected. All of the homestays are houses owned by local residents, so they qualify for the Pondok Wisata licence reserved for Indonesian citizens, unlike the foreign-owned villas that the new policy mainly targets. Under Ministry of Tourism Regulation No. 6 of 2025 on risk-based business licensing standards, accommodations listed on online travel agencies must hold a valid business licence or risk removal. The compliance deadline was initially set for 31 March 2026 and was subsequently extended, with the delisting of unlicensed properties beginning on 1 August 2026. As of May 2026, Kelecung's homestays were not yet formally licensed, so completing this registration will be needed to keep them visible on these platforms.

To prevent Kelecung from fast-tracking into the Decline stage of the TALC, theoretical policy making is not the answer; strict enforcement and targeted financial reallocation are. The village government must strictly enforce existing regional conservation by utilizing local traditional security (*pecalang*) to ban disruptive beach attractions and tighten land-use regulations on the ground to halt exploitative land sales. Economically, the village urgently needs to reallocate its formal village funds toward concrete tourism infrastructure or a capacity-building program. Instead of generic spending, these funds must be used transparently to support the development of rural digital nomadism, such as providing reliable public Wi-Fi networks, subsidizing high-speed internet connections for local homestays, constructing dedicated co-working spaces, and offering financial incentives for local youth to manage digital platforms or establish small enterprises.

Furthermore, because grassroots initiatives often lack initial capital, transitioning into a sustainable digital nomad destination requires a strategic intervention through a government-backed pilot project. Kelecung Eco Village and the local government can adopt the SECReTOUR Project funded by the European Union. This project successfully empowers marginalized rural communities in Idrija (Slovenia) by providing structured seed funding and

capacity-building to develop sustainable, heritage-based cultural tourism for remote workers (Fresa, 2024). Replicating this framework in Indonesia must be driven by a clear 'Pentahelix' synergy: the Government acts as the initiator and catalyst; Academia, like Udayana University where the project's original concept was born, provides mentoring and capacity building; the local community, through the tourism awareness group (*Pokdarwis*), manages daily operations; the Business sector supplies essential funding and grants; and the Media amplifies strategic promotion.

Addressing the marketing "digital divide" means the village must stop relying exclusively on Airbnb. While Airbnb is highly effective for passively renting rooms, its format fails to communicate the cultural narrative (storynomics) and cannot establish Kelecung's distinct identity as a rural digital nomad destination. Therefore, the village must optimize its own dedicated website, managed by local youth who are compensated through the aforementioned village funds. To build their capacity, these young administrators should be strongly encouraged to participate in free start-up incubators and fellowships, such as the beVisioneers Fellowship, Matangi Bali Initiative, or Young Entrepreneur Academy (YEA) Indonesia, to acquire advanced digital marketing skills and access early-stage seed funding. Armed with this expertise, the marketing strategy can shift from passive listings to proactive outreach, such as directly engaging with and promoting the village within established digital nomad community groups on Facebook.

Finally, the rural nomad experience itself must be designed around the concept of 'curated flexibility'. Because remote workers still need to adhere to professional work routines, the desire for cultural spontaneity must be balanced with predictable community schedules. For instance, cultural immersion can be seamlessly synchronized with the villagers' daily rhythms, allowing nomads to join locals in feeding cattle at dawn and dusk, or participating in morning farming activities before logging online for their workday. Additionally, the *Pokdarwis* can offer supplementary, on-demand paid activities, such as sea fishing or canoeing. This approach not only provides the structured predictability that professionals require but also creates direct micro-revenue streams for the local community, ensuring the economic sustainability of the initiative.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that overtourism in Bali has accelerated the transition of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) toward stagnation and potential decline, underscoring that the problem lies less in visitor numbers than in governance fragility, ecological overshoot, and sociocultural commodification (Butler & Dodds, 2022; Milano et al., 2024). The Kelecung Eco Village case provides

rare longitudinal evidence from the Global South that rural digital nomadism can act as a conditional driver of rejuvenation. By integrating co-living, co-working, and authentic rural experiences, such an initiative could diversify household economies, extend visitor stays, and reposition peripheral destinations within global tourism flows, while aligning with the slow tourism values of immersion, reciprocity, and ecological restraint (Lonardi et al., 2024; Situmorang, 2022). However, the findings also reveal persistent vulnerabilities, including youth outmigration, limited financial sustainability, and the risk of gentrification, which highlight the need for anticipatory governance and sustained community engagement (Håkansson & Bejaković, 2023; Wibowo, 2024).

Relative to prior scholarship, this study both confirms and challenges existing knowledge. This confirms evidence from European and Mediterranean cases that digital nomadism can extend destination life cycles by stabilizing incomes and lengthening stays (Amaral et al., 2024; Lonardi et al., 2024), while also resonating with studies that underscore the role of digital infrastructure and collaborative governance in rural revitalization (Bosworth et al., 2023; Serpa et al., 2024). Simultaneously, it challenges narratives from Bali's urban hubs, such as Canggu, where nomadism has fueled exclusion and gentrification (Henkens, 2025; Wibowo, 2024). Unlike investor-driven enclaves, Kelecong illustrates how community-based initiatives can embed nomads into everyday life and mitigate socio-spatial segregation in Bali. Moreover, while rural limitations, such as modest infrastructure and slower Internet, are often treated as weaknesses (Zhou et al., 2024), this study suggests that they can be reframed as assets within the slow tourism paradigm, offering authenticity, tranquility, and a counterbalance to urban saturation.

Theoretically, this study extends the TALC framework to Global South contexts, which remain underrepresented in the literature. The findings highlight that digital nomadism can support sustainability only when nomads are actively embedded in local community structures rather than remaining in isolated expatriate enclaves (Bosworth et al., 2023; Serpa et al., 2024). This perspective reflects what this study terms *participatory nomadism*, in which nomads are integrated into community life rather than existing in exclusive bubbles. This framing aligns with broader debates on community-driven approaches to tourism and reinforces the connection between digital nomadism and slow tourism by demonstrating that rejuvenation is not automatic but highly contingent on governance capacity, community innovation, and ecological stewardship. In doing so, the study validates and complicates assumptions drawn from Global North experiences while revealing the distinctive conditions shaping tourism futures in the Global South.

Practically, the Kelecung case shows that grassroots innovation stays fragile without structural support. Community-driven efforts can preserve cultural authenticity, but they remain vulnerable when capital and institutional backing are missing. Because self-funded volunteerism could not yet sustain competitive living wages for local youth, the village pragmatically refocused on its established edu-ecotourism model, which proved more effective and more stable in the near term. This was a strategic decision, and the village still treats rural digital nomadism as its main direction for future development, to be revived as capital, skilled people, and governance support become available. The wider lesson is that without robust institutional backing, external funding, and youth retention, rural digital nomadism cannot mature and may reproduce the urban outmigration and inequality it set out to solve (Henkens, 2025; Yang, 2024).

Despite these contributions, this study acknowledges limitations. The qualitative sample was heavily weighted toward program organizers and local stakeholders, with digital nomad informants representing 32% of the total interviewees. While this was mitigated by triangulating findings with a broader feasibility survey of 85 respondents, the small number of in-depth nomad interviews reflects the nascent and exploratory stage of the initiative. Second, as a single-case study focused on Kelecung Eco Village, the findings may have limited generalizability to other rural contexts with different governance structures or cultural dynamics. These constraints highlight the need for further validation through broader empirical lenses.

For future research, comparative and multisite studies across Bali and other Global South destinations are recommended to assess the transferability of these findings. Longitudinal mixed-methods approaches can provide deeper insights into the long-term social, cultural, and ecological implications of rural digital nomadism, including the carbon paradox of high-mobility lifestyles (Yang, 2024) and the dynamics of gender and youth participation (Mao & Xu, 2024). Evaluating policy frameworks, particularly digital nomad visa schemes, is essential to determine whether they can redistribute flows and enhance competitiveness without replicating the harms of overtourism (Serpa et al., 2024).

Ultimately, this study argues that governance is the decisive factor shaping a destination's trajectory within the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC). While overtourism exposes the exhaustion of a growth-dependent paradigm, rural digital nomadism offers a promising but conditional pathway for rejuvenation. The Kelecung experience proves that rejuvenation is never an automatic or organic outcome. Without formal policy support and consistent institutional backing, grassroots innovations stay vulnerable to the systemic pressures of mass overtourism pushing outward from urban enclaves. By articulating the concept of participatory nomadism, this study demonstrates that advancing

sustainable tourism futures in the Global South depends on anchoring community resilience within a concrete legal and financial framework.

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### Use of Generative AI

The author used OpenAI's ChatGPT for language checking and proofreading during manuscript preparation. No figures were generated using AI. All AI-assisted output was reviewed and verified by the author, who takes full responsibility for the manuscript.

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## Author Profile

**Fransisco Situmorang** is an independent tourism researcher, consultant, and practitioner with over five years of experience in sustainable tourism, consultancy, and project management. He currently serves as a Destination Manager at The TripGuru and a project-based consultant for Komaling Consulting, Indonesia. His research interests include rural tourism, digital nomadism, sustainability, and overtourism. He authored the award-winning book *Tourism Recovery Based on Digital Nomadism Post-COVID 19 in Ubud Tourism Area Bali* (Syiah Kuala University Press, 2022). Email: [fransisco@komalingconsulting.id](mailto:fransisco@komalingconsulting.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9408-7220>

# Overtourism as Urban Overdevelopment: Social Representations and Adaptive Governance in Bali

I Nyoman Darma Putra<sup>1</sup> , Putu Devi Rosalina<sup>2\*</sup> , I Ketut Nama<sup>3</sup> ,  
Paul Green<sup>4</sup> , Michael Hitchcock<sup>5†</sup> 

<sup>1,3</sup> Udayana University, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Institut Pariwisata dan Bisnis Internasional (IPBI), Bali, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> University of Melbourne, Australia

<sup>5</sup> University of London, UK

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**Abstract:** While numerous studies examine overtourism's mechanisms and impacts, research on how overtourism is perceived and managed within political governance frameworks remains scarce. Using a case study of Bali, Indonesia, this study examines how overtourism is socially and politically constructed through stakeholder interpretations and identifies adaptive strategies to address this narrative. The study employed data triangulation through three key research methods of document analysis of online media, semi-structured interviews, and fieldwork observations across major tourism destinations in Bali. Our findings suggest that overtourism should be treated as an integral component of urban phenomena. We emphasise the importance of socially adaptive strategies focusing on equitable distribution, aligned with public trust in government through transparency and credibility. Through recognition of long-term tourists' impact, our findings complicate the association of overtourism with lifestyle migrants. The study contributes to reimagining overtourism as a conjoint urban phenomenon and encourages policymakers to advance towards comprehensive urban planning.

**Keywords:** overtourism; social representation theory; adaptive management strategies; Bali; urbanisation; migration

## 1. Introduction

Overtourism is a key topic in tourism studies, receiving global attention from media, public discourse, and academia. Destinations like Barcelona, Venice, and Dubrovnik face overwhelmed infrastructure and reduced resident quality of life (Cheung & Li, 2019a; Milano et al., 2024). In 2024, Fodor listed Bali

\* Corresponding author's email: [putudevi@ipb-intl.ac.id](mailto:putudevi@ipb-intl.ac.id)

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on its "No-Visit List" due to excessive tourism and unsustainable development ("Fodor's no travel 2025", 2024). Such travel lists highlight important issues yet risk oversimplifying and reducing these concerns to a matter of numbers (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023; Gössling et al., 2020). During the final stage of manuscript preparation in 2026, Bali was ranked by TripAdvisor as the world's best destination (Tripadvisor, 2026). Whilst the government welcomed this, media outlets called for the use of this title to improve tourism facilities and infrastructure (Pusparisa, 2026).

Overtourism typically occurs when the scale and impact of tourism adversely affect local communities, the environment, and heritage resources, often exceeding the destination's management capacity (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023; Dodds & Butler, 2019; Mihalic, 2020). However, no single definition covers all contexts. For example, European cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam face housing shortages and protests (Dodds & Butler, 2019), while on a broader scale, Southeast Asian nation-states like Thailand suffer environmental degradation and overdevelopment (Mihalic, 2020). These examples show overtourism as a dynamic process with various drivers and consequences.

Bali exemplifies overtourism. As Indonesia's top tourist destination, it is a global cultural icon and economic force (MacRae, 2016; Picard, 1996). Rapid tourist growth, population increase, migration, and uneven infrastructure cause local tensions (Chong, 2019; Wardana, 2019). Migration for jobs and business expansion leads to conflicts with local Balinese, who struggle to find employment (Sarmita et al., 2025; Suyadnya et al., 2025). Studies highlight additional issues and sources of local tension, such as land conversion, environmental stress, cultural erosion, and marginalization of the Balinese in decision-making (Mananda et al., 2025; Sunarta et al., 2025; Wardana, 2019, 2020).

A study in Canggu, Bali, however, illustrates how locals rationalize overtourism's disruptions by focusing on economic benefits (Suyadnya et al., 2025). Overtourism discourse in Bali is complicated by political dynamics, where national growth and foreign investments often conflict with local concerns about congestion, pollution, and social change (Fallon, 2001; Situmorang et al., 2019). Overtourism in Bali involves complex social and political dynamics. Widespread elite collusion, corruption, and land mafias influence licensing and development in tourism (Bachriadi & Aspinall, 2023). These issues make solutions like fair and sustainable tourism (Pandit, 2025) seem utopian and difficult to implement.

Despite extensive research on overtourism in Bali as previously discussed, there has been limited focus on how key stakeholders socially represent overtourism and how these differing representations can inform adaptive management approaches to address the socio-political and governance

complexities of tourism development. Utilising Social Representation Theory (SRT), this research examines overtourism as both a tangible and symbolic phenomenon, elucidating how meanings influence perceptions of tourism's impacts, contributing to a more inclusive and adaptive understanding of tourism governance beyond purely quantitative or impact-based perspectives. Two research questions are proposed: How do different stakeholder groups in Bali make sense of the concept of overtourism? And what adaptive management strategies are perceived as viable by stakeholders, and how are they justified within these understandings of overtourism?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 *Conceptualising overtourism*

Overtourism has become a significant focus of interest in tourism studies and practice, especially in areas facing unsustainable expansion and strain on local resources. This term generally describes the adverse effects of excessive tourism on the environment, local populations, infrastructure, and cultural heritage (Butler, 2020a; Mihalic, 2020; Milano et al., 2024; Panousi & Petrakos, 2021). Researchers have identified several key indicators of overtourism, such as environmental harm, increased cost of living expenses, erosion of local culture, and growing opposition from residents (Dodds & Butler, 2019). There are three major themes that describe overtourism in the tourism literature, including the role of destination mismanagement, the specific context in which overtourism occurs, and how it impacts tourists and residents (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023). Studies of overtourism have also focused on the growth of anti-tourism movements (Mihalic, 2020) and the role that overtourism causing distress to locals, as a result of poor tourist behaviour in the form of law breaking and cultural disrespect, for example, and limited job opportunities within the tourism sector (Bouchon & Rauscher, 2019; Milano et al., 2024; Panousi & Petrakos, 2021; Suyadnya et al., 2025).

Although overtourism was initially exemplified in the study of prominent European cities such as Barcelona and Venice (Dodds & Butler, 2019), island destinations like Bali have increasingly become focal points for overtourism due to rapid and often unregulated tourism growth (Wardana, 2019). These concerns are exemplified in Canggu where a significant foreign population in the area has led to a growth of illegal businesses and property ownership (Mananda et al., 2025; Sunarta et al., 2025). This study defines overtourism as a condition of environmental and socio-cultural pressures to destinations due to immense tourist influx resulting in tourist misbehaviour and residents' rejection of these incomers (Subadra, 2024; Suyadnya et al., 2025) with Bali serving as the focal destination for this research. The selection of Bali is relevant as recent

literature has criticised the tourism development model in Bali which leads to overtourism, land conversion, overpopulation, water crises and marginalisation of local people (Cole et al., 2021; Nordholt, 2007; Westoby et al., 2021). Hence, understanding stakeholder perceptions is crucial for grasping the dynamics of tourism development and its effects in the context of excessively developing tourism in certain destinations (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Despite ongoing concerns about overtourism, Bali remains a popular tourist destination, as illustrated by the large crowds attending the 2026 Bali Spirit Festival (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra, 2026).

Overtourism is intricately linked to urban environments, where "urban" denotes areas with high population density, characterized by concentrated economic activities, infrastructure development, and intensive land use (Parr, 2007). Urban destinations are particularly susceptible to overtourism, as the growth of tourism directly competes with residential demands for space, housing, mobility, and public services (Amore et al., 2020). This phenomenon is closely associated with urbanization processes, which involve the transformation of rural or semi-rural areas into urban-like settings through population growth, infrastructure expansion, and intensified economic activity, often driven by tourism development. This transformation has been observed in numerous rural areas in Indonesia, which have now evolved into urban areas (Cole et al.,

2021; Wall, 2018). In tourism destinations, rapid tourism-induced urbanisation can exacerbate overtourism by increasing accommodation density, attracting migrant populations, and intensifying pressure on land, water, and cultural landscapes (Milano et al., 2019).

Overtourism has also been linked to exclusivity of foreign interests (Bouchon & Rauscher, 2019; Cheung & Li, 2019a), which means there is a substantive neglect of local involvement while prioritising foreign interests amidst the increasing number of tourists (Nilsson, 2020), creating a resident-tourist conflict. Studies indicate that stakeholders' views on tourism significantly affect their responses to its challenges and the formulation of future strategies (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Byrd, 2007; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Loverio et al., 2023; Yrigoy et al., 2024). These perceptions can either facilitate or obstruct sustainable tourism development, depending on whether stakeholder groups' interests align or clash here. In situations of overtourism, conflicts often emerge when local communities feel excluded from decision-making, while industry stakeholders focus on economic expansion (Fallon, 2001; Rosalina et al., 2023; Situmorang et al., 2019). Therefore, examining stakeholder perceptions can facilitate powerful rooted strategies that can advance a more inclusive and equitable tourism development.

## ***2.2 Defining overtourism through the lenses of social representations***

Research on overtourism has predominantly utilised frameworks from political economy (Milano et al., 2024), carrying capacity (Butler, 2020b; Panousi & Petrakos, 2021) and stakeholder theory (Loverio et al., 2023; Yrigoy et al., 2024) to investigate the causes, consequences, and strategies of tourism saturation. Numerous studies concentrate on measuring impacts, assessing visitor numbers, or analysing destination management strategies through quantitative or policy-oriented perspectives (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Nepal & Nepal, 2021). While these approaches provide valuable structural insights, they frequently neglect the social construction and symbolic interpretation of tourism by various stakeholder groups. In contrast, Social Representation Theory (SRT) offers a more nuanced and interpretive perspective that emphasizes the collective meaning-making process, which has become a call of research in some studies (Howarth, 2006; Monterrubio & Andriotis, 2014). By adopting SRT, this study transcends surface-level narratives and reveals the underlying social, cultural, and cognitive dynamics that affect how overtourism is perceived and addressed in Bali. This approach is particularly valuable for capturing diverse, context-specific perceptions, which are essential for formulating grounded and inclusive development strategies.

SRT, initially conceptualized by Moscovici (2001) provides a robust framework for examining how social groups construct collective understandings of complex phenomena, such as overtourism. Representations encompass the common-sense knowledge, images, and narratives that circulate within a society, guiding individuals' actions and judgments (Howarth, 2006). In the context of tourism research, SRT has been employed to investigate how communities and stakeholders interpret tourism-related issues, negotiate meanings, and establish symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Monterrubio & Andriotis, 2014; Moscardo, 2011; Moyle et al., 2010). The application of SRT enables researchers to reveal not only negative representations of overtourism, such as overcrowding or the erosion of cultural values; but also more nuanced or positive perceptions, such as viewing tourism as a developmental opportunity (Lai et al., 2016). This would significantly add to scholarly debate and discussion as overtourism is largely regarded as a negative phenomenon or referred to as representative of a 'decline' in a tourism destination lifecycle (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023).

### *2.3 Adaptive Management in Tourism Planning*

Adaptive management (AM), a dynamic and flexible approach with origins in ecological sciences, is designed to manage complex systems under conditions of uncertainty (Holling, 1978). Within the context of tourism, it is increasingly acknowledged as a valuable framework for addressing evolving challenges such as overtourism (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023). "Adaptive management is the process of building resilience and coping with uncertainty through a continual process of experimenting, monitoring, and social learning" (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004, p. 285). This approach emphasizes iterative learning, stakeholder participation, feedback loops, and the capacity to revise actions based on empirical outcomes (Plummer & Fennell, 2009). Such characteristics render it particularly pertinent to destinations like Bali, where tourism pressures fluctuate over time, and uniform solutions often prove inadequate. Integrating adaptive strategies into tourism planning can assist destinations in balancing development and conservation, incorporating diverse perspectives, and maintaining resilience amid change.

Governance is pivotal in determining how destinations address the challenges posed by overtourism. Scholars contend that effective management necessitates not only top-down regulations but also bottom-up participation and multi-stakeholder collaboration (Graci, 2013; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Loverio et al., 2023; McComb et al., 2017). Common policy measures include limiting visitor numbers, zoning, enforcing environmental standards, and investing in infrastructure. However, these measures are often reactive rather than

proactive and do not adequately address the underlying causes of overtourism. In destinations such as Bali, governance is further complicated by overlapping jurisdictions, political interests, and economic reliance on tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). There are some cases where a government program is refused by the local community due to irrelevant community needs and limited community inclusion, though the government claimed that their program objective is community-led and oriented (Cole, 2006; Saufi et al., 2014). Consequently, governance solutions must be context-sensitive, inclusive, and sufficiently flexible to adapt over time, aligning with the principles of AM (Islam et al., 2018).

In alignment with the AM framework, this study utilises a feedback loop model (Armitage et al., 2009; Holling, 1978; Plummer & Fennell, 2009) to evaluate and refine strategies aimed at mitigating overtourism in Bali. The analysis is organised around the identification of mechanisms and anticipated outcomes, thereby facilitating iterative learning and strategy refinement, following earlier study using AM theory in the tourism context (Armitage et al., 2009; Islam et al., 2018; Larson & Poudyal, 2012). Mechanisms are represented by proposed adaptive strategies drawn from the stakeholders' perspectives. The expected outcomes focus on enhancing destination resilience, ensuring equitable tourism benefits, and promoting socio-ecological sustainability (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2005). This feedback loop structure acknowledges that overtourism is a non-linear, evolving challenge that necessitates continuous monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and responsive policy adaptation. By embedding this dynamic approach, the study advances a more context-sensitive and participatory model of destination management, suitable for complex systems such as Bali.

Addressing the issue of overtourism requires a reimagining of tourism that emphasises long-term sustainability, equity, and resilience. In this study, Social Representation Theory (SRT) informs Adaptive Management (AM) by providing the social and interpretive foundation through which stakeholder perceptions, meanings, and contested understandings of overtourism are identified and incorporated into adaptive learning processes. While AM emphasizes iterative learning, feedback loops, and policy adjustment, SRT contributes by explaining how different stakeholder groups socially construct tourism problems and acceptable solutions. Therefore, the feedback loops within AM are not solely driven by technical indicators, but also by evolving social representations, enabling a more socially adaptive, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach to overtourism governance in Bali. In the context of Bali, envisioning responsible tourism futures involves balancing the economic dependence on tourism with the imperative to protect cultural and natural resources (Putra, 2015; Rosalina et al., 2023; Verheijen & Putra, 2019). Therefore,

stakeholder engagement, adaptive governance, and a deeper understanding of local social representations are considered suitable approaches to explore how overtourism in Bali needs to be addressed.

### 3. Method

A qualitative case study design was employed as this design is particularly relevant to the topic as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives and paradigms on the matter (Miles et al., 2014). Moreover, a case study approach is particularly relevant for examining complex social phenomena within their real-world contexts, enabling an in-depth understanding of tourism-related challenges (Yin, 2001). Bali was selected as the research site due to its global recognition as a prominent tourism destination and its frequent citation in academic and policy discussions on mass tourism and overtourism (Chong, 2019; Suyadnya et al., 2025; Wall, 2018).

There are three methods conducted in this research to allow data triangulation (Miles et al., 2014). Data collection was conducted over a period of three months, from May to August 2025. Initially, the data collection process involved a document analysis of online media pertaining to overtourism in Bali. The keywords employed in this investigation were "overtourism AND Bali." The term "overtourism" has been adopted into the Indonesian language and, therefore, was not translated for this study. Only articles addressing either definitions or solutions were selected for analysis. A total of 44 articles and 7 video news were analysed, as presented in Appendix 1 and 2. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 stakeholders, including representatives from the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local government, a tourism scholar and consultant, tourism entrepreneurs, and hospitality employees. The selection of these stakeholders regards their significant roles in the tourism literature, participants were selected using purposive and chain-referral sampling strategies to ensure the acquisition of deep, context-rich insights (Patton, 2002). The researchers' academic and professional familiarity with Bali's tourism sector facilitated access to diverse tourism stakeholders while also requiring continuous reflexive awareness regarding potential interpretive biases throughout the research process. The selection criteria are based on their long-standing experience (minimum 10 years) in the tourism industry to ensure their deep knowledge of the context being investigated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were meticulously adhered to. Participants were comprehensively informed about the study's objectives, and informed consent was obtained prior to their participation. To maintain confidentiality, all identifying information was either removed or anonymized in the presentation

of the findings (Wiles et al., 2008). The details of the informants' profiles are presented in Table 1. In the analysis, their identities are referred to with the initials Participant: P1–12. Meanwhile, news and video data are referred to with the codes D1–44, and video: V1–7.

Table 1. Participants' details

| <b>Participants' Identification</b> | <b>Profile</b>                                                                                                                | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Industry tenure (in year)</b> | <b>Organisational tenure (in year)</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| P1-Hotel                            | General Manager of a hotel group                                                                                              | M             | 30                               | 12                                     |
| P2-NGO                              | Hotel and Tourism practitioner; NGO Representative; An occasional guest lecture; professional advisor for a legislative group | M             | 32                               | 11                                     |
| P3-TA                               | Entrepreneur/owner of a tour travel; Travel agent representative                                                              | M             | 35                               | 28                                     |
| P4-TA                               | Tour guide                                                                                                                    | F             | 10                               | 4                                      |
| P5-Entrepreneur                     | Entrepreneur/Owner of a hotel                                                                                                 | M             | 10                               | 10                                     |
| P6 -TA                              | Tour Guide                                                                                                                    | F             | 13                               | 10                                     |
| P7-TA                               | Travel operator, managing partner, guest service relation in the travel agency                                                | M             | 21                               | 11                                     |
| P8-Academic                         | Ex-hotel employee and full-time academic, tourism researcher and consultant                                                   | F             | 20                               | 15                                     |
| P9-Hotel                            | General Manager of a hotel group; Leader of Hotel Association; Tourism consultant                                             | M             | 24                               | 15                                     |
| P10-Entrepreneur                    | Entrepreneur of a villa management; Villa consultant/developer                                                                | M             | 20                               | 17                                     |
| P11-Hotel                           | General Manager of a hotel; CEO of local hotel operator                                                                       | M             | 32                               | 12                                     |
| P12-Government                      | Government representative                                                                                                     | M             | 28                               | 10                                     |

Thirdly, researchers also conducted fieldwork across key tourism hubs in Bali, including Kuta, Nusa Dua, Sanur, Canggu and Ubud; areas that have been significantly impacted by mass tourism (Chong, 2019; Cole & Browne, 2015; Gössling et al., 2020; MacRae, 2016). The purpose of the observation is to validate the data obtained through the first and second methods by specifically examining the environmental and social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), as well as documenting the impacts of overtourism on local communities, including traffic congestion, waste accumulation, environmental degradation, social uneasiness related to tourist misbehaviour, and increasing socio-spatial pressures experienced by residents. By integrating interviews, direct observations at tourism-saturated sites, and online media analysis, the researchers not only enhanced the credibility of their findings but also facilitated the cross-verification of emergent themes across multiple data sources. All datasets were subsequently compiled and transcribed for input into NVivo, where they were analysed using inductive thematic analysis, allowing themes to naturally emerge from the datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inductive thematic analysis was primarily conducted by one researcher to ensure coding consistency, while the resulting codes and themes were regularly reviewed and validated through iterative discussions among the co-authors to enhance analytical reliability, reflexivity, and interpretive credibility. Analytical rigour was further ensured by comparing patterns across the three sources of data (Patton, 2002).

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 *Overtourism is represented as an urban overdevelopment*

Public dissatisfaction with overtourism tends to focus on tourism growth and visitor numbers, often framing tourism as the sole and island-wide issue. Our research, however, suggests that overtourism is the result of a complex overlap between urban overdevelopment and tourism (Figure 2), which complicates how we might associate Bali as a whole with a concept or understanding of overtourism:

In Bali, there are several less-visited tourist areas, while tourists tend to flock in Petitenget, Canggu, and Ubud. It would be beneficial to address this congestion. I am confident that most practitioners would agree that Bali has not yet reached the stage of overtourism. Some hotels remain unoccupied, even though the streets are bustling (P1-Hotel).



Figure 2. Canggu is often associated with traffic congestion and overtourism, yet it continues to attract large numbers of tourists who visit to enjoy its beaches and coastal recreation (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra, 2022).

This is also found in the online news, drawn from the statement from the representative of Bali Tourism government, and remains consistent in the interview.

South Bali is the focal point of the island, evident in its bustling business activities, frequent traffic jams, and extensive development. However, Bali encompasses more than just the south; it also includes East, North, and West Bali (D20).

More importantly, some participants highlighted that tourism might be not the only causal factor affecting the overdevelopment and landscape change. Participants perceived overtourism as an imbalance of infrastructure to carry the tourist/visitor influx.

Generally, we see overtourism is used as a campaign to disparage destinations (P2-Hotel).

In fact, tourism alone should not bear the blame. Bali has experienced significant population growth, yet this increase has not been accompanied by corresponding infrastructure improvements. The roads remain narrow, with no upgrades, and public transportation is not operating as it should. (P3-entrepreneur).

Various online sources similarly depict tourism as a factor contributing to a destination's inability to balance urban development or manage migration and foreign involvement, as one article explains that:

The initial threat of overtourism can be felt in several aspects: property sold to foreigners, cultural shifts in some areas, and concrete threats to infrastructure. The "New Moscow" phenomenon [refers to influx of long-term foreigners, including Russian nationals to settle in one particular suburb/area], ongoing uncontrolled traffic jams, and even fireworks at beach clubs disrupt local traditional rituals (D9).

This imbalance creates annoyance and irritability in both tourists and visitors, illustrating how overtourism can have reciprocal negative impacts in host-guests experiences due to a shift in perceived decline in local culture and the spread of urbanisation towards once pristine or valued rural areas. Take the view of a travel agent below:

On the downside, it could potentially affect local culture, making it appear as though we are altering our own traditions to align with theirs (tourists'), thereby transforming our identity. The environment also gets impacted, for instance, through extensive landscape change of hotels and villas, along with increased pollution and traffic congestion. Overcrowding results in excessive resource consumption, which is what makes the Balinese people slowly feel annoyance at their own homeland (P7-TA).

These views suggest that overtourism is perceived as a framing of the complex inter-related impacts of migration and urban-development. As the participants and online data suggest, tourism can be a part of, yet cannot be regarded as a sole cause of the detrimental impact on a destination.

## ***4.2 Towards adaptive management of overtourism***

### ***4.2.1 Spatial strategy***

Overtourism is perceived as a spatial planning issue. When participants were asked whether they agreed with the statement that Bali is experiencing overtourism, they believe that overtourism is confined to specific, urbanised areas that do not reflect Bali as an entire destination. An academic mentioned that:

Bali is not yet having overtourism, actually the problem is the uneven distribution of tourists, we can compare it with Singapore and Malaysia, with so many tourists visiting, they can still make tourists comfortable (P8-Academic).

Although comparing Bali as an island to countries like Singapore and Malaysia might be a flawed assumption, this participant's comment highlights the poor management of tourism in Bali, particularly in terms of distributing tourists effectively, or attracting tourists in least visited destinations. Most discussions then lead to a focus on a more equitable distribution of the tourism economy by empowering local communities, leveraging entrepreneurial efforts, creating new tourist attractions, as well as promoting alternatives to diversify tourism mobilities and pathways across the island. This hotel stakeholder also resonates with previous comments by an academic:

We need to create opportunities for entrepreneurs in less densely populated regions, as well as for other small businesses. Additionally, we should collaborate with local entrepreneurs to bring their products to the international market (P11-Hotel).

As one accommodation entrepreneur illustrates, the spatial distribution of the tourism economy is also viewed through the idea of involving tourism villages beyond congested areas and promoting new tourism products and attractions:

Our aim is to develop tourist villages by enhancing their attractions based on their unique potential. Therefore, we should not limit our focus to popular destinations only. Instead, we can tailor our offerings by guiding tourists to lesser-known destinations, enriching their travel experiences with similar attractions. For instance, when someone desired the Tanah Lot sunset but faced heavy traffic, we can replace the Tanah Lot visit to an alternative sunrise spot, such as in Kintamani (P3-Entrepreneur).

The analysis suggests overtourism is positioned less as an issue of excessive tourist arrivals and more as a challenge of managing spatial distribution to enhance both visitor experiences and local livelihoods.

#### *4.2.2 Limitation strategy*

The analysis indicates that it is crucial to limit growth, being uniform amidst diverse types of stakeholder groups, particularly in terms of infrastructure development and visitor numbers, as illustrated below:

The governor needs to consider the optimal number for Bali. For instance, we mentioned 7 million tourists, which differs from

the national target, as the central government is advocating for a continuous increase (P9-Hotel).

Moreover, technology can aid in controlling the number of visitors to certain overcrowded tourist destinations. As P8 suggested, visitor tracking data can be utilised:

Based on this data, we can determine where tourists should visit, allowing us to impose restrictions. This approach has been implemented at Borobudur and can be applied to other crowded destinations (P8-Academic).

Other participants expressed concerns about the importance of enforcing a moratorium on infrastructure development with rigorous monitoring. To provide context, Bali has imposed such a moratorium on hotels and villas in overcrowded tourist areas since 2015, yet participants noted inconsistencies in its implementation:

Despite the moratorium, development sometimes continues, so the government must monitor it to ensure effective destination management (P1-Hotel).

Overall, the theme suggests that limitations are essential in controlling the crowd and massive development, but further efforts are needed to enforce sanctions and ensure the moratorium is implemented as initially intended.

#### 4.2.3 Tourist Levy

Regulations regarding the foreign tourist levy in Bali are designed to address overtourism and outlined through several complementary provisions. Regional Regulation (*Perda*) No. 6/2023, effective since August 2023, introduced the levy to support cultural and environmental preservation, later refined by *Perda* number 2/2025, which added provisions on exemptions and service fees. Governor Regulation (*Pergub*) No. 2/2024 specifies the payment procedure, which must be made cashless via the *Love Bali* application, with a fixed amount of IDR 150,000 per visit. Exemptions apply to holders of certain visas such as diplomatic, KITAS/KITAP (Temporary or Permanent resident visa), student, business, and golden visas. Sanctions include warnings and restrictions from entering tourist sites, while incentives provide a 3% service fee to certain parties. Overall, these regulations aim to protect Bali's culture and environment while enhancing the sustainability and quality of its tourism sector.

Although the levy was generally introduced as a preservation-oriented initiative, many participants perceived its implementation with scepticism and

distrust, expressing concerns that the policy symbolised ineffective governance, limited transparency, and weak accountability rather than meaningful community protection. Several participants questioned whether the levy genuinely contributed to addressing overtourism or merely functioned as an additional financial burden disconnected from local community needs, as reflected in the following quote:

I have heard about this (levy), but in my opinion, it was ineffective because there was no transparency regarding how the funds were ultimately utilised, making the outcomes unclear. As a result, many assumed it to be an act of extortion since no evidence of its use was available afterward. People were, in fact, willing to contribute, especially when framed as supporting sustainability, but the implementation lacked clarity. Was there any tangible value or benefit? (P8-Academic).

While one participant (P9-Hotel) expressed support for the Tourist Levy and viewed it as a necessary mechanism for preserving Bali's environmental and cultural sustainability, this positive representation was strongly tied to perceptions of stricter enforcement, institutional commitment, and shared responsibility among tourism stakeholders. Drawing from prior involvement in government briefings, the participant perceived the End-point mechanism as a potentially more credible and effective approach to improving levy implementation:

This End-point system essentially operates through an incentive mechanism for the collectors, whereby each would receive 3% of the total amount they collect. By downloading the Love Bali application, they can explain its functions and benefits while also facilitating the onsite payment process. This new system has already been stipulated and legalized in the Regional Regulation (Perda). They also explained that since only around 30% (approximately IDR 300 billion) of the targeted amount (of this year) has been collected, the government is not yet in a position to allocate the funds for improving destinations (P9-Hotel).

P12-Government further confirmed that the revenue from the levy in 2024 surpassed its target, with total earnings exceeding IDR 318 billion, well above the initial goal of IDR 250 billion. All funds have been transferred to the regional treasury and allocated according to the 2025 Regional Budget (APBD) to safeguard Balinese culture and the environment. These funds are utilized for various activities, including support for traditional villages, *subaks* irrigation system, and artists participating in the Bali Arts Festival (PKB). In a news article, it is confirmed that a considerable amount has been allocated, IDR 6.5 billion

in 2025, part of which was sourced from the PWA fund (Samudero, 2025). They also confirm to optimise the use of the fund for the waste management through the TPS3R (recycling facilities) in regencies and cities. The Bali Provincial Government is committed to transparency in PWA management and anticipates that revenues in 2025 will rise in line with improvements made on the ground.

While P9-Hotel perceived the levy as a preservation-oriented initiative with potential to improve tourism governance, many other participants viewed it with scepticism due to limited transparency regarding fund allocation and implementation. For these stakeholders, the levy symbolised not only environmental responsibility, but also growing distrust toward governmental accountability and commitment to addressing overtourism. Although the government later promoted the allocation of levy funds for waste management, customary villages, and infrastructure development (Nusa Bali, 2025), participants remained cautious about whether these promises would translate into tangible improvements for local communities and destinations experiencing overtourism pressures.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Redefining overtourism and tourism system

Most of the literature on overtourism frames it as a problem of excessive tourist arrivals surpassing a destination's carrying capacity (Mihalic, 2020), which subsequently diminishes the quality of life for residents and degrades the visitor experience (Goodwin, 2017). The repercussions include environmental stress, cultural erosion, increased living costs, and stakeholder conflicts arising from uneven benefits and differing priorities (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023; Mihalic, 2020). Our findings propose a more nuanced perspective: in Bali, overtourism is largely seen as a form of urban overdevelopment, where tourism intersects with rapid population growth, migration, and growing infrastructure deficits. Although Bali is not universally labelled as overtouristed by its residents (as they largely focus on population concentration), there is widespread acknowledgment of poor management of both migrants and tourists, leading to overcrowding, landscape changes, overloaded infrastructure, and local frustration with newcomers and visitors.

This finding directly aligns with MacRae's (2016) arguments, which explore how migration and cosmopolitan identities complicate the narrative of tourism-driven change. Since the post-bombing attacks in 2002 and 2005, an anti-migrant sentiment has passively emerged among the Balinese, who perceive the bombing as having been caused by Muslims (Couteau, 2003). This sentiment is now further intensified by the influx of foreign residents, whose misbehaviour often undermines the cultural values of Bali, a place where

sacredness is cherished (Nordholt, 2007). Migrants, former residents, and tourists all contribute to shifts in urban demographics, spatial consumption, and cultural tensions, making it difficult to single out tourism as the sole cause of urban stress. The situation in Seville further illustrates this dynamic. Jover & Díaz-Parra (2022) document that in the historic center, lifestyle migrants and tourists often inhabit the same neighborhoods, leading to increased housing costs, altering the social profile, and causing long-term residents to feel “outpriced” or socially excluded. Similarly, in Reykjavík, Iceland, recent research indicates that the growth of tourism-related short-term rentals and migration has exacerbated a housing shortage for long-term residents, increasing precarity and undermining housing stability (Mixa & Loftsdóttir, 2025). These examples underscore that overtourism cannot be reduced to visitor numbers alone but is intricately linked with migration flows, housing markets, and urban governance.

Applying Social Representation Theory (SRT) allows us to see overtourism not as a condition but as a contested social meaning. Stakeholders in Bali framed overtourism as both a tangible issue, manifested in traffic congestion, pollution, and landscape changes, as well as a symbolic issue, linked to cultural erosion, shifting identities, and a sense of annoyance toward both tourists and development actors. These representations reveal nuance to the existing literature, which often portrays overtourism as a homogenous, universally negative phenomenon (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023). By highlighting the diversity and contestation in how overtourism is socially constructed, our study advances the role of SRT in tourism scholarship and demonstrates how meanings, rather than numbers, drive community acceptance or rejection of tourism policies.

Bali’s case enriches the growing body of literature by demonstrating that the discourse of overtourism is influenced not only by tourist arrivals but also by internal and external migration. This highlights the necessity of viewing overtourism as a complex social phenomenon arising from the cumulative effects of various social and political dynamics, rather than simply as a matter of lifestyle migrants. Indeed, the term overtourism itself can be considered a form of media framing (Clark & Nyaupane, 2020; Phi, 2020) that risks oversimplifying the issue and diverting attention from more fundamental challenges in destination management and urban planning.

This understanding also prompts a re-evaluation of earlier theoretical models of the tourism system. For instance, Leiper’s (1990) model emphasizes the flow of tourists between origin and destination, and Dwyer and Kim’s (2003) focus on destination competitiveness highlights comparative advantages, yet they largely overlook the possibility that tourists may become long-term residents, property investors, or business owners. Another concern is Doxey’s

Tourist's Irritation Index, which needs expansion (Williams, 1979), as findings show that local communities can also become irritated when tourism is not properly managed. The findings suggest that residents' frustration is directed less toward tourists themselves and more toward perceived governance failures, particularly as lifestyle migrants contribute to urban overdevelopment, land-use change, and socio-spatial pressures that extend beyond the impacts of tourism per se. Consequently, recognizing the declining phase in a tourism destination's lifecycle as a result of overtourism (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023) can serve as a warning to implement effective management strategies before further deterioration occurs. These realities call for a more critical and integrated perspective on destination management framework, one that prioritises the well-being of local communities while also considering the role of foreign investment and migration in shaping urban and tourism landscapes.

### *5.2 Towards a new framework: Tackling overtourism with socially adaptive management strategies*

This finding underscores the necessity of framing the issue of overtourism as a consequence of mismanagement, which neglects the prioritization of visitor management and destination planning. Numerous studies, such as those conducted in Singapore (Toan et al., 2023) illustrates the successful management of destinations despite high visitor numbers. Participants have consistently highlighted that congestion in Bali is concentrated in specific hotspots (such as Canggu, Jimbaran, Uluwatu, Ubud), while many areas remain underutilised, indicating an uneven spatial development pattern rather than island-wide saturation. This insight contributes to current debates by redefining overtourism not as a universal threshold of numbers and impacts (Mihalic, 2020; Milano et al., 2019) but as a relational imbalance between tourism growth, infrastructure provision, and urban planning. Such a reframing emphasizes the need to integrate overtourism research with urban studies and social-ecological systems, offering a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding.

Our findings offer empirical support for the application of adaptive management within the tourism sector. We identified three strategies: spatial strategy, limitation strategy, and tourist levy, each reflecting varying degrees of adaptive thinking. The spatial dispersal approach, which promotes the development of new attractions and entrepreneurship in less-visited areas, aligns closely with the principles of experimentation, flexibility, and learning inherent in AM (Islam et al., 2018). Conversely, limitation strategies, such as moratoria on hotel construction or the implementation of visitor tracking technologies, underscore the tension between policy ambition and enforcement capacity, revealing deficiencies in governance structures and lacking the

collaborative focus, essential to AM (Plummer & Fennell, 2009). Lastly, the tourist levy exemplifies how adaptive strategies can falter in the absence of trust, transparency, and effective feedback mechanisms: although intended to preserve culture and the environment, stakeholders questioned its credibility and fairness. These insights advance AM theory by demonstrating that its efficacy depends not only on technical design (Armitage et al., 2008) but also on the social legitimacy of policies within local contexts.

The analysis further elucidates that deficiencies in governance are central to the issue of overtourism in Bali. Numerous documented issues pertain to the involvement of national elites and foreign investors, and land mafias (Bachriadi & Aspinall, 2023) often at the expense of the interests of the local Balinese population in decision-making processes related to tourism development in Bali (Adityanandana & Gerber, 2019; Rosalina et al., 2023; Wardana, 2019). Furthermore, there exists a misalignment between national visitor arrival targets and the potential impacts thereof. While the national government prioritizes continued growth targets, local communities express concerns regarding congestion, cultural erosion, and the quality of daily life (Chong, 2019). This misalignment generates tensions that cannot be resolved solely through adaptive strategies. Participants consistently highlighted issues such as weak enforcement, inconsistent monitoring, and a lack of transparency in government programs, particularly concerning the tourist levy. These findings not only corroborate but also expand upon existing literature that identifies governance failures as a fundamental cause of overtourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Situmorang et al., 2019).

Our contribution, therefore, is the direct linkage of governance trust to AM, extending the aim of sustainability and fairness (Pandit, 2025; Sharpley, 2000). Without institutional credibility and stakeholder confidence, even well-intentioned adaptive measures may be perceived as ineffective or exploitative. This underscores the political dimensions of overtourism management, where success is contingent not only upon technical design but also upon sustained legitimacy and participatory engagement.

In synthesising these insights, we propose that overtourism in Bali should be conceptualised as a socially adaptive governance process rather than merely a tourism management problem. The findings suggest that overtourism is closely intertwined with urban overdevelopment, migration, and governance challenges, where effective management depends not only on technical interventions but also on institutional legitimacy. Within this framework, social representations shape how stakeholders interpret overtourism and evaluate the legitimacy of policy responses, while Adaptive Management contributes principles of experimentation, flexibility, and continuous learning. Trust, transparency, and collaboration emerge

as critical adaptive governance mechanisms because they strengthen institutional legitimacy and stakeholder willingness to support, participate in, and comply with management interventions. Consequently, transparency should be understood not simply as a normative principle, but as an adaptive strategy that enables learning, reduces stakeholder scepticism, and facilitates collective responses to the complex socio-spatial challenges of overtourism

### **5.3 Practical contributions**

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for policymakers, destination managers, and local communities. Firstly, the study reconceptualises overtourism as an issue of governance and spatial management rather than merely a matter of tourist numbers. Destination planners are encouraged to focus on redistributing visitor flows and enhancing infrastructure, particularly in underdeveloped areas. This reframing facilitates more targeted interventions, such as zoning policies, diversification of attractions, and mobility management, which can alleviate pressure on hotspots while creating new opportunities for peripheral communities (Amore et al., 2020; Nilsson, 2020). Secondly, the application of AM underscores the necessity for governance practices that prioritise trust, transparency, and participatory decision-making. This suggests that adaptive measures, such as levies or dispersal programs, must be co-designed with local stakeholders to ensure legitimacy and acceptance (Mihalic, 2020). Finally, by linking tourism pressures with migration, housing, and urban development dynamics, the study provides a foundation for cross-sector collaboration between tourism authorities, urban planners, and community organizations (Cheung & Li, 2019b; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Loverio et al., 2023). Such integrative governance can help align national growth objectives with local well-being, ensuring that tourism development supports both cultural sustainability and the quality of life for residents.

## **6. Conclusion and Future Research**

This study contributes to overtourism scholarship by reconceptualising overtourism as a socially adaptive governance challenge rather than merely a consequence of excessive visitor numbers. By integrating Social Representation Theory and Adaptive Management, the study demonstrates that stakeholder perceptions, institutional legitimacy, trust, and governance capacity are central to understanding and managing overtourism. The findings further suggest that overtourism in Bali is closely linked to urban overdevelopment, migration dynamics, and uneven governance processes, highlighting the need to move beyond visitor management toward more adaptive, participatory, and spatially informed governance approaches.

Future research should further examine the political ecology of overtourism governance, particularly how power relations, institutional arrangements, and competing stakeholder interests, shape tourism development in island destinations. It is crucial to examine whether adopting a participatory and partnership-centered model with various stakeholders, while promoting local involvement, is necessary, as suggested by earlier studies (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Loverio et al., 2023). In the context of Bali, the emerging concept of “One Island Management” (Pitana, 2004, Konsep ‘One Island Management’, 2018, 2025) presents a promising avenue for future investigation. Rather than being viewed solely as a governance mechanism, a research question can be framed, for instance, “How can the concept of One Island Management enhance institutional legitimacy, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive governance in addressing overtourism and urban overdevelopment in Bali? Examining the opportunities, limitations, and political realities of One Island Management would not only advance understanding of overtourism governance in Bali but also contribute to broader debates on adaptive governance and political-ecological management (Dangi & Petrick, 2021) in island geographies.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Sources of written online news article

| ID Number | URL Link                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| D1        | Kurniati, D. (2025, March 16). Atasi overtourism, anggota DPR usul naikan tarif pajak turis di Bali. <i>DDTC News</i> . <a href="https://news.ddtc.co.id/berita/nasional/1809483/atasi-overtourism-anggota-dpr-usul-naikkan-tarif-pajak-turis-di-bali">https://news.ddtc.co.id/berita/nasional/1809483/atasi-overtourism-anggota-dpr-usul-naikkan-tarif-pajak-turis-di-bali</a>                                                   |
| D2        | Lisani, N. (2024, September 30). Bagaimana overtourism jadi ancaman bagi pariwisata Indonesia. <i>Identitas Unhas</i> . <a href="https://identitasunhas.com/bagaimana-overtourism-jadi-ancaman-bagi-pariwisata-indonesia/">https://identitasunhas.com/bagaimana-overtourism-jadi-ancaman-bagi-pariwisata-indonesia/</a>                                                                                                           |
| D3        | CXO Media. (2024, April 29). Bali dan overtourism yang menghantui. <i>CXO Media</i> . <a href="https://www.cxomedia.id/general-knowledge/20240429160710-55-180289/bali-dan-overtourism-yang-menghantui">https://www.cxomedia.id/general-knowledge/20240429160710-55-180289/bali-dan-overtourism-yang-menghantui</a>                                                                                                               |
| D4        | Permana, R. (2024, August 20). Bali gives a snapshot of what overtourism looks like in the developing world. <i>The Conversation</i> . <a href="https://theconversation.com/bali-gives-a-snapshot-of-what-overtourism-looks-like-in-the-developing-world-235550">https://theconversation.com/bali-gives-a-snapshot-of-what-overtourism-looks-like-in-the-developing-world-235550</a>                                              |
| D5        | The Bali Sun. (2024, November 22). Bali kicks back over listing on travel “no list” for 2025. <i>The Bali Sun</i> . <a href="https://thebalisun.com/bali-kicks-back-over-listing-on-travel-no-list-for-2025">https://thebalisun.com/bali-kicks-back-over-listing-on-travel-no-list-for-2025</a>                                                                                                                                   |
| D6        | Wahyuni, T. (2024, December 3). Mengubur mimpi punya tanah di Bali – Warga ‘terjepit’ di tengah perkembangan wisata dan kebutuhan hidup. <i>BBC News Indonesia</i> . <a href="https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c14ld7l1gyeo">https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c14ld7l1gyeo</a>                                                                                                                                        |
| D7        | Sahputra, Y.E. (2024, January 4). Bali mengalami overtourism, Menteri Sandiaga Uno ungkap penyebabnya. <i>Tempo</i> . <a href="https://www.tempo.co/hiburan/bali-mengalami-overtourism-menteri-sandiga-uno-ungkap-penyebabnya-101631">https://www.tempo.co/hiburan/bali-mengalami-overtourism-menteri-sandiga-uno-ungkap-penyebabnya-101631</a>                                                                                   |
| D8        | Pusparisa, Y.D.R. (2024, January 3). Bali menyandang predikat overtourism. <i>Kompas</i> . <a href="https://www.kompas.id/baca/ekonomi/2024/01/03/bali-menyandang-predikat-overtourism">https://www.kompas.id/baca/ekonomi/2024/01/03/bali-menyandang-predikat-overtourism</a>                                                                                                                                                    |
| D9        | Regitahadi. (2025, January 7). Bali surga yang terancam overtourism. <i>Kumparan</i> . <a href="https://kumparan.com/regita-hadi/bali-surga-yang-terancam-overtourism-24FgXOcywFF">https://kumparan.com/regita-hadi/bali-surga-yang-terancam-overtourism-24FgXOcywFF</a>                                                                                                                                                          |
| D10       | Villa Bali Sale. (2024, September 9). Bali overtourism laws & global solutions. <i>Villa Bali Sale</i> . <a href="https://www.villabalisale.com/blog/bali-overtourism-laws-global-solutions">https://www.villabalisale.com/blog/bali-overtourism-laws-global-solutions</a>                                                                                                                                                        |
| D11       | World Tourism Forum. (2024, September 17). Bali takes action to combat overtourism with new hotel ban. <i>World Tourism Forum</i> . <a href="https://live.worldtourismforum.net/news/Catch-up-the-latest-news-i...ndustry/Bali-Takes-Action-to-Combat-Overtourism-with-New-Hotel-Ban">https://live.worldtourismforum.net/news/Catch-up-the-latest-news-i...ndustry/Bali-Takes-Action-to-Combat-Overtourism-with-New-Hotel-Ban</a> |
| D12       | Novita, M. (2024, November 19). Bali tops Fodor’s 2025 “no list” due to overtourism. <i>Tempo</i> . <a href="https://en.tempo.co/read/1943066/bali-tops-fodors-2025-no-list-due-to-overtourism">https://en.tempo.co/read/1943066/bali-tops-fodors-2025-no-list-due-to-overtourism</a>                                                                                                                                             |

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| D13       | Mahindro, R. (2025, january 29). Bali's tourism in numbers part II: Overtourism and overdevelopment. <i>Medium</i> . <a href="https://raditmahindro.medium.com/balis-tourism-in-numbers-part-ii-overtourism-and-overdevelopment-a375090f8e65">https://raditmahindro.medium.com/balis-tourism-in-numbers-part-ii-overtourism-and-overdevelopment-a375090f8e65</a>                                                                              |
| D14       | Channel News Asia. (2024, August 8). Beach club Sanur icon Bali overtourism. <i>Channel News Asia</i> . <a href="https://www.cna.id/indonesia/beach-club-sanur-icon-bali-overtourism-19846">https://www.cna.id/indonesia/beach-club-sanur-icon-bali-overtourism-19846</a>                                                                                                                                                                     |
| D15       | Alexander, H.B. (2025, May 12). Benarkah Bali overtourism dan kehilangan pesona. <i>Kompas.com</i> . <a href="https://www.kompas.com/propterti/read/2025/05/12/160544521/benarkah-bali-overtourism-dan-kehilangan-pesona">https://www.kompas.com/propterti/read/2025/05/12/160544521/benarkah-bali-overtourism-dan-kehilangan-pesona</a>                                                                                                      |
| D16       | Anuar, M.I.K. (2024, August 12). Indonesia launches initiative to combat overtourism in Bali, promotes North Bali and Beyond. <i>Bernama</i> . <a href="https://bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2328225">https://bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2328225</a>                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| D17       | De Guzman, C. (2025, March 28). Bali overtourism, tourist tax, behavior rules, foreign visitors, economy Indonesia. <i>Time</i> . <a href="https://time.com/7272442/bali-overtourism-tourist-tax-behavior-rules-foreign-visitors-economy-indonesia/">https://time.com/7272442/bali-overtourism-tourist-tax-behavior-rules-foreign-visitors-economy-indonesia/</a>                                                                             |
| D18       | Era.id. (2024, August 25). Dampak overtourism di Bali salah satunya ini. <i>Era.id</i> . <a href="https://era.id/travel/164074/dampak-overtourism-di-bali-salah-satunya-ini">https://era.id/travel/164074/dampak-overtourism-di-bali-salah-satunya-ini</a>                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| D19       | Yamin, M (2024, November 28). Dari surga ke “no list”: Overtourism Bali dan tantangan diplomasi Indonesia. <i>Tatkala</i> . <a href="https://tatkala.co/2024/11/28/dari-surga-ke-no-list-fodor-overtourism-bali-dan-tantangan-diplomasi-indonesia/">https://tatkala.co/2024/11/28/dari-surga-ke-no-list-fodor-overtourism-bali-dan-tantangan-diplomasi-indonesia/</a>                                                                         |
| D20       | Muliantari, N.P.P (2024, December 26). Dispar klaim Bali bukan overtourism tapi over-concentrate. <i>Antara News</i> . <a href="https://www.antaranews.com/berita/4551030/dispar-klaim-bali-bukan-overtourism-tapi-over-concentrate">https://www.antaranews.com/berita/4551030/dispar-klaim-bali-bukan-overtourism-tapi-over-concentrate</a>                                                                                                  |
| D21       | Travel and Tour World. (2025, August 15). Indonesia mengatasi overtourism Bali dengan paket wisata baru. <i>Travel and Tour World</i> . <a href="https://www.travelandtourworld.id/berita/artikel/indonesia-mengatasi...rtourism-bali-dengan-paket-wisata-baru-ke-bali-utara-dan-jawa-timur/">https://www.travelandtourworld.id/berita/artikel/indonesia-mengatasi...rtourism-bali-dengan-paket-wisata-baru-ke-bali-utara-dan-jawa-timur/</a> |
| D22       | Ratliffe, R. (2024, September 10). Indonesia Bali tourism hotels moratorium. <i>The Guardian</i> . <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/sep/10/indonesia-bali-tourism-hotels-moratorium">https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/sep/10/indonesia-bali-tourism-hotels-moratorium</a>                                                                                                                                |
| D23       | Bayu, R. (2024, December 21). Isu overtourism dan dampak kenaikan PPN pada pariwisata Bali 2025. <i>Balebengong</i> . <a href="https://balebengong.id/isu-overtourism-dan-dampak-kenaikan-ppn-pada-pariwisata-bali-2025/">https://balebengong.id/isu-overtourism-dan-dampak-kenaikan-ppn-pada-pariwisata-bali-2025/</a>                                                                                                                       |
| D24       | Rahmat, A.F. (2025, March 9). Mengapa Bali dilabeli sebagai overtourism. <i>Netral News</i> . <a href="https://www.netralnews.com/mengapa-bali-dilabeli-sebagai-overtourism-dan-apa-yang-harus-pemerintah-lakukan/Sk5vMDVwSUVBL3VVQUZrUGR5UTFWQT09">https://www.netralnews.com/mengapa-bali-dilabeli-sebagai-overtourism-dan-apa-yang-harus-pemerintah-lakukan/Sk5vMDVwSUVBL3VVQUZrUGR5UTFWQT09</a>                                           |

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| D25       | Penelitian Pariwisata. (2024, December 9). Mengatasi overtourism di Bali. <i>Penelitian Pariwisata</i> . <a href="https://penelitianpariwisata.id/mengatasi-overtourism-di-bali/">https://penelitianpariwisata.id/mengatasi-overtourism-di-bali/</a>                                                                                                                                                                 |
| D26       | Dewi, F.S. (2024, April 19). Menparekraf Sandiaga Uno bantah Bali alami overtourism. <i>Bisnis.com</i> . <a href="https://ekonomi.bisnis.com/read/20240419/12/1758799/menparekraf-sandiaga-uno-bantah-bali-alami-overtourism">https://ekonomi.bisnis.com/read/20240419/12/1758799/menparekraf-sandiaga-uno-bantah-bali-alami-overtourism</a>                                                                         |
| D27       | Mailoa, M. (2024, December 8). Menyoal overtourism di Bali. <i>Detik News</i> . <a href="https://news.detik.com/x/detail/intermeso/20241208/Menyoal-Overtourism-di-Bali/">https://news.detik.com/x/detail/intermeso/20241208/Menyoal-Overtourism-di-Bali/</a>                                                                                                                                                        |
| D28       | Dorsi, S. (2025, May 26) Bali faces overtourism concerns introducing new airport. <i>Tourism Review</i> . <a href="https://www.tourism-review.com/bali-faces-overtourism-concerns-introducing-new-airport-news14961">https://www.tourism-review.com/bali-faces-overtourism-concerns-introducing-new-airport-news14961</a>                                                                                            |
| D29       | Paulo, D.A., & Pardomuan, L. (2024, April 14). Overtourism Bali paradise lost. <i>Channel News Asia</i> . <a href="https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cna-insider/overtourism-bali-paradise-lost-canggu-world-heritage-site-culture-4260606">https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cna-insider/overtourism-bali-paradise-lost-canggu-world-heritage-site-culture-4260606</a>                                                  |
| D30       | Nugroho, M.A.H. (2025, November 26). Overtourism Bali: Ancaman lingkungan dan urgensi pariwisata hijau. <i>Kompasiana</i> . <a href="https://www.kompasiana.com">https://www.kompasiana.com</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| D31       | Sativa, O. (2024, December 5). Over tourism di Bali mengancam keberlanjutan wisata di Indonesia. <i>Kumparan</i> . <a href="https://kumparan.com/user-10112024051251/over-tourism-di-bali-mengancam-keberlanjutan-wisata-di-indonesia-241rFw4PdUT">https://kumparan.com/user-10112024051251/over-tourism-di-bali-mengancam-keberlanjutan-wisata-di-indonesia-241rFw4PdUT</a>                                         |
| D32       | Sirait, J. (2024, May 18). Overtourism Bali?. <i>Detik News</i> . <a href="https://news.detik.com/kolom/d-7345195/overtourism-bali">https://news.detik.com/kolom/d-7345195/overtourism-bali</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| D33       | Putri, D.S.. (2024, February 14). Overtourism di Bali antara berkah dan kesulitan. <i>Suara Bali</i> . <a href="https://bali.suara.com/read/2024/01/01/183000/overtourism-di-bali-antara-berkah-dan-kesulitan">https://bali.suara.com/read/2024/01/01/183000/overtourism-di-bali-antara-berkah-dan-kesulitan</a>                                                                                                     |
| D34       | Responsible Travel. (n.d.). Overtourism in Bali travel guide. <i>Responsible Travel</i> . <a href="https://www.responsibletravel.com/holidays/bali/travel-guide/overtourism">https://www.responsibletravel.com/holidays/bali/travel-guide/overtourism</a>                                                                                                                                                            |
| D35       | Tasyarani, N.M. (2024, November 9). Overtourism or balanced development Bali airport plan sparks debate. <i>The Jakarta Post</i> . <a href="https://www.thejakartapost.com/business/2024/11/09/overtourism-or-balanced-development-bali-airport-plan-sparks-debate.html">https://www.thejakartapost.com/business/2024/11/09/overtourism-or-balanced-development-bali-airport-plan-sparks-debate.html</a>             |
| D36       | CNN Indonesia. (2024, September 7). Overtourism Bali kesulitan kendalikan pertumbuhan pesat pariwisata. <i>CNN Indonesia</i> . <a href="https://www.cnnindonesia.com/gaya-hidup/20240418154022-269-10877...ertourism-bali-kesulitan-kendalikan-pertumbuhan-pesat-pariwisata">https://www.cnnindonesia.com/gaya-hidup/20240418154022-269-10877...ertourism-bali-kesulitan-kendalikan-pertumbuhan-pesat-pariwisata</a> |
| D37       | Virginia, I. (2024, April 26). Paradise under pressure: Overcoming overtourism in Bali. <i>Seven Stones Indonesia</i> . <a href="https://sevenstonesindonesia.com/blog/paradise-under-pressure-overcoming-overtourism-in-bali/">https://sevenstonesindonesia.com/blog/paradise-under-pressure-overcoming-overtourism-in-bali/</a>                                                                                    |

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| D38       | Wiguna, D.K.S. (2024, December 6). Riset Poltekpar ungkap Bali belum overtourism. <i>Antara News</i> . <a href="https://bali.antaranews.com/berita/364330/riset-poltekpar-ungkap-bali-belum-overtourism">https://bali.antaranews.com/berita/364330/riset-poltekpar-ungkap-bali-belum-overtourism</a>                                                                                                                     |
| D39       | CNBC Indonesia. (2024, August 11). Sandiaga tak setuju Bali disebut overtourism. <i>CNBC Indonesia</i> . <a href="https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/lifestyle/20240104100213-33-502659/...ndiaga-tak-setuju-bali-disebut-overtourism-penuh-orang-karena-ini">https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/lifestyle/20240104100213-33-502659/...ndiaga-tak-setuju-bali-disebut-overtourism-penuh-orang-karena-ini</a>                       |
| D40       | Heriyani, W. (2024, August 30). Sandiaga Uno soroti overtourism di Bali. <i>Sindo News</i> . <a href="https://lifestyle.sindonews.com/read/1446331/156/sandiaga-uno-soro...ourism-di-bali-kemenparekraf-bakal-buat-kebijakan-baru-1725026910">https://lifestyle.sindonews.com/read/1446331/156/sandiaga-uno-soro...ourism-di-bali-kemenparekraf-bakal-buat-kebijakan-baru-1725026910</a>                                 |
| D41       | Ayal, J. (2024, September 12). Ternyata ini langkah Indonesia untuk hadapi overtourism di Bali. <i>Mangente Maluku</i> . <a href="https://www.mangentemaluku.com/nasional/90566721/ternyata-ini-langkah-indonesia-untuk-hadapi-overtourism-di-bali">https://www.mangentemaluku.com/nasional/90566721/ternyata-ini-langkah-indonesia-untuk-hadapi-overtourism-di-bali</a>                                                 |
| D42       | Rayda, N. (2025, February 20). IN FOCUS: Overcrowded south, undeveloped north – Bali seeks new airport, highways and rail lines despite roadblocks. <i>Channel News Asia</i> . <a href="https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/indonesia-north-bali-new-airport-infrastructure-projects-tourism-4942186">https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/indonesia-north-bali-new-airport-infrastructure-projects-tourism-4942186</a> |

Appendix 2. Sources of video news

| ID Number | URL Link                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| V1        | KompasTV Dewata. (2023, September 27). <i>Mulai Februari, Wisatawan Asing Kena Pungutan Rp. 150.000</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df66pqRfUko">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df66pqRfUko</a>                                      |
| V2        | KompasTV Dewata. (2023, April 11). <i>Wagub Bali: Usulan Pajak Wisatawan Asing, Demi Pariwisata Berkualitas</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7yQDPtiQSQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7yQDPtiQSQ</a>                              |
| V3        | CNN Indonesia. (2023, July 17). <i>Masuk Bali, Turis Asing Diusulkan Dipungut Biaya Tambahan</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mO4T0lUGho">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mO4T0lUGho</a>                                             |
| V4        | KompasTV. (2024, February 13). <i>Bali Resmi Berlakukan Pungutan Rp150.000,- Bagi Wisatawan Asing</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92RET6icRsY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92RET6icRsY</a>                                        |
| V5        | DW Indonesia. (2024, March 12). <i>Turis masuk Bali, kini kena pajak! Ini reaksi wisatawan asing atas retribusi lingkungan dan budaya</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYXSS7t_wUM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYXSS7t_wUM</a>    |
| V6        | Kompas TV. (2023, March 23). <i>Bali Colonized by Foreign Tourists</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh6a3R0fupM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh6a3R0fupM</a>                                                                       |
| V7        | Podcast ASN Bali Bisa. (2025, November 5). <i>Podcast Episode 35: optimalisasi pungutan wisatawan asing (PWA) melalui kerjasama endpoint</i> [Video]. YouTube. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df66pqRfUko">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df66pqRfUko</a> |

## Author Profiles

**I Nyoman Darma Putra** is Professor at the Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Bali, and has served as Head of the Doctoral Program in Cultural Studies since 2022. He previously headed the master's Program in Tourism Studies (2014–2017), Udayana University. His publications include *Tourism Development and Terrorism in Bali* (with Michael Hitchcock; Ashgate, 2007; Routledge, 2018) and *A Literary Mirror: Balinese Reflections on Modernity and Identity in the Twentieth Century* (KITLV/Brill, 2011). Email: darmaputra@unud.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2852-7918>

**Putu Devi Rosalina** holds a PhD in Tourism from Griffith Business School, Griffith University, and a double Master's degree from the University of Angers (France) and Udayana University. She is a lecturer at the International Institute for Tourism and Business. Her research focuses on rural tourism, resource management, and rural entrepreneurship, with publications in internationally recognised journals. Email: putudevi@ipb-intl.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1286-4864>

**I Ketut Nama** is an Associate Professor in the Indonesian Literature Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Udayana. His research interests include Indonesian literature, Balinese literature, philology, and Balinese culture. Email: kt\_nama@unud.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5428-2372>

**Paul Green** is a social anthropologist and senior lecturer in the School of Social and Political Sciences, at the University of Melbourne. He has been involved in two longitudinal, ethnographic research projects, based on the life experiences of international retirees and digital nomads, respectively, in and beyond Southeast Asia. His research can be found in numerous academic journals, including *Asian Studies Review*, *Ethnography*, *Medical Anthropology* and *Mobilities*. Email: pgreen@unimelb.edu.au ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3702-5178>

**Professor Michael Hitchcock** was an anthropologist and Emeritus Professor of Cultural Policy and Tourism at Goldsmiths, University of London. A leading expert on Southeast Asian heritage, he co-authored *Tourism Development and Terrorism in Bali* (Ashgate, 2007; republished by Routledge in 2018) with I Nyoman Darma Putra. He passed away in January 2025 while this Bali tourism research was being prepared. His contribution is gratefully acknowledged. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6490-3976>

## Tourist Arrivals Increase, Hotel Occupancy Declines: Governance Strategies for Sustainable Tourism Accommodation in Bali

Agus Made Yoga Iswara<sup>1\*</sup> , I Gusti Agung Ngurah Darma Suyasa<sup>2</sup> ,  
Ratu Agung Bagus Ngurah Putra<sup>3</sup> , Putu Herny Susanti<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1,2,4</sup> The International Institute of Tourism and Business (IPBI), Bali, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Politeknik Negeri Bali, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Despite receiving approximately 6.9 million international tourist arrivals in 2025, Bali's hotel occupancy remained relatively low at 57–67%, revealing governance challenges in the tourism accommodation sector. This disparity is partly driven by tourists' growing preference for villas, homestays, and short-term rentals, many operating outside formal licensing and taxation systems. This study analyses the governance challenges underlying the mismatch between rising tourist arrivals and declining hotel occupancy and proposes strategies for sustainable tourism accommodation in Bali. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), follow-up interviews, field observations, and analyses of policy documents and media reports. The findings show that the Bali Provincial Government and the Ministry of Tourism have strengthened regulatory enforcement, including restricting online travel agencies from marketing unlicensed accommodation providers. Although these measures have encouraged business formalization, non-compliance remains widespread. The study highlights the need for stronger enforcement, integrated data systems, and collaborative governance to foster a more accountable, competitive, and sustainable accommodation sector.

**Keywords:** tourism governance; regulatory enforcement; accommodation businesses; sustainable tourism

### 1. Introduction

Bali remains one of the world's most visited tourism destinations, attracting millions of international visitors annually. In 2025, Bali experienced sustained growth in international tourist arrivals, with monthly arrivals frequently exceeding 600,000 visitors and contributing to an estimated

\* Corresponding author's email: [yoga.iswara@ipb-intl.ac.id](mailto:yoga.iswara@ipb-intl.ac.id)

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annual total of nearly 7 million visitors (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2025). However, this increase in tourist arrivals was not accompanied by a proportional increase in traditional hotel occupancy. Official statistics indicate that the occupancy rates of star-rated hotels in Bali fluctuated between 57% and 67% in 2025, suggesting stagnation—or even decline—relative to visitor growth, particularly when compared with pre-pandemic levels (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2025; Bali Post, 2025). These trends indicate a structural shift in accommodation preferences away from conventional hotels toward alternative forms of lodging, including villas, homestays, and short-term rental accommodations (STRA).

Bali's rapid tourism expansion has generated profound governance challenges that extend well beyond the tourism sector itself. Approximately 2,612 accommodation businesses have been operating without official business permits, reflecting weak enforcement of licensing regulations and limited institutional capacity to monitor tourism development (Merdeka.com, 2025). Simultaneously, an estimated 700 hectares of land are converted annually into villas and foreign residential properties, placing increasing pressure on spatial planning, agricultural land, water catchment areas, and environmental sustainability (Harian Massa.id, 2025). Fiscal governance presents an equally serious concern, particularly in Badung Regency—the island's principal tourism district encompassing Kuta, Canggu, and Nusa Dua—where tourism-related businesses are heavily concentrated, followed by Denpasar (Sanur) and Gianyar (Ubud).

Despite the issuance of 40,060 business and investment permits between 2020 and 2024, only 17.9% of these businesses were registered under the Regional Taxpayer Identification Number (NPWPD) and Regional Tax Object Identification Number (NOPD). Consequently, approximately 82.1% of taxable business entities had not been integrated into the regional tax administration system, limiting the effectiveness of local revenue collection and regulatory oversight (DDTCNews, 2025). Similar governance deficiencies are evident at Bali's main international gateway, where persistent problems include inadequate supervision of foreign visitors, lengthy immigration queues, inefficient baggage handling, customs procedures, illegal transport services, poor cleanliness, security concerns, and chronic traffic congestion (Merdeka.com, 2025).

Although the continued increase in international tourist arrivals is widely regarded as an indicator of economic success, the concentration of visitors in major destinations has created growing pressures on Bali's physical, environmental, and social carrying capacity. Popular tourism areas such as Kuta, Canggu, Ubud, and Nusa Dua increasingly experience traffic congestion, excessive tourism development, waste management problems,

and environmental degradation. Recent research in Canggu demonstrates that overtourism has become a tangible local concern, with residents expressing increasing sensitivity to the rapid conversion of agricultural land, declining environmental quality, infrastructure overload, and the erosion of community well-being, indicating that tourism growth has exceeded the area’s capacity to accommodate visitors sustainably (Suyadnya et al., 2025). These conditions have positioned Bali alongside globally recognised overtourism destinations such as Venice and Barcelona (Dodds & Butler eds., 2019). Collectively, these challenges demonstrate that the proliferation of tourism accommodation in Bali is not merely a market-driven phenomenon but fundamentally a governance issue requiring stronger coordination in licensing, spatial planning, taxation, environmental protection, and institutional oversight to ensure the long-term sustainability of the destination.

Table 1. Number of Registered Tourism Businesses in Bali by Business Category, 2019–2025

| No. | Tourism Business Category       | ISIC Code (KBLI*) | 2019  | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  | 2023  | 2024   | 2025   |
|-----|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1   | Star-rated Hotels               | 55110             | 265   | 266   | 266   | 319   | 435   | 1,297  | 1,694  |
| 2   | Non-star Hotels (Budget Hotels) | 55120             | 2,097 | 2,097 | 2,097 | 1,996 | 3,157 | 1,243  | 2,221  |
| 3   | Villas                          | 55193             | –     | –     | –     | –     | –     | 5,272  | 7,610  |
| 4   | Serviced Apartments             | 55194             | –     | –     | –     | –     | –     | 305    | 424    |
| 5   | Homestays                       | 55130             | 3,247 | 3,247 | 3,247 | 699   | 3,981 | 4,110  | 5,594  |
|     | Total                           |                   | 5,609 | 5,610 | 5,610 | 3,014 | 7,573 | 12,227 | 17,543 |

Source: Compiled from Regency and Municipal Tourism Offices across Bali.  
Note: *KBLI* (Klasifikasi Baku Lapangan Usaha Indonesia) Indonesian Standard Industrial Classification.

Table 1 shows in 2024, Bali officially recorded 12,227 registered tourism accommodation properties. Following the launch of the Bali Kerthi Compliance programme in mid-2025, through which the Governor of Bali initiated a comprehensive licensing audit of tourism accommodation businesses, the number of officially registered properties increased sharply by more than 5,000 units, reaching 17,543 properties by the end of 2025. This substantial increase suggests that many accommodation businesses had previously operated outside the formal regulatory system before being brought into compliance.

Nevertheless, data obtained from online travel agencies (OTAs) indicate that an estimated 2,000 additional properties may still be operating without official registration. In the context of this study, these properties are primarily villa-based short-term rental accommodation (STRA), referring to privately owned villas rented to tourists on a short-term basis through digital platforms such as Airbnb and other OTAs. This situation reflects broader governance challenges identified in the international literature.

Systematic reviews of short-term rental regulation show persistent difficulties in urban and tourism governance as digital platforms facilitate the rapid expansion of informal accommodation markets that local authorities struggle to monitor, license, and tax effectively (Guth et al., 2026; Hidalgo & Velázquez, 2026). Similarly, studies in European and North American cities reveal persistent regulatory lag and enforcement gaps, particularly in addressing illegal or unregistered STRA listings and integrating platform-generated data into formal governance systems (Nieuwland & Van Melik, 2018; Yeon et al., 2020). Bali exhibits many of these characteristics, where the rapid growth of villa-based STRA has outpaced regulatory capacity, underscoring the need for stronger licensing enforcement, integrated data systems, and closer collaboration between government agencies and digital accommodation platforms.

Despite the growing body of literature on the economic and social impacts of short-term rental accommodation (STRA), significant gaps remain in understanding the fiscal and institutional implications of unlicensed accommodation in tourism-intensive destinations. Most studies focus on housing markets, hotel competition, or general governance models, while relatively few examine how unregistered STRA affects local tax revenue, licensing enforcement, and inter-agency coordination. This gap is particularly critical in Bali, where unlicensed villas and other non-hotel accommodations may create unfair competition, weaken regional revenue collection, intensify pressure on land use and environmental resources, and fragment tourism governance. Moreover, the proliferation of illegal accommodation may ultimately undermine Bali's destination image and visitor confidence, particularly when tourists encounter safety, service quality, consumer protection, or legal problems while staying in unlicensed properties. These risks extend beyond individual visitor experiences, potentially affecting the island's reputation as a well-managed, safe, and sustainable world-class tourism destination. This study seeks to explain the governance challenges behind the paradox of increasing tourist arrivals alongside declining hotel occupancy and to develop governance strategies for a more sustainable tourism accommodation sector in Bali.

## 2. Literature Review

The rapid expansion of digital tourism accommodation platforms has transformed the global tourism industry and challenged conventional approaches to tourism governance. Digital platforms such as Airbnb, Booking.com, Agoda, and other online travel agencies have enabled villas, homestays, guesthouses, and private residences to participate directly in the tourism market, often operating outside traditional hotel regulations (Akbar & Tracogna, 2024; Leoni & Parker, 2019). As a result, governments increasingly face difficulties in regulating, monitoring, and taxing accommodation providers operating through digital platforms, creating new challenges for destination governance and regulatory enforcement (Benítez-Aurioles, 2021; Çakar, 2023).

Previous studies have identified short-term rental accommodation (STRA) as a disruptive innovation that reshapes accommodation supply by lowering market entry barriers and facilitating the growth of informal tourism businesses (Guttentag, 2015). While this development provides economic opportunities for local communities and property owners, it also creates governance challenges related to licensing, taxation, safety standards, land-use control, and fair competition (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020; Colomb & Moreira de Souza, 2024).

The growth of STRA has been particularly significant in Southeast Asia, where alternative accommodation has become an increasingly important component of tourism supply. The Asian Development Bank (2023) reported that non-hotel accommodation, including villas, homestays, serviced apartments, and private rentals, constitutes a substantial share of tourism accommodation in the region. Bali represents one of the most prominent examples of this transformation. The island's tourism success, combined with strong international demand for private villas and experiential accommodation, has stimulated rapid growth in villa developments across major tourism destinations such as Canggu, Seminyak, Uluwatu, Ubud, and North Kuta. However, the expansion of accommodation supply has not always been accompanied by corresponding growth in regulatory compliance.

Recent developments in Bali reveal an apparent paradox. While international tourist arrivals have continued to increase significantly following the post-pandemic recovery, hotel occupancy rates have remained relatively stagnant. This phenomenon has generated growing concern among policymakers and tourism industry stakeholders. Hotel operators argue that the increasing number of villas and STRA has altered market dynamics by diverting visitors from licensed accommodation providers. Previous research found that Airbnb and similar platforms affect conventional hotel performance in Bali by increasing competition in the accommodation market (Ganapati et al., 2021). Similar findings have been reported internationally, where the expansion

of short-term rentals has reduced hotel revenues and shifted accommodation demand away from formal establishments (Zervas et al., 2017; Falk & Yang, 2021).

Beyond market competition, concerns have emerged regarding the legality of accommodation businesses operating in Bali. Evidence from government audits, tourism associations, and media investigations suggests that a substantial proportion of villas and tourism accommodation businesses operate without complete legal permits, tax registration, building approvals, or tourism business certification. Earlier studies conducted in Badung Regency found that many villas were already operating despite lacking the required business legality and tourism licenses (Aryani et al., 2021). Weak enforcement capacity, fragmented administrative databases, limited human resources, and the absence of effective sanctions have historically constrained regulatory oversight. Consequently, the accommodation sector has evolved into a dual system consisting of licensed businesses that comply with legal and fiscal obligations and unlicensed operators that benefit from lower compliance costs while competing in the same market.

The implications of this situation extend beyond market fairness. Illegal or unregistered accommodation may reduce government capacity to collect tourism-related taxes, licensing fees, and other forms of local revenue. This issue is particularly important in Bali because local governments depend heavily on tourism-related fiscal income to finance public services, environmental management, infrastructure, and destination development. Furthermore, uncontrolled villa development has been linked to land-use conversion, environmental degradation, pressure on water resources, and increasing social tensions between tourism growth and local community interests. Studies on tourism leakage in Bali have also highlighted how informal and weakly regulated tourism businesses may reduce the extent to which tourism benefits are retained within local economies (Margayawati et al., 2025).

The international literature has extensively examined the impacts of short-term rentals on housing markets, urban transformation, gentrification, hotel competition, and tourism governance (Barron et al., 2021; Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020). Recent studies have also explored regulatory responses adopted by governments to address illegal STRA operations, including registration requirements, licensing systems, platform accountability measures, zoning restrictions, and data-sharing arrangements between digital platforms and public authorities (Colomb & Moreira de Souza, 2024). Nevertheless, the existing literature remains largely focused on the economic, social, and governance consequences of STRA growth. Much less attention has been given to the relationship between accommodation legality,

regulatory enforcement, and fiscal outcomes, particularly in tourism-dependent destinations in developing countries.

In the context of Bali, existing studies primarily discuss hotel competition, tourism leakage, villa supervision, licensing challenges, and the social impacts of tourism development (Aryani et al., 2021; Ganapati et al., 2021; Margayawati et al., 2025). However, there remains limited scholarly understanding of how recent efforts by the Bali Provincial Government, the Ministry of Tourism, local governments, and tourism industry associations have sought to standardize accommodation businesses through licensing audits, business verification, and stricter enforcement measures. More importantly, no study has comprehensively examined the emerging governance strategy that combines accommodation standardization, inter-agency coordination, industry participation, and restrictions on online travel agencies from marketing unlicensed accommodation businesses.

Therefore, a significant research gap exists regarding the governance mechanisms required to formalize Bali's accommodation sector and ensure that tourism growth contributes to both sustainability and fiscal resilience. While previous studies have documented the existence of illegal accommodation and the challenges of tourism regulation, little empirical attention has been devoted to understanding how standardization initiatives, licensing reforms, and collaborative governance arrangements can improve regulatory compliance and strengthen sustainable tourism governance. This study seeks to address that gap by critically examining the ongoing efforts to regulate accommodation businesses in Bali through licensing standardization, institutional collaboration, and enhanced enforcement mechanisms, thereby contributing to the broader debate on tourism governance, regulatory effectiveness, and sustainable destination management.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### ***3.1 Methods***

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine governance strategies for regulating accommodation businesses in Bali, particularly in relation to licensing compliance, villa standardization, institutional coordination, and sustainable tourism governance. A case study design was selected because the research focuses on a contemporary governance issue embedded in a specific policy and destination context (Yin, 2018). Data were collected through participant observation, stakeholder discussions, and documentary analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Sources of Data

| Source                    | Date         | Participants                                                    | Main Topics                                         |
|---------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Bali Villa Connect 2026   | 26 May 2026  | Government, DPR RI, PHRI, academics, investors, villa operators | Licensing, standardization, sustainability          |
| FGD Tourism Strengthening | 11 June 2026 | Government agencies, associations, business actors              | Illegal accommodation, licensing reform, investment |
| Legal Documents           | 2024–2026    | Government regulations                                          | Licensing and compliance                            |
| Media Reports             | 2025–2026    | National and local media                                        | Enforcement and tourism governance                  |

Source: Authors compilation, 2026.

Primary data were collected through participation in two major tourism stakeholder forums held in Bali in 2026, supplemented by policy or legal documents, official meeting materials, and follow-up interviews. These forums were particularly significant because they took place at a critical moment when concerns over the paradox of increasing tourist arrivals alongside declining hotel occupancy had become a prominent public issue. At the same time, the Provincial Government of Bali had begun implementing strategic measures to improve governance in the accommodation sector through the Bali Kerthi Compliance programme, which emphasized licensing audits, regulatory enforcement, and the legalization of tourism accommodation businesses. The first author participated in both forums as a speaker and an active observer, providing direct access to discussions, official documents, and interactions with key stakeholders in tourism governance and business.

The first forum, Bali Villa Connect 2026, was held on 26 May 2026 at the Bali Sunset Road Convention Center, Denpasar (Figure 1). Organised by the Bali Villa Rental Management Association (BVRMA), the forum aimed to establish an industry platform for strengthening villa governance, promoting legal and sustainable accommodation practices, and fostering collaboration among villa owners, property managers, investors, academics, government regulators, and hospitality professionals (Bali Portal News, 2026; BVRMA, 2026). The forum took place amid intensified efforts by the Bali Provincial Government and the Ministry of Tourism to regulate unlicensed tourism businesses, including proposals to remove illegally operated accommodation providers from online booking and marketing platforms. The Bali Villa Rental and Management Association (BVRMA) shared the same objective, encouraging its members to comply with applicable regulations. The forum attracted a large audience, not only because it featured a villa exhibition but also because villa owners and

managers were eager to obtain the latest information on licensing policies that could directly affect their businesses.



Figure 1. Bali Villa Connect 2026 Forum, held on 26 May 2026, attended by villa managers and short-term rental accommodation operators from Bali, other parts of Indonesia, and abroad (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra).

Participants included I Nyoman Parta, a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives representing Bali; I Gusti Agung Ngurah Rai Suryawijaya, Chair of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI) Badung Chapter; representatives of the Bali Provincial Investment and One-Stop Integrated Service Office; academics from several higher education institutions; and Julie George (Australia), author of *Million-Dollar Host: Julie's Airbnb Portfolio Earned Over a Million Dollars in Her First Year... Yours Can Too!* (2018). The first author participated both as an invited panellist and as a participant observer, presenting a paper on the importance of operational standardisation and licensing compliance as prerequisites for building legal, competitive, and sustainable villa businesses.

The second forum was the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on Strategic Strengthening of Tourism through Licensing Synergy, Business Aspirations, and Investment in Badung, held on 11 June 2026 (Figure 2). The discussion was initiated by I Gusti Agung Ngurah Rai Suryawijaya (PHRI Badung), Dr. Drs.

Panudiana Kuhn, M.M. (Bali Business Club), and Agus Maha Usadha (NCPI Tourism Bali). While the Bali Villa Connect forum was initiated by the Bali Villa Rental and Management Association (BVRMA), the second forum—a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)—was organised by the Badung chapter of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI Badung), whose chair had also served as a speaker at the first forum. Despite being organised by different associations, both forums shared a common objective: to identify practical solutions to licensing and governance issues in Bali's accommodation sector that would benefit accommodation businesses, government authorities, and tourists alike.



Figure 2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on Strategic Strengthening of Tourism through Licensing Synergy, Business Aspirations, and Investment in Badung, held on 11 June 2026 (Photo: Raka Suardana).

The FGD focused on key governance issues, including licensing complexity, legal certainty, illegal villas, spatial planning, the investment climate, and the need for stronger institutional coordination among government agencies and tourism businesses (Atnews, 2026). To complement the forum discussions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected participants representing government institutions, tourism associations, academics, and business practitioners to obtain in-depth perspectives on regulatory enforcement, licensing reform, and the governance challenges facing Bali's rapidly expanding villa-based short-term rental accommodation (STRA) sector.

Complementary data were collected from legal documents, government reports, policy materials, and mass media reports related to accommodation licensing, business permits, building approval, villa standardization, online travel agency governance, and enforcement against illegal accommodation

businesses. These documents were used to trace the regulatory framework and public discourse surrounding illegal accommodation, tourism image protection, tax compliance, business sustainability, and sustainable destination management. The study also used relevant academic literature on villa supervision, Airbnb, short-term rental accommodation, and tourism governance in Bali to contextualize the empirical findings (Aryani et al., 2021; Ganapati et al., 2021).

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis identified recurring themes related to licensing barriers, regulatory enforcement, illegal accommodation, stakeholder coordination, fiscal implications, and sustainable tourism governance. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information from forum observations, stakeholder statements, legal documents, government materials, academic studies, and media reports. This process strengthened the credibility of the findings and allowed the study to critically examine how Bali's accommodation sector is being repositioned through standardization, licensing reform, and collaborative governance.

### 3.2 Theory

The governance of tourism accommodation in Bali requires an analytical framework capable of explaining both the institutional coordination among multiple stakeholders and the mechanisms through which regulatory compliance is achieved. This study therefore combines Collaborative Governance and Responsive Regulation as complementary theoretical perspectives. Recent tourism governance research reinforces this approach by demonstrating that sustainable destination management depends on collaborative partnerships among governments, tourism industries, local communities, and other stakeholders who jointly formulate and implement governance strategies (Zhang et al., 2022; Teguh & Scott, 2025). Collaborative Governance explains how public agencies, private-sector organizations, and civil society collectively formulate and implement policy, whereas Responsive Regulation explains how regulatory authorities encourage compliance through graduated and adaptive enforcement. Together, these perspectives provide an integrated framework for understanding how governance arrangements shape the behaviour of accommodation providers and contribute to sustainable tourism management.

Collaborative Governance refers to a governing arrangement in which one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative process of collective decision-making to formulate and implement public policy or manage public resources (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Rather than relying solely on hierarchical government authority, collaborative governance recognizes that increasingly complex

public problems require the participation of actors possessing diverse resources, expertise, and institutional capacities. Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) further conceptualize collaborative governance as a dynamic governance regime built upon principled engagement, shared motivation, and joint capacity for action, enabling stakeholders to address problems that cannot be effectively solved by individual organizations acting independently. Within tourism governance, this perspective is particularly relevant because tourism development involves overlapping jurisdictions, multiple economic interests, and shared responsibilities among governments, tourism industries, business associations, local communities, and digital platforms. Consequently, effective governance depends not only on government intervention but also on sustained coordination, stakeholder participation, and collective problem-solving.

While Collaborative Governance explains the institutional architecture through which policy is coordinated, it does not fully explain how regulatory compliance is achieved. This dimension is addressed by Responsive Regulation, developed by Ayres and Braithwaite (1992), which argues that effective regulation should combine persuasion with enforcement through a graduated and adaptive strategy. Rather than relying exclusively on punitive sanctions or voluntary compliance, regulators initially promote compliance through education, consultation, and dialogue before progressively applying inspections, administrative sanctions, financial penalties, licence suspension, or market exclusion when non-compliance persists. This responsive approach seeks to maximise cooperation while preserving the credibility of enforcement, thereby enhancing both regulatory legitimacy and long-term compliance (Braithwaite, 2011).

The two theories are therefore mutually reinforcing. Collaborative Governance identifies the institutional relationships through which governments coordinate with business associations, tourism organizations, and online travel agencies to formulate and implement accommodation policies, whereas Responsive Regulation explains how these collaborative arrangements translate into behavioural change among accommodation operators. In Bali, this integrated framework helps explain how the Provincial Government, the Ministry of Tourism, district governments, industry associations such as the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI) and the Bali Villa Rental and Management Association (BVRMA), together with digital booking platforms, seek to address the proliferation of unlicensed accommodation businesses. While collaborative governance facilitates coordination and stakeholder participation, responsive regulation provides the enforcement logic through which accommodation operators are encouraged to formalize their businesses and comply with licensing, taxation, and operational standards.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining governance strategies that promote a more accountable, competitive, and sustainable tourism accommodation sector.

## 4. Result

### 4.1 *The Accommodation Governance Paradox in Bali*

The findings reveal a significant mismatch between tourism growth and the performance of Bali's formal accommodation sector. In 2025, Bali recorded approximately 6.9 million international tourist arrivals, yet hotel occupancy rates remained relatively low, ranging from 57% to 67%. Interviews, stakeholder discussions, and policy documents consistently identified the rapid expansion of villas, homestays, and short-term rental accommodations (STRA) as a major factor contributing to this disparity. From a collaborative governance perspective, this paradox reflects fragmented coordination among government agencies, industry associations, digital platforms, and local communities, despite the need for collective decision-making and shared accountability in managing complex public problems (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012).

Government and industry stakeholders consistently identified incomplete legal compliance as a central problem in Bali's accommodation sector. A substantial proportion of accommodation businesses reportedly operate without complete business permits, tourism licenses, or local tax registration. In Badung Regency, 82.1% of registered business entities were not registered in the regional tax administration system and had not fulfilled their local tax obligations. This condition creates significant potential revenue losses and weakens the government's capacity to monitor tourism activities effectively. Stakeholders further emphasized that the rapid growth of unlicensed accommodation has raised concerns about market fairness, particularly for licensed businesses that comply with regulatory and fiscal obligations. Viewed through the lens of responsive regulation, these findings suggest that effective governance requires a graduated regulatory approach that combines education, incentives, monitoring, and escalating sanctions to encourage voluntary compliance while maintaining credible enforcement against persistent violators (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992; Braithwaite, 2011). As emphasized by Kadek Adnyana, Chair of the Bali Villa Rental and Management Association (BVRMA):

“Legally licensed businesses are required to comply with various government regulations and obligations, whereas illegal operators can continue operating with minimal oversight while capturing significant benefits from Bali's tourism market.” (Bali Post, 2026)

This situation has created unequal competitive conditions between formal accommodation providers and informal operators, while simultaneously reducing the sector's contribution to regional development and public revenue.



Figure 3. Rice fields in the Canggu area that are continuously being converted into villas and other tourism accommodation properties, 2018 (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra).

The issue extends beyond fiscal concerns. Participants reported that the rapid growth of accommodation developments has accelerated land-use conversion (Figure 3). Government data indicate that approximately 700 hectares of land have been converted into villa developments, contributing to environmental pressures, including increased flood vulnerability, declining green open space, and growing pressure on local water resources. The governance challenge therefore extends beyond taxation and licensing and increasingly intersects with issues of spatial planning, environmental sustainability, and infrastructure capacity.

These findings suggest that accommodation growth in Bali has become increasingly disconnected from formal governance mechanisms. While tourist arrivals continue to increase, a substantial share of tourism activity is occurring outside the regulatory framework designed to ensure legal compliance, environmental protection, and fiscal accountability.

#### **4.2 Government Responses to Illegal Accommodation**

The findings show that Bali Provincial Government and the Ministry of Tourism have recently adopted more assertive enforcement strategies to address illegal accommodation businesses. A key policy intervention involves restricting the marketing channels through which unlicensed accommodation businesses operate. During stakeholder consultations, participants repeatedly referred to the Governor of Bali's directive requiring Online Travel Agents (OTAs) and digital booking platforms to remove unlicensed accommodation listings from their platforms.

In the the Focus Group Discussion on Strategic Strengthening of Tourism through Licensing Synergy, Dr. Panudiana Kuhn stated that approximately 1,600 illegal accommodation units were identified as operating through digital booking platforms (Atnews, 2026). The government subsequently issued an ultimatum to OTAs, including Airbnb and other online booking services, requiring the removal of illegal accommodation listings. Stakeholders viewed this measure as one of the most important enforcement initiatives undertaken by the government because it targets the market access of illegal businesses rather than relying solely on field inspections.

During stakeholder discussions, concerns were raised regarding the socio-economic implications of these enforcement measures. I Gusti Agung Ngurah Rai Suryawijaya, Chairman of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI) for Badung Regency, highlighted the sheer scale and nuance of the issue. The number of illegal villas is substantial. Out of roughly 1,600 unauthorized accommodations, 60 percent are foreign-owned companies (PMA) that exploit real estate business classifications (KBLI) by using residential properties for daily tourism rentals. The remaining 40 percent are owned by local entrepreneurs operating homestays and tourist lodges throughout our tourism villages. Rai Suryawijaya urges authorities to exercise wisdom and discretion in addressing this issue. Otherwise, both the community and the government will lose out, as vital taxes and levies will continue to go uncollected (Atnews, 2026).

This perspective underscores the deep complexities of accommodation governance in Bali. It highlights the delicate balance regulators must strike between enforcing compliance on foreign-backed entities and protecting the economic livelihoods of local communities who depend heavily on tourism. Interview data further indicate that stricter enforcement has encouraged increasing numbers of accommodation operators to register their businesses and initiate licensing procedures. Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that compliance remains uneven and that a substantial number of accommodation providers continue to operate informally.

### ***4.3 Licensing Challenges and Institutional Constraints***

Although stakeholders generally supported stronger enforcement, they also highlighted persistent institutional barriers that complicate compliance. Participants in the Focus Group Discussion repeatedly emphasized that accommodation licensing procedures remain fragmented and difficult to navigate. Operators must often deal with multiple agencies responsible for tourism licensing, building permits, taxation, zoning regulations, and operational certification. Several participants described the process as time-consuming, costly, and characterized by overlapping requirements.

Stakeholders further emphasized that regulatory reform should not focus solely on enforcement. Agus Maha Usadha from NCPI Bali argued that sustainable tourism development requires a broader governance approach:

“Tourism in Bali, particularly in Badung, is the lifeblood of the island’s economy. However, sustainable growth depends on three pillars: regulatory certainty and licensing facilitation, business aspirations that are heard and accommodated, and a healthy, safe, and sustainable investment climate” (Atnews, 2026).

This perspective suggests that licensing compliance is more likely to improve when regulatory systems are accompanied by supportive administrative services and investment-friendly policies.

As noted by I Gusti Agung Ngurah Rai Suryawijaya, Chair of PHRI Badung, the sustainability of tourism development depends not only on strict enforcement but also on legal certainty, effective licensing services, and a supportive investment climate. Similar concerns were raised by business associations, which proposed the establishment of guidance clinics to assist tourism operators in understanding licensing requirements and administrative procedures.

The findings therefore indicate that non-compliance is not solely a consequence of weak enforcement. It is also associated with institutional complexity, fragmented governance arrangements, and limited administrative support for business formalization.

### ***4.4 Discussion***

The findings reveal that the primary challenge facing Bali is not tourism growth itself but the limited capacity of governance institutions to respond to the rapid transformation of the accommodation market. Two structural factors

are particularly significant. First, Indonesia's regulatory framework governing investment remains fragmented and insufficiently coordinated across government institutions, particularly with regard to foreign direct investment (FDI). This fragmented system creates regulatory loopholes that are difficult to monitor and enforce effectively. As a result, inconsistencies in regulatory implementation weaken institutional oversight and reduce the effectiveness of tourism governance.

Second, the national Online Single Submission (OSS) licensing system, while designed to streamline business registration, is not fully adapted to the unique characteristics of Bali's tourism ecosystem. Specifically, the minimum capital requirements established at the national level are relatively low by Bali's standards, enabling an increasing number of foreign-owned enterprises to enter the accommodation market and thereby intensifying competition with local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These findings suggest that national investment regulations require greater contextual adaptation to address the governance needs of tourism-dependent destinations such as Bali.

These regulatory weaknesses have facilitated the proliferation of informal, illegal, or semi-compliant foreign investment practices. Common examples include the use of nominee arrangements to circumvent foreign ownership restrictions and the misuse of Indonesian Standard Industrial Classification (KBLI) business classifications, whereby properties originally intended for residential purposes are marketed as tourism accommodation and rented on a daily basis without obtaining the required tourism business licenses or complying with local taxation requirements. Consequently, these practices undermine regulatory compliance, distort market competition, reduce fiscal revenue, and weaken the effectiveness of tourism governance.

The coexistence of increasing tourist arrivals and stagnant hotel occupancy rates illustrates what may be described as an accommodation governance paradox. Tourism demand continues to expand, yet a growing proportion of economic activity occurs through accommodation businesses that operate partially or entirely outside formal regulatory systems. As a result, the benefits of tourism growth are increasingly dispersed through informal and weakly regulated channels, reducing the effectiveness of governance mechanisms and undermining fair competition within Bali's tourism industry.



Figure 4. Despite intense competition in the tourism industry, tourist arrivals in Bali remain high, as reflected in the crowded restaurants along Sanur Beach (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra).

This phenomenon reflects broader global trends associated with the expansion of short-term rental accommodation platforms. As argued by Guttentag (2015), digital platforms have fundamentally transformed tourism accommodation by lowering barriers to market entry and enabling informal operators to compete directly with licensed businesses (Figure 4). Similar patterns have been documented in Europe, North America, and Asia, where regulatory institutions often struggle to monitor rapidly expanding platform-based accommodation markets (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020; Colomb & Moreira de Souza, 2024).

However, the Bali case demonstrates that the implications extend beyond market competition. The findings indicate that unlicensed accommodation creates a multidimensional governance problem encompassing fiscal leakage, environmental degradation, spatial planning challenges, and regulatory inequality. Formal hotels are required to comply with licensing, taxation, safety, environmental, and labor regulations, while many informal operators benefit from significantly lower compliance costs. This creates an uneven competitive environment and weakens incentives for legal compliance. Similar concerns were expressed by Kadek Adnyana, who argued that the expansion of unregistered

accommodation has distorted market competition because licensed businesses bear substantially higher regulatory obligations than informal operators. This finding suggests that accommodation governance is not merely a matter of legal compliance but also of ensuring fairness and accountability within Bali's tourism economy.

The findings further suggest that enforcement alone cannot resolve the problem. Although the government's decision to pressure Online Travel Agents to remove illegal listings represents a significant regulatory breakthrough, compliance challenges remain deeply embedded within institutional structures. Stakeholders consistently highlighted the complexity of licensing procedures, overlapping bureaucratic responsibilities, and regulatory uncertainty as barriers to formalization. This finding supports regulatory governance theories that emphasize the importance of combining sanctions with administrative facilitation and institutional support (Braithwaite, 2008).

This interpretation is reinforced by the views of Agus Maha Usadha, who emphasized that sustainable tourism governance requires not only enforcement but also a conducive investment environment. As he stated,

"When the investment climate is conducive—licensing is efficient, legal certainty is ensured, security is maintained, and incentives are clear—investors will come, local businesses will grow, employment opportunities will expand, and regional revenues will increase." (Atnews, 2026)

This observation supports the argument that compliance is more likely to emerge when governments combine regulatory sanctions with institutional facilitation and clear economic incentives. A particularly important contribution of this study is the identification of a governance transition from reactive enforcement toward compliance-based regulation. The Bali Kerthi Compliance initiative represents a shift away from traditional inspection-centered approaches toward a governance model that combines auditing, standardization, incentives, and sustainability assessment. Rather than viewing accommodation businesses solely as objects of regulation, the program seeks to encourage voluntary compliance through reputational incentives and performance recognition.

As part of its efforts to strengthen tourism governance and improve the quality of Bali's tourism industry, the Bali Provincial Government launched the Bali Kerthi Compliance audit initiative through an online kick-off event on 31 March 2026, attended by approximately 500 accommodation-sector tourism entrepreneurs. Opening the event, the Head of the Bali Provincial Tourism Office, Dr. I Wayan Sumarajaya, emphasized that the audit was essential to ensuring a higher-quality and more sustainable tourism sector. The program

is implemented by the Tourism Business Licensing Audit Acceleration Team, established under Bali Governor Decree No. 404/04-B/HK/2025, with the objective of evaluating and auditing the licenses held by tourism businesses, particularly accommodation providers. To encourage compliance, businesses that successfully meet the audit standards are awarded Bali Kerthi Compliance certification at Gold, Platinum, or Diamond levels, depending on their degree of compliance. Beyond regulatory enforcement, the initiative also provides coaching clinics and technical assistance to help tourism operators address licensing and administrative challenges. Through this combination of auditing, capacity building, and certification, Bali Kerthi Compliance seeks to promote a more transparent, accountable, and sustainable accommodation sector in Bali (Bali Berkarya, 2026; Bali Hote News, 2026).

This approach is consistent with contemporary theories of responsive regulation, which argue that sustainable compliance is more likely when governments combine coercive enforcement with mechanisms that reward good performance and facilitate compliance (Braithwaite, 2008). The Diamond, Platinum, and Gold classification system effectively creates a form of reputational governance that may influence both market behavior and consumer choice. The emphasis on integrated governance is also consistent with broader perspectives on tourism development in Bali. As Prof. Ida Bagus Raka Suardana, the moderator of FGD, observed,

“The success of tourism development cannot rely solely on increasing tourist arrivals or investment flows. It depends on the ability of stakeholders to build synergy among licensing, spatial planning, investment, infrastructure, and business needs.” (Interview, 11 June 2026)

The Bali Kerthi Compliance initiative may therefore be interpreted as an attempt to operationalize such synergy by linking licensing compliance, sustainability standards, and institutional coordination within a single governance framework.

Another important contribution concerns the role of data integration in tourism governance. Previous studies have highlighted how fragmented information systems undermine the capacity of governments to regulate short-term rentals effectively (Colomb & Moreira de Souza, 2024). The integration of accommodation monitoring with APOA and immigration databases represents an important institutional innovation because it enables governments to move from reactive monitoring toward data-driven governance. Such integration may improve regulatory accuracy, enhance tax compliance, and strengthen evidence-based policy making.

At a broader level, the Bali case demonstrates the limitations of using tourist arrival numbers as the primary indicator of tourism success. The findings suggest that high visitor numbers do not necessarily translate into equitable economic benefits, fiscal sustainability, or environmentally responsible development. Consequently, tourism governance should be evaluated not only by growth indicators but also by the extent to which tourism activities operate within legal, fiscal, social, and environmental frameworks.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Bali is experiencing an accommodation governance paradox whereby rapid tourism growth has not translated into proportional benefits for the formal accommodation sector. Despite receiving approximately 6.9 million international tourist arrivals in 2025, hotel occupancy rates remained relatively low, while a substantial proportion of tourism activity shifted toward villas, homestays, and short-term rental accommodations operating outside formal regulatory frameworks. Consistent with Guttentag's (2015) argument, digital accommodation platforms have significantly lowered barriers to market entry, enabling the rapid expansion of informal accommodation businesses and challenging the effectiveness of conventional tourism governance and regulatory systems.

The findings indicate that recent initiatives by the Bali Provincial Government including stricter enforcement against illegal accommodation, licensing audits, data integration, and the Bali Kerthi Compliance system represent important efforts to restore regulatory control and support more sustainable tourism development. Such measures are necessary to ensure fair competition, improve tax compliance, protect environmental resources, and strengthen the overall quality of Bali's tourism industry. These findings support international calls for stronger governance of short-term rental accommodation in tourism destinations (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020; Colomb & Moreira de Souza, 2024).

However, the study also reveals that non-compliance cannot be attributed solely to deliberate regulatory avoidance. Many operators, particularly small-scale and locally owned businesses, face difficulties arising from complex licensing procedures, overlapping regulations, and administrative uncertainty. In this context, overly restrictive or burdensome regulations may produce unintended consequences by discouraging entrepreneurship, reducing local participation in tourism, and encouraging continued informality.

Therefore, sustainable accommodation governance requires a balanced approach that combines firm enforcement with continuous guidance, education, and institutional support. As suggested by Braithwaite's (2008) theory of

responsive regulation, regulatory effectiveness is achieved not only through sanctions but also through mechanisms that facilitate compliance and build trust between regulators and regulated actors. Simplified licensing procedures, regulatory assistance programs, phased compliance mechanisms, and targeted support for small businesses are essential to ensure that local entrepreneurs are not excluded from tourism development.

Ultimately, Bali's long-term tourism sustainability depends on the ability of government institutions to balance regulatory enforcement with economic inclusiveness. Effective governance should not merely eliminate illegal accommodation but should also create pathways for informal operators to transition into the formal economy. By combining enforcement, facilitation, and stakeholder collaboration, Bali can foster a tourism accommodation sector that is competitive, accountable, environmentally sustainable, and capable of generating broader benefits for local communities.

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The research data and analysis presented in this article are entirely the work of the authors. The use of artificial intelligence was limited to improving the clarity and quality of English language expression. Any omissions or shortcomings remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

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### Author Profiles

**Agus Made Yoga Iswara** holds dual bachelor's degrees from Monash University, Melbourne, and earned his Master of Management (2015) and Doctor of Tourism (2020) from Udayana University, Bali. He is a lecturer at The International Institute of Tourism and Business (IPBI), Bali. His research focuses on sustainable tourism. With over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry across Australia and Southeast Asia, he serves as CEO of FreshWater Asia, Vice President of the Indonesian Hotel General Manager Association, and Honorary Consul of Romania to Bali. Email: [yoga.iswara@ipb-intl.ac.id](mailto:yoga.iswara@ipb-intl.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9402-4563>

**I Gusti Agung Ngurah Darma Suyasa** is the Chief Operating Officer of Freshwater Asia, overseeing eight hospitality properties across Bali. He is also an Expert Lecturer at the The International Institute of Tourism and Business (IPBI), Bali. With extensive experience in hospitality leadership, he serves as an advisor to several tourism organizations, including the Bali Villa Association and IHGMA Bali Chapter, while actively contributing to the advancement of Bali's tourism and hospitality industry. Email: [coo@freshwaterasia.com](mailto:coo@freshwaterasia.com) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2359-8488>

**Ratu Agung Bagus Ngurah Putra** is a lecturer at Politeknik Negeri Bali, Indonesia. He holds a Master of Applied Tourism and is currently pursuing a PhD at the same institution. His research interests include human capital management, sustainable tourism, and hospitality management. He has published articles in accredited national journals and frequently serves as

a keynote speaker at tourism and hospitality conferences and professional forums. Email: [ngurahputra@pnb.ac.id](mailto:ngurahputra@pnb.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5751-5695>

**Putu Herny Susanti** is a lecturer at The International Institute of Tourism and Business (IPBI), Indonesia. She earned her doctoral degree in Tourism from Udayana University. Her research interests include sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, wellness tourism, spiritual tourism, destination development, and tourism management. She is actively engaged in research, academic publishing, and book authorship, with numerous publications in accredited national journals and international peer-reviewed journals. Email: [herny.susanti@ipb-intl.ac.id](mailto:herny.susanti@ipb-intl.ac.id) : ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8379-2961>

# From Triple to Quadruple Roles: Reconceptualising Women's Labour in Bali's Tourism Economy

Nararya Narottama<sup>1\*</sup> , Lu Chang<sup>2</sup> , Made Diah Pranyaswari<sup>3</sup> ,  
Putu Anom<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1,3,4</sup> Udayana University, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> City University of Macau, China

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**Abstract:** The paper examines how Balinese women organise their work within a tourism economy shaped by cultural obligations and gendered expectations. Using constructivist grounded theory and fieldwork at the Sukawati Art Market, Bali, it advances a Quadruple Roles framework reconceptualising women's labour as comprising reproductive, productive, sociocultural, and spiritual dimensions. With Moser's triple-role model and *Tri Hita Karana* as sensitising concepts, in-depth interviews and participant observation allowed spirituality to emerge inductively as an analytically distinct dimension of labour. Evidence shows that ritual practices establish the moral legitimacy that structures household work, market participation, and community organisation, even amid constraints of patriarchy, limited capital, and market competition. By reconceptualising spiritual obligation as labour, the paper demonstrates that culturally embedded tourism economies operate within a moral economy rather than a purely market system, with implications for gender-sensitive destination governance and comparative research.

**Keywords:** Balinese women; quadruple roles; spiritual labour; *Tri Hita Karana*; gendered work; constructivist grounded theory; moral economy

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is frequently discussed as an intersection of gender, culture, and economy. However, women's work in tourism is often interpreted through narrow economic or managerial lenses. While existing scholarship has foregrounded themes of empowerment, resilience, and well-being, women's contributions continue to be assessed primarily in terms of market participation and income generation. As a result, other forms of labour that sustain social relations, cultural continuity, and moral order remain under-theorised

\* Corresponding author's email: [nararya.narottama@unud.ac.id](mailto:nararya.narottama@unud.ac.id)

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(Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000; Putra, 2011). In many Asian societies, women play a central role in sustaining creative economies and maintaining social cohesion and cultural reproduction, forms of work which extend beyond formal economic activity.

In Bali, these dynamics are embedded in the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* (THK), which emphasises harmony among humans, nature, and the divine, and structures daily life, ritual practice, and tourism development (Adityanandana & Gerber, 2019; Roth & Sedana, 2015; Wiryawan, 2024). Balinese Hindu cosmology further articulates this relational worldview through the principles of *Purusa* (male consciousness) and *Pradhana* or *Prakerti* (female nature and energy), animated by the feminine power of *śakti*. These principles are understood as bound together and complementary rather than hierarchical (Lange, 2023; Titib, 1998). Within this cosmological framework, men and women are interdependent forces whose balance sustains households, ritual life and economic activity. Economic practices, cultural obligations, and spiritual devotion do not operate as discrete domains but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of everyday labour. Simultaneously, the mobilisation of THK within tourism development has been both celebrated and contested, reflecting ongoing tensions between cultural sustainability, political agendas and market expansion (Arida & Pitanatri, 2023; Dolezal & Novelli, 2020; Pickel-Chevalier et al., 2019). Such tensions raise critical questions about how women's labour is recognised, valued, and governed within tourism economies shaped by both cultural philosophy and commercial imperatives.

Despite the increasing attention to gendered labour in tourism, dominant analytical frameworks remain limited in their ability to capture this complex reality. A foundational contribution to gender and development studies, Moser's (1993) triple-role model distinguishes reproductive, productive, and community-managing roles and has been widely applied across diverse contexts (Balgah et al., 2019; Matamanda et al., 2022; Maviza & Thebe, 2023; Mtshali, 2000). While valuable, the framework offers limited conceptual space for spirituality as an autonomous domain of labour, despite substantial evidence that ritual practice, cosmology, and faith are central to women's resilience, identity formation, and moral agency (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007; Myint, 2000). Although tourism scholarship acknowledges that women's motivations and constraints are shaped by cultural and spiritual obligations (Ayuningsasi et al., 2022; Duffy et al., 2016), such practices are rarely theorised as labour. This omission obscures a critical dimension of women's everyday work, particularly in contexts such as Bali, where spirituality permeates daily life and moral obligations are present.

Spiritual labour has previously been examined within the sociology of work and organizational studies, where it refers to the incorporation, regulation, and performance of workers' spirituality as part of the labour process. Extending the concept of emotional labour, research shows that institutions may require workers to display appropriate beliefs, moral orientations, and meaningful self-presentation as conditions of participation and legitimacy (Byrne et al., 2011; McGuire, 2010). Subsequent studies have demonstrated that spirituality can function as a productive resource through which organisations structure behaviour, identity, and belonging, transforming inner conviction into a socially expected form of work (Case & Gosling, 2010; Karjalainen, 2022). Rather than voluntary cultural participation, spiritual labour therefore involves socially binding practices that regulate access to recognition and membership within a given social order (Pärna, 2012). However, this literature primarily examines corporate or institutional settings, leaving largely unexplored contexts in which cosmology, rather than managerial authority, structures the obligation to perform spiritually grounded work.

Dominant tourism and development frameworks rest on secular economic assumptions that privilege measurable production, income generation, and market participation as primary indicators of work and empowerment (Adams, 2018; Roelofsen, 2018). Within this logic, activities that do not produce direct financial returns, such as unwaged caring and affective labour, are typically categorised as culture, tradition, or social obligation rather than as labour (Azizah, 2024; Roelofsen, 2018). Ritual practices embedded in everyday tourism life accordingly remain analytically marginal, even when they structure access to markets, social legitimacy, and participation in economic activities (Widiastini et al., 2018).

In the Balinese context, women's involvement in tourism is inseparable from the ritual devotional responsibilities that sustain community order and the symbolic authenticity on which tourism depends (Fagertun, 2016; Yudhistira et al., 2024). The omission of these practices is not merely empirical but epistemological; existing frameworks subordinate forms of work organised through cosmology to those organised through wage relations (Azizah, 2024). The paper addresses this bias by examining spirituality as a foundational dimension of labour in tourism within a cosmological framework that legitimises commercial exchange (Morrison, 2020).

The continuing influence of ritual obligations on economic participation presents a conceptual challenge for existing role-based models of women's work. Although these models address domestic care, income generation, and community coordination, they provide limited analytical guidance for interpreting practices organised through religious duty and cosmological order.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines how everyday economic participation is organised in a setting where devotional responsibilities shape time allocation, social legitimacy, and access to trade. Using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2014, 2016; Stumpf et al., 2016), the research investigates how Balinese women organise household responsibilities, market activity, and community involvement in relation to ritual practice. Rather than treating spirituality solely as a belief or cultural background, the analysis treats ritual participation and devotional obligations as socially structured practices that require time, effort, and embodied engagement. Women's agency is examined within the social and moral organisation of *Tri Hita Karana*, where economic participation operates alongside cultural and religious obligations.

Empirically, the study is grounded in a case study of the Sukawati Art Market in Gianyar, Bali, an iconic centre of handicraft production and trade in which women constitute the majority of traders. Sukawati is not merely a commercial site but also a cultural space where livelihoods, artisanal knowledge and ritual obligations intersect. Previous research has demonstrated that Balinese women play pivotal roles in sustaining creative and tourism-related economies while facing persistent gender constraints and structural inequalities (Shantika et al., 2021). Studies in Ubud further illustrate how women's agency shapes destination identity through culinary and creative practices (Pitanatri, 2016), while analyses of reproductive politics and strategic decision-making reveal how patriarchal norms intersect with economic participation (Putra & Creese, 2016; Sukardiasih et al., 2025). Market life is deeply intertwined with spirituality, as ritual practices continue to structure everyday activities within Balinese tourism spaces (Narottama, 2016).

For these reasons, the Sukawati Art Market functions as a strategic site and provides a particularly instructive lens through which to examine how Balinese women negotiate many-sided forms of labour that integrate livelihood, culture, and spirituality. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Balinese women organise their multiple responsibilities in relation to ritual obligation, household care, and market participation?
2. In what ways does *Tri Hita Karana* shape the meaning and performance of these roles?
3. What are the theoretical implications of the Quadruple Roles framework for rethinking gender, spirituality, and labour in culturally grounded contexts?

By addressing these questions, the paper makes three interrelated contributions to the literature. Theoretically, it refines existing frameworks on women's labour by formally incorporating spirituality as an autonomous and morally binding dimension. Empirically, it provides a detailed account of how Balinese women's everyday practices sustain creative economies, ritual continuity, and social legitimacy. Conceptually, the paper contributes to humanities scholarship by foregrounding spiritual labour as a critical yet often overlooked form of work in Asian societies, inviting a broader reflection on how labour, gender, and cosmology are understood beyond secular economic frameworks.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Gender, Tourism, and Power Relations*

Tourism scholarship has long examined how gender, the economy, and culture intersect through unequal power relations. Pritchard and Morgan (2000) demonstrate that tourism landscapes are socially produced through gendered relations that determine the visibility and value of certain work. Extending this critique, Biddulph and Scheyvens (2018) argue that development approaches centred solely on income generation overlook the broader dimensions of empowerment, equity, and well-being. Subsequent research has shown that empowerment narratives often mask persistent structural inequalities, with women's agency constrained by institutional, political, and market forces (Curtin & Bird, 2021; Efthymiadou & Farmaki, 2024; Lindvert et al., 2022; Shrestha et al., 2024).

Although the empowerment framework has been valuable in recognising women's participation in tourism, it rests on a largely secular-economic understanding of work, agency, and autonomy. Empowerment is typically evaluated through income generation, decision-making power, or market participation, implicitly assuming that labour is individual, remunerated, and oriented toward economic advancement. However, in contexts where social legitimacy and livelihood are bound up with ritual obligation, tourism participation cannot be understood solely in terms of economic agency. Women may engage in tourism not primarily to increase their income or independence but to fulfil socially mandated responsibilities that sustain community life and enable their participation in the tourism economy. For this reason, empowerment-based approaches struggle to interpret obligatory, unpaid, and spiritually grounded work.

This limitation is particularly evident in Bali, Indonesia. Women play a central role in sustaining both tourism activities and cultural reproduction; however, their contributions are frequently framed only in terms of economic

participation (Sudiarta et al., 2025; Sukardiasih et al., 2025). In market spaces such as Sukawati, women's activities extend beyond trading to include household maintenance, ritual preparation, and the fulfilment of community obligations. These practices materially support tourism while remaining analytically marginal to dominant frameworks. Existing gender and tourism studies have examined productive labour, informal entrepreneurship, and household survival strategies, while feminist scholarship has documented reproductive and community management responsibilities in destination economies. More recent work has emphasised agency and identity negotiation within tourism livelihoods. However, these perspectives remain anchored primarily in economic and social interpretations of work and do not adequately explain the contexts in which participation in tourism is mediated by ritual obligation, moral legitimacy, and cosmological duty. In such settings, women's involvement in tourism is not only a livelihood strategy but also a culturally mandated practice linked to the maintenance of social and spiritual order. A significant dimension of women's work thus remains unrecognised: practices that are socially compulsory, time-intensive, and materially enabling for tourism activity, yet neither waged nor conventionally defined as labour. This unresolved analytical gap motivates the present study, which conceptualises these practices as spiritual labour.

## 2.2 *Tri Hita Karana and Cultural Sustainability*

Bali offers a distinctive philosophical context through *Tri Hita Karana* (THK), which emphasises harmony between humans, nature, and the divine. Roth and Sedana (2015) traced how THK evolved from a cultural philosophy into a political and developmental discourse, while Adityanandana and Gerber (2019) highlighted its contested mobilisation within large-scale tourism projects. Pickel-Chevalier et al. (2019) further illustrate how THK has been used to legitimise integrated village tourism, even as gendered divisions of labour persist. More recently, Wiryawan (2024) demonstrated THK's relevance for environmental conservation by connecting local philosophical values to broader sustainability debates. While this body of work confirms THK's symbolic, political, and policy significance, it largely operates at the institutional or macro-analytical level. Far less attention has been paid to how THK is enacted through everyday practices, particularly by women in households, markets, and ritual spaces. This gap obscures how gendered labour operationalises THK not as an abstract philosophy but as lived cultural sustainability grounded in daily routines and moral obligation.

Understanding THK as a lived practice shifts the analytical question from cultural meaning to social organisation. Rather than functioning solely as a

normative philosophy, THK operates as a moral framework that regulates when and how individuals engage in production, exchange and social interaction. Women's everyday activities operationalise this framework by linking household care, market work, and ritual obligation. Recognising these practices reveals that the maintenance of cultural sustainability depends on forms of work that are socially compulsory, materially consequential, and economically enabling, yet rarely conceptualised as labour. This insight provides a conceptual basis for analysing spiritual labour as a foundational dimension of tourism.

### 2.3 Balinese Cosmology: Purusa - Pradhana Duality and Śakti

Balinese Hindu cosmology conceptualises harmony through relational duality, most notably the inseparable principles of *Purusa* (male consciousness) and *Pradhana* or *Prakerti* (female nature and generative energy). Central to this ontology is *Śakti*, the animating feminine force that activates and balances the masculine principle of Lord Siva (Lange, 2023; Titib, 1998). Rather than positioning men and women as hierarchical opposites, this cosmological framework understands gendered forces as complementary and mutually sustaining. This ontology has analytical implications for understanding labour and agency. Within this cosmology, actions are not primarily evaluated by economic output but by their contribution to the maintenance of cosmic order (*dharma*) and relational harmony. Activities such as preparing offerings, temple services, ritual organisation, and household care are therefore not peripheral domestic practices but are necessary forms of world-maintaining work. Women's ritual and reproductive activities do not merely support social organisation; they sustain a balance among the human, natural, and divine realms. In this context, agency is not expressed mainly through individual autonomy or market participation, as assumed in many tourism and development frameworks. Instead, agency operates through relational responsibility: women act as bearers of *Śakti*, performing obligations that secure moral legitimacy, community cohesion, and the ritual viability of economic life. Participation in tourism, including market trading, is thus embedded within a wider system of duties that makes commercial activity culturally permissible and socially legitimate in the region.

This perspective clarifies why certain forms of work that are central to tourism economies remain marginal. Because ritual practices are unpaid and morally obligated, they fall outside conventional definitions of labour that prioritise remuneration and productivity. These practices materially enable tourism by sustaining temple cycles, ceremonial calendars, and the cultural authenticity on which destination value depends. The *Purusa-Pradhana* framework thus provides a conceptual basis for identifying spiritual practice as

labour: not because it resembles wage work, but because it is necessary, time-intensive, socially expected, and economically enabling. Spirituality is not, then, an additional cultural layer surrounding tourism work but a structuring condition that organises when, how, and under what moral authority economic activities can occur in the region. Recognising this cosmological logic allows the analysis to move beyond describing women's participation to explaining why tourism labour in Bali cannot be fully understood through secular economic categories alone.

#### ***2.4 Moser's Triple Roles Framework and Its Limits***

Moser's triple-role framework remains a cornerstone of gender and development studies, distinguishing reproductive (domestic), productive (income-generating), and community management roles (Moser, 1993). The framework has been widely applied across diverse contexts, including rural development (Balgah et al., 2019; Mtshali, 2000), urban health and water governance (Matamanda et al., 2022), and crisis conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic (McLaren et al., 2020; Maviza & Thebe, 2023). Within tourism research, it has helped reveal women's unpaid domestic responsibilities, participation in handicraft production and trade, and involvement in community ceremonies.

However, the model's analytical limits become evident in societies where religion and cosmology structure everyday obligations. The triple-role framework implicitly treats labour as a social and economic activity organised around households, markets, and communities. This assumption reflects a secular developmental logic in which work is defined as social reproduction, income generation or collective organisation. Activities are accordingly classified according to who they serve: the household, economy, or community.

In the Balinese context, many women's responsibilities do not fit this classification. Ritual offerings, temple services, and devotional preparations are not undertaken primarily for household welfare or community coordination but to maintain the cosmic balance and moral legitimacy. Their purpose is neither economic production nor social management; it is the maintenance of relations among the human, natural, and divine realms. Although such practices often occur collectively, their obligations derive from religious duties rather than community administration.

Spirituality cannot be analytically subsumed under a community management role. Community management work involves organising social relations among people, such as coordinating ceremonies, mutual assistance, and neighbourhood activities. In contrast, ritual practice is oriented toward a nonhuman moral order and is believed to affect prosperity, safety, and the viability of economic activity itself. For example, women's participation in market trade

is considered legitimate only when their ritual obligations are fulfilled. Spiritual practice does not simply accompany productive and community activities; it regulates the conditions under which these can occur. Applying the triple-role framework without modification thus risks reproducing the secular assumption that unpaid religious practices are ancillary social activities. In contexts where cosmological duty governs everyday action, these practices constitute a distinct domain of work: they are obligatory, time-intensive, socially recognised, and materially enabling for tourism economies, yet neither waged nor reducible to community management. Recognising this limitation motivated the extension proposed here, which conceptualises such practices as spiritual labour to more accurately represent women's lived experiences.

### ***2.5 Spirituality and Women's Work in Culturally Embedded Tourism***

Moser's framework differentiates reproductive, productive, and community-managing roles but fails to account for the ritual practices that organise economic participation in culturally embedded tourism. In this study, "spiritual labour" refers to the embodied time and energy devoted to sustaining cosmological balance through offerings (*canang sari*), temple service (*ngayah*), and devotional craft. Unlike community work, these activities are grounded in the ontological interplay of *Purusa*, *Pradhana*, and *Sakti*, serving to harmonise the human, natural, and divine realms (Titib, 1998).

While research acknowledges that ritual obligations shape women's livelihoods (Ayuningsasi et al., 2022; Duffy et al., 2016) and coexist with economic activity (Curtin & Bird, 2021; Lindvert et al., 2022; Tao et al., 2024), current scholarship largely treats spirituality as a cultural influence or source of resilience (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007; Myint, 2000; Morrison, 2020) rather than as a form of work. However, in Bali, ritual practice is not optional; it is a moral precondition for commerce that dictates schedules, regulates trade, and legitimises economic success.

What distinguishes this definition from "spiritual labour" in management studies, which denotes the organisational appropriation of employee spirituality to enhance productivity (Case & Gosling, 2010; Karjalainen, 2022; McGuire, 2010; Pärna, 2012). In this context, ritual is a cosmological duty rather than a workplace resource. By focusing primarily on employment, entrepreneurship, and empowerment, previous tourism scholarship renders this enabling work analytically invisible, classifying it as culture rather than labour. Reconceptualising these socially binding obligations as labour is essential for understanding not only Balinese tourism but also other heritage, pilgrimage, and indigenous systems, where economic activity operates within moral rather than purely market logic.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Research Design

The research employed a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach (Charmaz, 2006, 2014, 2016) embedded within a qualitative case study of Balinese women working at the Sukawati Art Market in Gianyar Regency, Bali, Indonesia. CGT prioritises participants' lived experiences, emphasises the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants, and enables analytical categories to emerge inductively from empirical data. This approach is particularly suited for examining forms of labour that are culturally embedded, morally regulated, and insufficiently captured by preexisting analytical frameworks. The triple-role model (Moser, 1993) and Balinese THK philosophy were used as sensitising concepts. Rather than functioning as fixed variables, these concepts served as heuristic guides that oriented data collection and interpretation, while allowing new dimensions of labour to emerge from the participants' narratives. This methodological stance resonates with Balinese cosmology, in which knowledge is understood to be relational and embedded in harmonious relationships among humans, nature, and the divine.

#### 3.2 Case Selection

The Sukawati Art Market was purposely selected as the research site because of its strongly gendered composition and cultural significance to the Balinese people. Approximately 70 percent of traders are women, whose activities extend beyond commercial exchange to include cultural reproduction, ritual participation, and household responsibilities. The market's recent revitalisation further positions it as a setting where tradition, economic adaptation, and cultural continuity intersect, making it an appropriate site for examining women's wide-ranging labour. As a single-site qualitative case study, the work does not aim for statistical generalisation to all Balinese markets or tourism destinations. Rather, the case is treated as theoretically instructive. Sukawati represents a context in which tourism is deeply embedded in ritual obligation and community organisation, enabling a close examination of how cosmological practice shapes economic participation. The results offer analytical transferability to culturally embedded tourism settings, rather than empirical representativeness.

#### 3.3 Participants

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, requiring a minimum of three years of experience in handicraft production or market

trading. Two categories of informants were engaged (Table 1). The key informants were the heads of Blocks A, B, and C, who provided the institutional context for market governance, trading regulations, and collective ritual obligations. Their accounts were used to contextualise organisational expectations rather than to generate analytic categories. The main informants were eight women artisans and traders across the three blocks, whose everyday practices formed the primary empirical basis for the analysis. Ten informants took part in the research, a sample size consistent with constructivist grounded theory, in which adequacy is determined by theoretical saturation rather than statistical representativeness (Charmaz, 2006). As a single-site, female-dominated, and culturally coherent setting, the Sukawati Art Market provided conditions conducive to saturation within a purposively constructed sample, consistent with CGT practice in bounded tourism contexts (Stumpf et al., 2016).

The sample reflects the gender composition of the Sukawati Art Market, where women comprise the majority of traders. Analytic categories were developed primarily from the women traders' narratives, while key informants were used to triangulate and interpret the institutional conditions that shape these practices. Theoretical saturation was achieved through iterative data collection and concurrent analysis, consistent with constructivist grounded theory. Early interviews identified recurring links between trading activities and ritual obligations. Subsequent interviews were conducted to examine variations across blocks and life stages and refine the emerging category of spiritual labour. Later data elaborated existing categories but did not introduce new properties or relationships, indicating category saturation and concluding the data collection.

Participant identifiers use a letter-number coding scheme: K denotes key informants (market block leaders), and W denotes the main informants (women traders and artisans). Numbers run sequentially within each category rather than across all participants, reflecting the distinct analytical functions of each group. Key informants (K1–K2) provided institutional context for market governance and ritual obligations, while main informants (W1–W8) constituted the primary empirical basis for category construction.

Table 1. Participants Profile

| ID | Category       | Role/Position                         | Gender | Age (approx.) | Years in Market | Notes                                                   |
|----|----------------|---------------------------------------|--------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| K1 | Key informant  | Market Head (Block A & B)             | Male   | Mid-50s       | 15+             | Provided institutional perspective                      |
| K2 | Key informant  | Market Head (Block C)                 | Female | Mid-50s       | 18+             | Provided institutional perspective                      |
| W1 | Main informant | Craft Merchant (Block A)              | Female | Late-40s      | 12              | Skilled artisan, specialises in traditional crafts      |
| W2 | Main informant | Craft Merchant (Block A)              | Female | Mid-40s       | 10              | Balances trade with household responsibilities          |
| W3 | Main informant | Handicraft Trader & Entrepreneur      | Female | Late-30s      | 8               | Operates accessories business in addition to trading    |
| W4 | Main informant | Handicraft Trader & Entrepreneur      | Female | Early-50s     | 20              | Produces woven bags; mentors younger women              |
| W5 | Main informant | Craft Trader & Entrepreneur           | Female | Late-40s      | 14              | Produces wood sculptures alongside handicraft trading   |
| W6 | Main informant | Handicraft Trader (Block C)           | Female | Mid-50s       | 9               | Long-standing trader; active in community ceremonies    |
| W7 | Main informant | Handicraft Trader (Block C)           | Female | Early-50s     | 11              | Combines trade with ritual obligations                  |
| W8 | Main informant | Handicraft Trader + <i>Jro Mangku</i> | Female | Late-50s      | 17              | Temple priest; integrates ritual authority with trading |

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

Participants ranged in age from their late thirties to late fifties, illustrating how handicraft trading sustains livelihoods across different life stages through integrating economic activity and cultural reproduction. One participant also served as a *Jro Mangku* (*Pemangku* or Balinese temple priest), providing a unique perspective on the intersection of spiritual authority and the market.

This diversity of roles and experiences ensured that the analysis captured the full spectrum of women's reproductive, productive, sociocultural, and spiritual responsibilities in tourism-related economies.

### 3.4 Data Collection

Fieldwork was conducted in two phases: December 2024 and June–July 2025. Data collection combined semi-structured interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes, conducted in Balinese and Indonesian, with participant observation of market practices, craft production, and ritual activities, as well as document analysis of market regulations and relevant policy texts. Interviews were guided by a protocol developed from the sensitising concepts of Moser's triple-role framework and *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English where necessary.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the constant comparative method central to the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2014, 2016) and proceeded in three iterative stages. First, line-by-line open coding of interview transcripts and field notes generated initial codes anchored in participants' language, such as "closing the stall for *odalan*", "preparing offerings before opening the shop", and "teaching craft skills to daughters". Ritual practices were initially coded descriptively (e.g. preparing offerings, temple duty, and ceremonial market closure) without assigning them to any predefined role.

Second, focused coding grouped recurrent codes into broader categories corresponding to reproductive, productive, and sociocultural responsibilities of men. However, during constant comparison, several practices could not be adequately explained within these categories. Activities such as daily offerings conducted before trading or participation in *ngayah* consumed time, structured market schedules, and influenced business legitimacy, yet were neither domestic care, income-generating work, nor community organisation.

Third, theoretical coding examined the relationships among the categories and their conditions and consequences. Through ongoing memo writing, which recorded coding decisions and theoretical sensitivities, comparisons across interviews indicated that these practices operated as obligations tied to cosmological order rather than social coordination. The repeated pattern of trading activities organised around ritual requirements led to the construction of a distinct analytical category. Although this category emerged inductively from the data, it resonates with sociological discussions of spiritual labour as a form of work involving disciplined spiritual performance and moral self-

regulation rather than economic production (Karjalainen, 2022; McGuire, 2010). In this way, spirituality emerged inductively from the data, prompting the development of the Quadruple Roles framework.

### 3.6 Ensuring Credibility and Ethics

Credibility was enhanced through the triangulation of interview data, participant observation, and documentary sources, along with member checking with selected participants. A thick description of the market settings, combined with sustained reflexive memoing, further strengthened interpretive rigor and transparency. All participants provided informed consent before data collection. All informants were identified through pseudonyms to protect confidentiality, even in cases where participants expressed no objection to disclosing their identities. This approach balances transparency with the long-term protection of the participants. Throughout the research process, cultural sensitivity was prioritised, particularly in scheduling field activities around ritual events and respecting participants' religious and cultural practices.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Study Site and Context

The Sukawati Art Market, located in Gianyar Regency, Bali, is one of the island's oldest and most recognisable cultural marketplaces. Established in the mid-1980s and revitalised between 2019 and 2022, the market currently comprises three main blocks (A, B, and C) with more than 1,400 trading units. Blocks A and B remain fully occupied by traditional handicraft vendors, whereas Block C, the modernised extension, continues to experience low occupancy, with approximately 30 percent of stalls in use. This uneven spatial distribution reflects ongoing tensions among revitalisation, affordability, and long-term sustainability, echoing broader debates on gentrification and the transformation of creative economies in the heritage markets.

Beyond its function as a trading hub, Sukawati operates as a cultural space where economic exchange is intertwined with its symbolic meaning. Market stalls display *lukisan wayang* (shadow puppet paintings), wooden statues, masks, woven bags, *endek* textiles, and other handmade crafts that embody aesthetic, cultural and ritual values. Purchasing practices in Sukawati accordingly extend beyond consumption to encompass encounters with Balinese heritage, where craft production is rooted in intergenerational knowledge transmission and cultural obligation. As observed in comparable Asian marketplaces that combine economic activity with symbolic capital (Aquino et al., 2021; Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018), Sukawati illustrates how cultural value is produced and sustained through everyday livelihoods rather than detached heritage narratives.

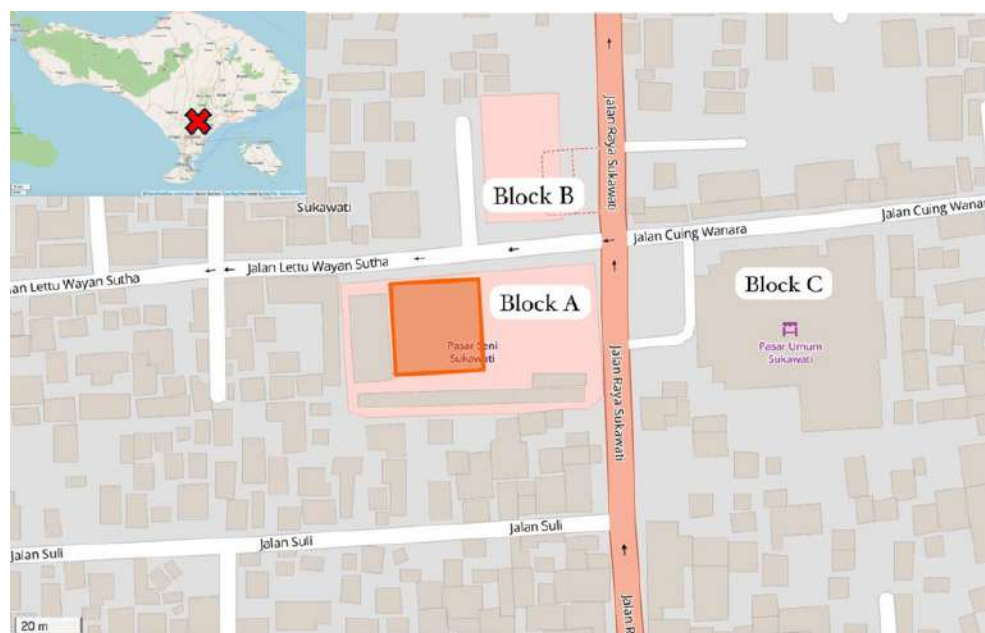


Figure 1. Map of Sukawati Art Market, Gianyar, Bali (Source: Open Street Map, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/way/419885974>).

Women constitute approximately 70 percent of traders at Sukawati, positioning them at the core of the local creative economy. Their presence illustrates how reproductive, productive, sociocultural, and spiritual responsibilities intersect within everyday market life. Sukawati offers a particularly instructive lens for examining how Balinese women enact the Quadruple Roles framework through the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* (Adityanandana & Gerber, 2019; Roth & Sedana, 2015; Wiryawan, 2024). Attention to the distribution of traders across Blocks A, B, and C further reveals where women's labour is most concentrated and highlights the vulnerabilities produced by uneven revitalisation and ongoing market restructuring.

Table 2. Distribution of Traders and Units in Sukawati Art Market (2025)

| Block / Floor                   | Potential Units | Active     | Inactive   | Occupancy Rate | Main Products/ Description                   |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------|------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Block A – Ground Floor          | 168             | 168        | –          | 100%           | Small to medium handicraft vendors           |
| Block A – First Floor           | 183             | 183        | –          | 100%           | Souvenirs and woven bags                     |
| Block A – Second Floor          | 211             | 211        | –          | 100%           | Wallets, fans, rattan crafts                 |
| Block A – Third Floor           | 217             | 217        | –          | 100%           | Various souvenir products                    |
| Block B (single level)          | 31              | 31         | –          | 100%           | Paintings, wooden statues, traditional masks |
| <b>Subtotal Block A &amp; B</b> | <b>810</b>      | <b>810</b> | <b>–</b>   | <b>100%</b>    | Fully occupied                               |
| Block C – Ground Floor          | 194             | 21         | 173        | 11%            | Clothing and modern souvenirs                |
| Block C – First Floor           | 120             | 87         | 33         | 73%            | Textiles and aesthetic handicrafts           |
| Block C – Second Floor          | 126             | 55         | 71         | 44%            | Batik, <i>endek</i> , home decorations       |
| Block C – Third Floor           | 155             | 18         | 137        | 12%            | General souvenirs, magnets, wooden dolls     |
| <b>Subtotal Block C</b>         | <b>595</b>      | <b>181</b> | <b>414</b> | <b>30%</b>     | Largely under-occupied                       |
| <b>Total Overall</b>            | <b>1,405</b>    | <b>991</b> | <b>414</b> | <b>71%</b>     | Traders concentrated in Blocks A & B         |

Source: Data adapted from the Sukawati Art Market Administration Office (Blocks A, B, and C), 2025.

The distribution of traders across the Sukawati Art Market reveals a pronounced divergence between its older and newer sections. As shown in Table 2, Blocks A and B remained fully occupied, with all 810 trading units actively used. This stability reflects the persistence of long-established vendors and the continuity of intergenerational artisanal practices, in which women play a dominant role in craft production and family based enterprises. In contrast, Block C, despite being revitalised with modern infrastructure, has only 181 active units out of 595, leaving approximately 70 percent of the stalls vacant. This uneven occupancy exposes a dual reality: while revitalisation has improved physical conditions, it has also generated new vulnerabilities for women traders with limited financial capacity to relocate to new sites to do business.

One trader (W2, 45 years old) described the dramatic shift in working conditions following revitalisation:

“After the Sukawati Art Market was revitalised, the trading atmosphere became much more comfortable. Previously, it was crowded and hot, and when it rained, we had to cover our products with plastic. Now the facilities are free, the toilets are clean, and the spacious building means we are no longer overheated or drenched... Unfortunately, not everyone can afford to move into the new stalls” (W2, Interview, June 23, 2025).

This testimony illustrates how upgraded infrastructure can create safer and more dignified working environments, aligning with broader aspirations for inclusive tourism (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018; Trilaksono et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). Simultaneously, this reinforces the observation that women’s economic contributions remain constrained by structural inequalities (Sukardiasih et al., 2025). In Sukawati, revitalisation reveals a paradox of modernisation: while physical improvements enhance comfort and safety, they do not resolve disparities in access to capital. For many women traders, empowerment remains partial and uneven, concentrated in traditional market blocks where livelihoods are sustained through intergenerational skills, relational social networks, and the moral economy embedded in the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*.

## 4.2 Triple Roles of Balinese Women

Addressing the first research question, this section examines how Balinese women enact reproductive, productive, and sociocultural responsibilities to sustain their everyday household economies and market-based livelihoods. Drawing on Moser’s triple-role framework (1993), the analysis demonstrates how these overlapping roles are continuously negotiated in daily life at the Sukawati Art Market. Domestic care, income-generating activities, and community obligations intersect in ways that blur the conventional boundaries between the household, market, and social spheres, revealing the relational and cumulative nature of women’s labour within the creative economy.

### 4.2.1 Reproductive Roles

In Sukawati, women shoulder the primary responsibility for reproductive labour, including childcare, food preparation, and maintaining household harmony. Although largely invisible in economic terms, this labour forms the foundation of family stability and enables women’s sustained participation in market activities. Reproductive work structures the rhythms of everyday life,

shaping when and how women engage in creative economies. As one trader explained,

“Every day, I wake up at 5 a.m. to cook for my family and prepare offerings before opening my stall.... If there is an *odalan* (temple festival), I wake even earlier, as part of my duty as a wife and mother, even though I also have a business.” (W3, aged 39, Interview, June 20, 2025)

This account illustrates the “double burden” widely documented in gender and development scholarship, in which women's reproductive responsibilities coexist with and enable their economic activities (McLaren et al., 2020; Mohanty, 2003; Mtshali, 2000). In the Balinese context, this burden is further intensified by ritual obligations that extend domestic labour into the spiritual realm. Tasks such as preparing offerings and observing ritual calendars are woven into everyday household care, blurring distinctions between reproductive and spiritual work.

Comparable dynamics are evident in other agrarian and tourism-linked economies in this region. For instance, Barry and Gahman (2021) demonstrate how women's unpaid care and subsistence labour in Caribbean communities underpin broader food systems and local livelihoods. Such parallels confirm that reproductive labour, while frequently undervalued and unrecognised (Mohanty, 2003), is foundational not only to household resilience but also to the sustainability of creative and tourism-related economies in the region. In Sukawati, women's reproductive roles constitute a critical, although often overlooked, dimension of the labour that sustains both family life and market participation.

#### 4.2.2 *Productive Roles*

Productive labour is most visibly concentrated in Blocks A and B of the Sukawati Art Market, where all 810 stalls remain fully occupied by traditional artisans and traders. Women dominate these spaces, producing and selling handicrafts such as paintings, wooden statues, woven bags, and masks. These activities generate household income while also sustaining artisanal traditions that are central to Balinese cultural identity. Women's productive roles operate at the intersection of economic necessity and cultural permanence. As one trader explained,

“The handicrafts I sell are all kinds of wooden statues, and I produce them myself at home with the help of my family and neighbours. My family has long been engaged in statue-making, inherited from our parents, and now we continue to manage and market it.” (W5, aged 49, Interview, June 20, 2025)

This account reveals two interrelated dynamics: First, women's productive labour is deeply embedded in family and community collaboration, reflecting an entrepreneurial agency that is relational rather than individualised. Craft production often involves shared labour among relatives and neighbours, blurring the distinction between household work and market-oriented activity. Second, productive labour is deeply bound to cultural reproduction, as artisanal skills and aesthetic knowledge are transmitted across generations and continuously adapted to the demands of tourism markets.



Figure 2. Women traders serving customers at textile stalls in the Sukawati Art Market (Photograph by Nararya Narottama, 2026)

Much of this productive work takes place within domestic spaces or small home-based workshops, further dissolving the boundaries between reproductive and productive roles for women. Income generation is interwoven with caregiving, household management, and cultural instruction, producing a cumulative workload that extends beyond formal employment. This embeddedness exemplifies how women's labour sustains inclusive tourism economies, where informal and household-based production underpins both livelihoods and heritage continuity (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018). Comparable patterns in heritage and craft-based economies elsewhere likewise demonstrate that women's productive contributions, while frequently undervalued, are central to linking cultural sustainability and tourism-related economic activity.



Figure 3. Balinese women producing handicrafts at Sukawati Art Market (Photograph by Made Diah Pranyaswari, 2025).

Figure 3 provides visual evidence of Balinese women engaged in handicraft production within their market stalls, illustrating how productive labour is artisanal, relational, and embedded in everyday market life. Through this work, women not only meet household needs and finance their children's education, but also create forms of informal employment and sustain the cultural foundations of Bali's creative tourism economy. Productive labour, then, serves as both an economic activity and a vehicle for cultural transmission, linking everyday livelihoods with broader processes of heritage continuity.

#### 4.2.3 Socio-Cultural Roles

The socio-cultural roles performed by Balinese women are central to sustaining both community life and the market economy. Women actively participate in rituals and *banjar* (neighbourhood associations), contributing unpaid labour rooted in the Balinese ethos of *menyama braya* (social solidarity).

These commitments frequently require women to suspend trading activities to fulfil their communal obligations. As one informant explained,

“When there is *ngayah* (communal service) in my village, I close my stall because it is our obligation in Bali. Economic loss can be accepted if social and cultural duties are fulfilled.” (W6, aged 55, Interview, 2025)

This testimony illustrates how communal responsibilities are prioritised over immediate economic gain, reinforcing the observation that women’s community obligations are tightly linked to their participation in market economies. In practice, women rely on flexible trading arrangements to align market work with *acara adat* (customary events) and *menyama braya* (socialising). However, such flexibility also exposes the structural constraints that shape women’s economic vulnerabilities. Another trader noted:

“Working as a trader here is flexible and not binding, so I can manage my time between selling and community activities. The only drawback is that I still must pay the daily administrative fee of Rp 1,000 (approximately US\$0.15), whether my stall is open or closed” (W4, aged 51, Interview, June 20, 2025).

This account reveals the tension between empowerment and precariousness. While flexibility enables women to integrate sociocultural duties into their livelihoods, fixed administrative costs mean that fulfilling communal obligations can have tangible economic consequences. Through these practices, women not only sustain household livelihoods but also legitimise the market as a culturally embedded space, ensuring that economic activity remains aligned with Balinese values.

Across all three roles, the analysis of reproductive, productive, and sociocultural responsibilities demonstrates that Balinese women’s labour is multilayered, adaptive, and deeply rooted in cultural norms. However, even this expanded understanding of women’s triple roles leaves certain dimensions unaddressed. Recurrent references to closing stalls during *odalan*, preparing offerings at market shrines, and prioritising *ngayah* as a sacred duty point beyond socio-cultural obligation toward a distinct spiritual dimension of labour are made in the study. These findings indicate that while Moser’s (1993) framework remains analytically valuable, it is insufficient for the context of Bali. Spiritual labour emerges as an autonomous role within the lived negotiation between ritual devotion and market livelihood in the following ways.

### 4.3 *Tri Hita Karana as the Basis for an Emerging Spiritual Dimension*

This section examines how *Tri Hita Karana* (THK), the Balinese philosophy of harmony among humans, nature, and the divine, shapes spirituality as a distinct dimension of women's labour at the Sukawati Art Market. The evidence demonstrates that women's ritual practices cannot be reduced to socio-cultural obligations alone; rather, they constitute autonomous spiritual duties that actively shape the everyday market life. During field observations, women traders were frequently seen *majejaitan*, arranging various offerings such as *canang sari*, *segehan*, and *banten* while also attending to their customers. *Banten* (or *bebanten*) is the Balinese term for ritual offerings, physical assemblages of natural materials prepared and presented to gods, spirits, and ancestors as acts of devotion, communication, and cosmological maintenance. A *banten* is not merely a gift or decoration. It is a structured cosmological object: each component (flowers, palm leaf, rice, fruit, incense, holy water) carries symbolic meaning tied to the Balinese Hindu understanding of the universe. The arrangement, colour, direction, and timing of a *banten* are prescribed by *adat* (customary law) and religious knowledge passed down through generations, often by women.

Ritual preparation occurred alongside economic activities rather than outside them. As one participant explained,

"Daily, and especially during *piodalan* (temple festivals), I perform *majejaitan* and prepare *banten* for the temple, even while at the market.... For me, *ngayah* is a non-negotiable obligation." (W7, aged 52, Interview, June 23, 2025)

*Majejaitan* is not merely a technical or decorative activity; it is imbued with spiritual meaning and understood as *yadnya/yajna* (an act of devotion or *Seva*). Within the philosophy of THK, such practices express harmony between economic livelihood (*pawongan*), the sacred (*parahyangan*), and material (*palemahan*) aspects. Rather than viewing ritual as an interruption to trade, women perceive it as integral to legitimising and sustaining their economic roles. Ritual labour, in this way, operates alongside productive labour as a parallel and equally necessary aspect of daily work.



Figure 4. Various kinds of *banten* with *canang sari* displayed at the market, illustrating the integration of ritual practice into daily trade (Photograph by Nararya Narottama, 2026).

A particularly illustrative case involves a trader (W8, aged 59) who also serves as a *jro mangku istri* (female temple priestess) alongside her husband, a *jro mangku lanang* (male priest). Together, they manage a handicraft stall but routinely suspend trading when ritual leadership is required during the *piodalan* or *ngayah* ceremonies. This arrangement positions the market as both a commercial and sacred space where spiritual authority and economic livelihood intersect. The dual priesthood reflects the Balinese cosmological principles of *Purusa* (male consciousness) and *Pradhana* (female energy), in which neither principle can function independently (Titib, 1998). Through her ritual leadership, the *jro mangku istri* embodies *Śakti*, the feminine power that animates and balances the masculine principle, demonstrating that women's spiritual agency is not secondary but complementary and indispensable (Remington & Kitterlin-Lynch, 2017). Economic and ritual duties are co-performed as parallel expressions of cosmological balance, affirming that gendered labour in Bali is structured by duality rather than by hierarchy. One trader explained:

“Every day, I wake up at 5 a.m. to prepare the household and make *canang sari* offerings before opening my stall.” (W8, Interview, June 23, 2025)

This testimony reveals how spiritual devotion is embedded within daily market routines, extending women's roles beyond reproductive, productive, and sociocultural responsibilities into an autonomous, spiritual domain.

Other traders articulated similar priorities. One trader noted,

“If there is *ngayah* in the *banjar*, I close my stall temporarily, because it is our obligation in Bali.” (W2, Interview, June 23, 2025)

Another explained,

"I close my stall during temple ceremonies because *ngayah* is an obligation. Even if I lose a day's income, my heart feels at peace, and my customary relationships are maintained." (W7, Interview, June 23, 2025)

Taken together, these accounts highlight how *ngayah*, a form of voluntary service performed without material compensation, embodies solidarity, devotion, and collective moral responsibility. In Sukawati, women willingly suspend trading to participate in communal rituals, accepting short-term economic losses in exchange for spiritual harmony and social legitimacy.

What is significant here is that women articulate these practices not simply as communal expectations but as sacred duties, underscoring spirituality as an autonomous domain of labour. Sacred responsibilities are structurally embedded within market routines, confirming Sukawati's status as both a commercial and sacred space. For female traders, spirituality exceeds Moser's (1993) reproductive and community-managing categories, demanding recognition as a distinct dimension of their agency. The Quadruple Roles framework is rooted in the lived practice of *Tri Hita Karana* and the cosmological balance of *Purusa*, *Pradhana*, and *Śakti*.

In labour sociology, spiritual labour differs from socio-cultural participation because it involves an obligatory performance tied to legitimacy and recognition within a social order. Unlike voluntary cultural activities, spiritual practices function as normative requirements, and their absence results in social sanctions or loss of moral standing (Byrne et al., 2011; McGuire, 2010). Rather than being a symbolic expression alone, they function as disciplined practices requiring time, bodily effort, and self-regulation (Karjalainen, 2022). In Sukawati, participation in ritual life similarly shapes acceptance within trading networks and access to community cooperation, indicating that these practices function as labour rather than merely as cultural traditions.

The disciplinary dimension of this obligation is equally significant. Women who are perceived to neglect ritual duties risk social censure, reputational loss within the trader community, and the withdrawal of the cooperative reciprocity (including assistance during busy trading periods and shared ceremonial responsibilities) on which market livelihoods depend. Spiritual labour, therefore, does not only authorize economic participation; its non-performance actively jeopardizes it. This coercive dimension distinguishes spiritual obligation from voluntary cultural practice and reinforces its analytical status as labour.

Table 3. Spiritual Labour of Balinese Women at Sukawati Art Market

| Aspect                                            | Manifestations                                                                                                                                                                               | Characteristics                                                                                                                       | Function                                                                                               | THK Alignment                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Transcendence (Personal Devotion)                 | Placing daily <i>canang sari</i> at stall shrines; sprinkling <i>tirta</i> (holy water) on products; brief prayers before trading; assuming ritual leadership ( <i>pemangku/jro mangku</i> ) | Obligatory practices performed prior to commercial exchange and independent of market demand; embedded in routine trading preparation | Establishes the moral legitimacy of trading and authorises participation in the marketplace            | <i>Parahyangan</i> – harmony with the Divine          |
| Healing (Well-being & Protection)                 | Offering <i>segehan</i> (ground offerings) for protection; preparing <i>loloh/jamu</i> (herbal drinks) for family and traders; providing comfort during hardship                             | Sacred care extending beyond households; rituals that protect, nurture, and sustain collective well-being                             | Maintains social and psychological stability necessary for continuity of economic activity             | <i>Pawongan</i> – harmony among people                |
| Cosmic Connection (Livelihood–Ritual Integration) | Closing stalls during <i>odalan</i> ; contributing income to ceremonies; decorating and cleaning temple grounds                                                                              | Integrates livelihood with ritual economy; situates market activities within cosmic balance                                           | Regulates temporal rhythms of market operation and synchronises commercial activity with ritual cycles | <i>Palemahan</i> – harmony with nature and the cosmos |

Source: Fieldwork, 2025.

Spiritual labour (as summarised in Table 3) is analytically distinct from socio-cultural obligation because its organising principle is cosmological rather than relational. Sociocultural roles coordinate relations among community members, whereas ritual practices in Sukawati are performed to maintain harmony among the human, natural, and divine realms, as prescribed by *Tri Hita Karana* (THK). Daily *canang sari* and *segehan* offerings and the closure of stalls during *odalan* are not merely collective social activities but required ritual acts that condition the moral legitimacy of trade in the temple area. The

marketplace, by extension, operates as both an economic arena and a ritually sanctioned space for the community.

This interpretation differs from most organisational studies, where spiritual labour is defined as the mobilisation or regulation of workers' spirituality within institutional settings (Case & Gosling, 2010; Karjalainen, 2022; McGuire, 2010). In Sukawati, spirituality is neither commodified nor managerially imposed. Rather, devotional practice precedes and authorises participation in exchanges. Ritual obligation does not function as workplace performance but as a community-recognised condition of economic legitimacy.

Spiritual labour intersects with reproductive, productive, and sociocultural responsibilities but remains functionally distinct from them. Practices such as *majejaitan* are incorporated into household routines, while participation in *ngayah* reorganises trading schedules and suspends commercial activity. These actions are not undertaken for reciprocity, income generation, or domestic care; they are obligations whose fulfilment enables livelihood. Prior research shows that unpaid care and ritual responsibilities support economic resilience (Barry & Gahman, 2021; Matamanda et al., 2022; Maviza & Thebe, 2023) however, in Bali, the relationship is stronger: economic participation is structured by ritual duty rather than merely being supported by it.



Figure 5. Women arranging *banten* as part of collective ritual preparation at a market temple (Photograph by Nararya Narottama, 2026).

Recognising this distinction extends Moser's (1993) triple-role framework into a quadruple-role model. The additional dimension does not subdivide community work but identifies a separate category of labour defined by its ontological orientation and regulatory function. Spiritual labour regulates when trade can occur, legitimises participation in tourism economies, and explains time allocation and temporary market withdrawal, which cannot be interpreted through reproductive, productive or socio-cultural roles alone. This formulation complements research linking women's spirituality to resilience and agency (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007; Myint, 2000) while grounding the analysis in tourism settings, where ritual obligation structures economic practices (Ayuningsasi et al., 2022; Duffy et al., 2016).

Within Balinese cosmology, the relationship between *Purusa* (consciousness) and *Pradhana* or *Sakti* (generative energy) further clarifies the role of women. Through ritual leadership and devotional practice, women enact the generative principles that maintain cosmic balance. Their authority derives not from community delegation but from ritual competence. Gendered agency is constituted through complementary cosmological functions rather than hierarchical positions. Spiritual labour has emerged as an institutionalised form of work that both authorises and sustains household livelihood, community order, and market activity.

#### ***4.4 The Quadruple Roles and Implications for Sustainable Tourism***

Addressing the third research question, this section synthesises the Quadruple Roles framework and considers its implications for gender, spirituality, and sustainability in tourism. Women's agency at the Sukawati Art Market spans the reproductive, productive, sociocultural, and spiritual domains, all of which are grounded in the philosophy of THK. Women's economic activities are bound up with household care, community obligations, and rituals. Beyond selling handicrafts, women act as cultural mediators, narrating the symbolic meanings of artefacts and transforming everyday trade into a cultural tourism. Items such as statues, textiles, and masks serve as souvenirs and ritual objects alike, positioning women as custodians of authenticity and agents of sustainable tourism (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018). However, this integration of commerce, culture, and devotion exposes vulnerabilities as women navigate capital constraints, market restructuring and patriarchal norms (Pickel-Chevalier et al., 2019; Sukardiasih et al., 2025).



Figure 6. Balinese women managing a stall while preparing ritual offerings (*canang sari*) during an interview session (Photograph by Made Diah Pranyaswari, 2025).

Spirituality emerges as central, rather than peripheral, to women's work. Nearly all traders prepare *banten* and *canang sari* at home and in the market, embedding devotion directly into their economic routines. As one trader explained,

"Making *canang sari* and other offerings while trading is my duty, so that my business remains aligned with the divine" (W7, Interview, June 23, 2025).

These practices require time and energy and may reduce trading hours; yet, women consistently describe them as sources of calm, legitimacy, and social respect. Rather than viewing rituals as interruptions, traders understand devotion as a condition for market success. This supports the argument that spirituality underpins women's resilience and leadership (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007; Myint, 2000) and aligns with tourism research emphasising the role of cultural obligations in shaping women's labour (Ayuningsasi et al., 2022; Duffy et al., 2016).

Reproductive responsibilities are the foundation of this labour configuration. Many women begin their day with household care and ritual preparation before opening their stalls, demonstrating how reproductive and spiritual labour enables productive engagement. Closing stalls during temple festivals is not framed as an economic loss but as an alignment with THK principles. In this sense, this study extends Moser's (1993) framework by showing how reproductive labour in Bali is uniquely ritualised and morally regulated.

Productive roles remain anchored in intergenerational craft traditions; however, women increasingly face barriers related to competition, digitalisation, and access to capital. Sociocultural duties, particularly *ngayah* and *menyama braya*, reinforce social solidarity but can temporarily reduce income. As one participant explained,

"If there is *ngayah* in the banjar, I prefer to close the stall temporarily for *menyama braya*, because that is our tradition and obligation in Bali. *Manava seva Madhava seva*, which means service to humanity is service to God. God will give us sustenance in different forms." (W6, Interview, June 20, 2025)

This testimony frames voluntary service not as a sacrifice but as a cosmologically sanctioned duty. By aligning community service with devotion, women legitimise their temporary withdrawal from trade as an investment in spiritual and social balance, reinforcing THK's integration of divine, human, and natural harmony. Such practices exemplify what Mohanty (2003) describes as a negotiated agency: women operate within patriarchal constraints but actively align economic activity with cultural and cosmological obligations.

Patriarchal expectations continue to shape these dynamics, particularly through the gendered socialisation of daughters into domestic and ritual responsibilities, while sons are often exempted (Putra & Creese, 2016). However, these norms are neither fixed nor uncontested in the literature. Some households increasingly pursue more equitable arrangements, revealing patriarchy as at once resilient and negotiated, a pattern echoed in agrarian and tourism economies elsewhere (Barry & Gahman, 2021; Matamanda et al., 2022).

This complexity was summarised by a market manager:

“Here, women have very complex roles. They must complete their responsibilities at home before taking on the obligation of earning a living.... Some traders collaborate with their husbands, with men focusing on marketing paintings or statues, while women sell souvenirs such as necklaces, bracelets, and fabrics” (K1, Interview, July 1, 2025).

This account underscores that women's agency is negotiated across the household, economic, and ritual domains. Women's labour sustains tourism not only through commerce but also through cultural and spiritual continuity. Economic participation thus becomes a contemporary form of *ngayah*, in which devotion extends beyond ritual service to include cultural and economic contributions.

Finally, the Quadruple Roles framework resonates with Balinese cosmology. The dual priesthood of *jro mangku istri* and *jro mangku lanang* embodies the complementary principles of *Purusa* (male consciousness) and *Pradhana* (female energy), animated by *Śakti*, the feminine power that balances and sustains the creation. Women's spiritual labour is therefore cosmologically indispensable. Mapping reproductive, productive, sociocultural, and spiritual roles onto THK's harmonies of *parahyangan* (divine), *parwongan* (human), and *palemahan* (nature) anchors the framework within Balinese epistemology (Adityanandana & Gerber, 2019; Roth & Sedana, 2015; Titib, 1998; Wiryawan, 2024). As summarised in Table 4, this synthesis demonstrates how Balinese women's interwoven labour secures household resilience, cultural continuity, environmental stewardship and spiritual legitimacy, providing a holistic foundation for sustainable tourism.

Table 4. Quadruple Roles of Balinese Women, *Tri Hita Karana* Alignment, and Implications for Tourism System

| Quadruple Roles                                                          | THK Domain                                                                                  | Practices                                                                                                                                                       | Functions                                                                                                                                                                                | Implications for Tourism System                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Reproductive</b><br>(domestic care, household responsibilities)       | <i>Pawongan</i> (humans relations) + <i>Parahyangan</i> (ritualised care)                   | Child-rearing, preparing meals, early-morning <i>mabanten canang sari</i> before opening stalls or trading                                                      | Reproduces labour capacity and moral discipline within the household; links daily subsistence routines with devotional order; <i>Śakti</i>                                               | Secures household resilience and intergenerational continuity; legitimises women’s participation in tourism |
| <b>Productive</b><br>(income-generating activities)                      | <i>Palemahan</i> (nature and material resources) + <i>Pawongan</i> (collaborative exchange) | Handicraft production in family workshops, trading in Blocks A and B, sourcing materials                                                                        | Generates livelihood and circulates locally embedded goods; converts cultural skills into economic value                                                                                 | Sustains the creative economy and material basis of tourism exchange                                        |
| <b>Socio-Cultural</b><br>(community organisation and ritual obligations) | <i>Pawongan</i> (social cohesion)                                                           | <i>Ngayah</i> , banjar rituals, temple cleaning, suspending trade for communal ceremonies ( <i>menyama braya</i> )                                              | It coordinates collective responsibilities and social relations, regulates cooperation, trust, and reciprocal obligation among traders, and frames communal service as a religious duty. | Stabilises market governance and embeds commercial activity within community institutions                   |
| <b>Spiritual</b><br>(ritual and devotional labour)                       | <i>Parahyangan</i> (divine relations) + integrating <i>Pawongan</i> and <i>Palemahan</i>    | <i>Canang sari</i> and <i>banten</i> offerings, sprinkling <i>tirta</i> on products, closing stalls during <i>odalan</i> , priestly roles ( <i>jro mangku</i> ) | Regulates moral legitimacy of economic participation and temporal organisation of trade; authorises when and how exchange may occur, legitimising markets as sacred spaces               | Constitutes the moral infrastructure of the tourism system by ritually sanctioning commercial activity      |

Source: Fieldwork (2025); adapted from Moser (1993) and *Tri Hita Karana* principles

Table 4 maps the Quadruple Roles of Balinese women (reproductive, productive, socio-cultural, and spiritual) onto the three harmonies of *Tri Hita Karana* (*parahyangan*, *pawongan*, and *palemahan*) and provides the conceptual basis for the framework illustrated in Figure 7.

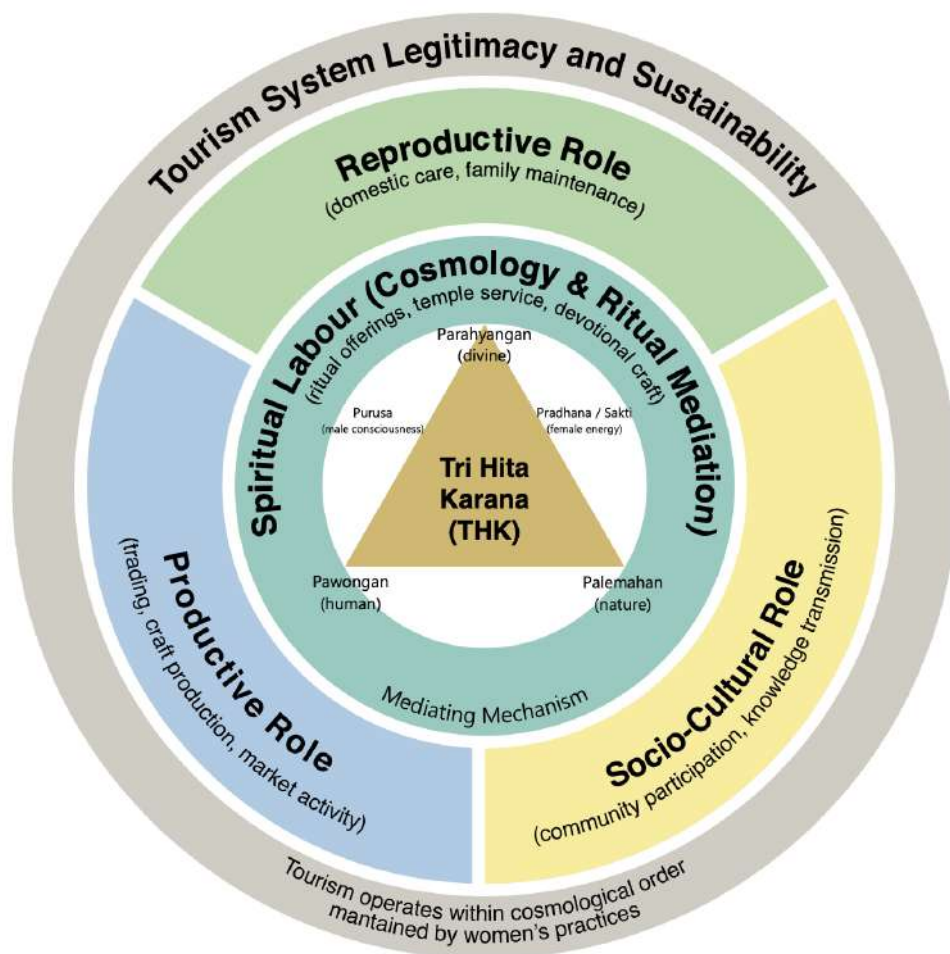


Figure 7. Quadruple Roles Framework (Source: Authors, 2026)

In contrast to Moser's (1993) triple-role model, the Balinese case identifies spirituality as an autonomous role in which ritual offerings, priestly duties, and devotional practices are structurally integrated into the market activity. Anchored in *Purusa-Pradhana* cosmology and the principle of *Sakti* as sustaining feminine energy, women's labour operates within a cosmological order rather than solely economic or social domains. Participant testimony, expressed in the phrase "*Manava Seva Madhava Seva*" ("service to humanity is service to God"), shows that *ngayah* is understood as communal service and spiritual devotion

at once, thereby legitimising the temporary withdrawal from trade as a sacred obligation rather than as economic inactivity.

The Quadruple Roles framework shows that spiritual labour does not merely accompany other roles but mediates them. Ritual practice regulates when economic activity may occur, aligns household responsibilities with devotional duties, and situates community participation within the moral obligation. Spiritual labour, in short, authorises participation in the tourism economy by ritually sanctioning commercial exchange and defining the conditions under which trade is considered to be proper and sustainable. Conversely, the failure to fulfil devotional obligations carries social costs, a dynamic that exposes the coercive, not merely enabling, character of spiritual labour and its function as a regulatory mechanism within the moral economy of the market. Within the harmonies of *Tri Hita Karana*, tourism sustainability in Bali depends on women's interwoven labour, which sustains household resilience, social cohesion, environmental balance and spiritual legitimacy.

This ritual regulation of market activity has governance implications. Tourism management cannot be organised solely around economic schedules, as temple cycles, *odalan* closures, and *ngayah* obligations structure legitimate trading time. Planning that ignores ritual calendars risks interpreting temporary closures as inefficiencies rather than normative practices. Destination authorities should incorporate ritual time into market regulations, operating schedules, and planning frameworks. Sustainability assessment should extend beyond visitor numbers and revenue to include cultural labour that maintains social cohesion and ritual continuity.

While spiritual labour as a cultural obligation applies broadly to Balinese society, its intensity, time burden, and moral weight are distributed unequally along gender lines. Women bear a disproportionate share of daily ritual preparation, including *canang sari*, *banten*, and *majejaitan*, which are understood as primarily feminine domestic-spiritual duties embedded in the *Purusa-Pradhana* cosmology. Men participate in *ngayah* and *odalan* observances, but the daily embodied labour of ritual maintenance falls predominantly on women. Women's economic legitimacy is, moreover, more directly contingent on ritual fulfilment, as their roles as wives, mothers, and bearers of *Śakti* are evaluated through visible devotional performance. For this reason, while the framework may offer analytical transferability to men in future research, the quadruple burden documented here is structurally gendered in the Balinese context. Future studies should include male traders as primary informants to test whether and how spiritual labour operates differently across gender lines.

## 5. Conclusion

Working from constructivist grounded theory and evidence from the Sukawati Art Market, the analysis shows how Balinese women sustain everyday life through interwoven reproductive, productive, sociocultural, and spiritual roles grounded in the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*. Theoretically, the analysis repositions spiritual labour as a form of work structured through moral obligation and cosmological legitimacy rather than wage relations or managerial regulation. While the existing literature has examined spiritual labour mainly within organisational and workplace settings, this research demonstrates that, in culturally embedded tourism economies, participation in economic exchange itself depends on ritual fulfilment and recognised devotion. Spiritual practice functions, in effect, as a condition of labour participation rather than as a symbolic culture.

Empirically, the evidence reveals a moral economy in which trading schedules, market legitimacy, and perceptions of success are organised around ritual requirements. Women's agency is exercised through the concurrent sustenance of household resilience, cultural continuity, and spiritual legitimacy. Conceptually, the framework suggests that tourism systems may rely on forms of labour that remain invisible within secular economic models of work. The Quadruple Roles framework offers a lens applicable beyond Bali to pilgrimage destinations, ritual heritage economies, and indigenous tourism contexts. Future research should employ comparative and longitudinal designs to examine how spiritual labour varies across cultural settings and how it adapts over time in response to tourism development, market pressure, and social change.

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## Author Profiles

**Nararya Narottama** is a lecturer and researcher at the Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia. Before entering academia, he built a career in international hospitality across Bali, the United States, and Canada, and has held research affiliations with UNESCO Headquarters in Paris and Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He holds a Master's degree in Tourism Research from I.R.E.S.T., Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne, France, and a doctorate in Tourism from Udayana University. His research specialises in spiritual and cultural tourism, gender, international migration, and sustainability in Bali. His recent work appears in the Springer *Handbook of Sustainability in Tourism and Hospitality in*

*Indonesia* (2025). He is the corresponding author for this study. Email: nararya.narottama@unud.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5469-2020>

**Lu Chang** is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of International Tourism and Management, City University of Macau, Macau SAR, China. She holds a doctorate from Griffith University, Australia, where she specialised in tourist wellbeing and positive psychology in tourism. Her research interests centre on tourist and senior wellbeing, eudaimonic frameworks of well-being, and cross-cultural tourism experiences. She has published in leading tourism journals including the *Journal of Travel Research*, *Tourism Management Perspectives*, *Current Issues in Tourism*, and the *International Journal of Tourism Research*. Email: [luchang@cityu.edu.mo](mailto:luchang@cityu.edu.mo) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7165-2477>

**Made Diah Pranyaswari** holds a degree in Tourism from the Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia. Her research interests include gender and tourism, and the tourism and hospitality industries. Email: [diahmade2002@gmail.com](mailto:diahmade2002@gmail.com) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3669-2786>

**I Putu Anom** is Professor of Tourism Development Policy at the Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia. He was inaugurated as the Faculty's first full professor in September 2022. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Development Economics, a Master's degree in Tourism Studies, and a doctorate from Institut Hindu Dharma Negeri Denpasar. His research addresses tourism governance and policy, cultural and spiritual tourism, rural tourism development, and the application of Balinese Hindu cosmological principles to sustainable tourism practice. He has published in *Jurnal Destinasi Pariwisata* and *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Scopus indexed), among other outlets. Email: [putuanom@unud.ac.id](mailto:putuanom@unud.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9557-3308>

# Assessing the Contribution of “the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival” to Balinese Language Maintenance

I Made Dian Saputra<sup>1\*</sup> , Aldi Dwi Saputra<sup>2</sup> , Indriyo K. Sukmono<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Yale University, United States

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**Abstract:** In response to concerns over the decline of regional languages, the Government of Bali Province has organized the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival (Balinese Language Month Festival) annually since 2019 to revitalize the Balinese language and encourage its everyday use. This study assesses the festival’s contribution to language maintenance by examining participants’ perceptions, language practices, and the role of government policy. Employing a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, data were collected from 180 participants across Bali through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Quantitative findings indicate strong awareness and positive attitudes toward the Balinese language, while qualitative findings reveal that language use remains largely situational and concentrated during the festival period. These findings suggest a disparity between positive perceptions and sustained everyday language use. The study posits that the festival serves as an important policy instrument for language maintenance, although its impact on daily linguistic practices remains limited.

**Keywords:** Balinese language; Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival; government language policy; language maintenance

## 1. Introduction

Language and culture are fundamental components in the formation of community identity (Zia & Fatima, 2025). In the context of Bali, the Balinese language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a vehicle for transmitting values, traditions, ethnic identity, and local wisdom (Putra et al., 2025). The decline in intergenerational transmission and the diminishing daily use of Balinese, particularly among younger generations, have raised significant concerns about the sustainability of the Balinese language and culture

\* Corresponding author’s email: [diansaputra@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:diansaputra@uhnsugriwa.ac.id)

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(Prilyasinta & Purnawan, 2025). Data from Indonesia’s Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS, 2020) reveal a declining trend in regional language usage among younger generations. Only approximately 61.7% of the post-Generation Z generation and 69.9% of Generation Z continue to utilize regional languages in daily communication, in contrast to more than 80% among older generations. This indicates a tendency toward reduced engagement of younger generations in the use of regional languages. In addition to globalization and the dominance of English, the increasing adoption of Indonesian as the national language also contributes to the shrinking domains of Balinese. As noted by I Wayan Pastika (2013), Indonesian language is increasingly employed not only in formal education and administration but also in family and community interactions. Consequently, the strengthening of Indonesian in both formal and informal sectors reduces the everyday functional space of Balinese and presents an internal structural challenge to its preservation.

In response to the challenges of preserving the Balinese language and culture, the Provincial Government of Bali has implemented a comprehensive policy framework aimed at language preservation and revitalization. This framework encompasses regulatory frameworks, educational initiatives, and community-based cultural programs that collectively enhance the utilization of the Balinese language across formal and informal contexts. Notably, one of the pivotal initiatives within this policy framework is the annual Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival, which is held every February. This cultural program serves as a cornerstone of efforts to safeguard and promote the Balinese language, script, and literature. The festival was officially inaugurated following the promulgation of Bali Governor Regulation Number 80 of 2018 and commenced its inaugural implementation in 2019. Consequently, by 2026, the festival has been held eight consecutive times.

The Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival serves as a platform for the appreciation, education, and revitalization of the Balinese language. It actively engages the community, traditional villages, schools, and cultural institutions through a diverse range of activities, including language seminars and discussions (*widya tula*), workshops (*kriya loka*), exhibitions of Balinese script and literature, traditional art performances, and various language competitions (*wimbakara*). These competitions encompass Balinese script writing, lontar manuscript writing, lontar reading, textual singing and interpretation, Balinese-language speeches, Balinese-language debates, storytelling, and religious discourse. The festival targets participants from diverse age groups and social backgrounds, from elementary school students to traditional leaders and the general public who attend the event. As a government-initiated and consistently implemented cultural program, the Balinese Language Month Festival functions as a strategic

instrument in sustaining the Balinese language while simultaneously preserving local cultural values, ensuring their vibrancy and relevance in contemporary Balinese society (Suputra, 2020).

Since its inception in 2019, the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival has undergone significant development in both its scope and execution. While its early editions were primarily confined to the provincial level, more recent iterations, particularly in 2025 and 2026, have expanded to regency, district, and customary village (*desa adat*) levels, thereby facilitating greater community participation. The festival's expansion is also evident in the increasing number of participants over time. Official records indicate that the number of competition participants increased from 245 people in 2019 to 1,168 in 2026, with fluctuations throughout the years but an overall upward trend. This growth signifies not only the broadening reach of the festival but also the strengthening of community engagement and institutional support in its implementation.

This study investigates the contribution of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival to the preservation of the Balinese language in response to the increasing influence of Indonesian and foreign languages across various domains in Bali, including education, digital communication, tourism, and everyday social interactions. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive analysis of public perceptions and the role of the government in positioning the festival as a cultural policy instrument for language preservation. Previous studies on language preservation have primarily focused on the roles of family, formal education, and community groups (Haerani & Putra, 2021; Alike et al., 2017; Bai, 2016). However, research on government-driven cultural festivals as strategies for language preservation remains limited, particularly in the context of Indonesia's regional languages. Furthermore, studies that examine participants' perceptions in relation to policy implementation and actual language use within a single analytical framework are still rare. This study therefore provides an assessment of the festival's contribution to language preservation by analyzing participants' perceptions, policy implementation by the Provincial Government of Bali, and language use practices during the festival.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Language Preservation and Contemporary Challenges

Language maintenance encompasses the concerted efforts of a community to preserve the utilization of its native language amidst the influence of a dominant language (Fishman, 2012). In numerous contexts, regional and minority languages encounter escalating challenges due to the pervasive adoption of dominant languages in communication, education, and media. It is pertinent to acknowledge that such pressures are not exclusively a contemporary

phenomenon but are also rooted in historical processes, including colonial language policies and the promotion of national languages during the post-independence era. For instance, in Indonesia, the reinforcement of Indonesian as the national language has significantly contributed to the shaping of language usage across formal and informal domains.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that language shift occurs when local languages experience a decline in usage, particularly among younger generations. According to UNESCO (2023), approximately 40% of the world’s over 6,700 languages are at risk of extinction due to a decrease in active speakers. One key indicator of this decline is the reduction in language use across social and educational domains. Furthermore, Shen (2024) illustrates how the influence of dominant languages in global contexts contributes to the diminishing vitality of Indigenous languages. Similarly, Marimuthu (2025) emphasizes that inadequate language policies further undermine the capacity of local languages to thrive in broader social contexts. In addition, studies on family language practices underscore the significance of intergenerational support in preserving heritage languages (Fatima & Nadeem, 2025). These studies collectively suggest that language maintenance necessitates sustained and coordinated support from various stakeholders, including government policy, education, community engagement, and family-level practices. Such support is crucial for ensuring long-term intergenerational transmission and the sustained use of local languages in everyday life.

## *2.2 Regional Languages and Cultural Identity*

Regional languages play a fundamental role in preserving cultural identity and sustaining local values. Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for transmitting knowledge, traditions, and the meaning systems of the communities that use it. Studies in sociolinguistics and cultural anthropology underscore the direct implications of the weakening of regional languages for the erosion of local identity and cultural expression (Kramsch, 2014). Recent research suggests that regional languages function as markers of collective identity and as social capital that enhances community cohesion, particularly within multicultural communities and indigenous societies (Massuannan, 2025). However, the forces of globalization and the dominance of national and global languages have accelerated language shift, particularly among younger generations, resulting in the diminished use of regional languages in social and cultural domains (Kasiyarno & Apriyanto, 2025).

In the context of Bali, the Balinese language serves as a fundamental pillar of Balinese identity. It functions as an ethnic marker that distinguishes

Balinese people from other ethnic groups in Indonesia. The Balinese language is not only used for communication, but also plays an essential role in traditional ceremonies, classical literature, and religious practices to transmit cultural values and ancestral heritage across generations (Widiatmika et al., 2025). Furthermore, the system of *angguh-ungguh basa* (speech levels), which regulates language use according to social hierarchy, age, and respect, reflects the traditional social structure and ethical values of Balinese society (Arnawa et al., 2022). The language also holds strong religious significance, particularly in Hindu rituals and sacred traditions that incorporate elements of Kawi and Sanskrit (Suweta et al., 2022). Therefore, its maintenance cannot be separated from the preservation of Balinese culture and identity as a whole. These studies suggest that the preservation of regional languages requires deliberate and continuous efforts to sustain their functional use across social, cultural, religious, and intergenerational domains amid increasing global pressures.

### *2.3 Cultural Festivals as a Strategy for Language Maintenance*

Numerous studies have demonstrated that cultural festivals serve not only as venues for entertainment and tourism but also as strategic mechanisms for the preservation and revitalization of regional languages. This is achieved through heightened public awareness, community involvement, and the reinforcement of local identity pride (Hakim et al., 2025). This phenomenon is particularly evident when such activities incorporate traditional linguistic practices into programs that engage younger generations and native speaker groups, a process commonly referred to as language maintenance through community engagement.

Empirical research on the role of intangible cultural components such as music, dance, rituals, and traditional narratives that frequently appear in festivals demonstrates that synergistic efforts between cultural practices and language preservation policies make a significant contribution to sustaining the social functions of endangered languages and reinforcing community identity cohesion (Gwerevende et al., 2023). However, although the literature extensively discusses the relationship between cultural festivals and the preservation of traditions, studies that explicitly evaluate cultural festivals as policy instruments for language maintenance remain relatively limited. This indicates the need for further research that integrates language vitality frameworks with assessments of the impact of festivals on language use across broader sociocultural domains (Ahmadu & Idris, 2025). In addition, in practice, festivals that support local linguistic expression, for example through narrative performances, language workshops, and traditional art exhibitions, serve as important moments for expanding the domains of regional language

use beyond domestic and ritual contexts. In doing so, they help slow language shift and promote intergenerational continuity within contemporary cultural contexts.

#### ***2.4 The Role of Government Policy in the Preservation of Regional Languages***

Government policy assumes a strategic role in facilitating the preservation of regional languages through the formulation of regulations, the allocation of resources, and the implementation of coordinated cultural programs. These interventions contribute to the enhancement of the position of regional languages within the public sphere, formal education, and mass communication media. May (2013) posits that linguistically responsive policies can augment language vitality and broaden the domains of utilization of minority languages, particularly when supported by inclusive implementation mechanisms and active participation from local communities. In both global and national contexts, several countries have integrated regional language preservation into legal and educational frameworks, for instance through bilingual curricula, funding for revitalization programs, and support for regional language media, all of which demonstrate positive effects on the preservation of endangered languages (Hinton & Hale, 2013).

In Indonesia, the protection of regional languages is regulated through various national and local regulations, including Law No. 24 of 2009 on the National Flag, Language, State Emblem, and National Anthem, as well as regional regulations that promote the teaching of local languages in primary schools and the promotion of local culture within communities (Pamungkas, 2019). In Bali, these efforts are further reinforced through Bali Provincial Regulation No. 1 of 2018 and Governor Regulation No. 80 of 2018 concerning the protection and utilization of the Balinese language, script, and literature. These regulations include the establishment of institutional programs such as the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival, support for Balinese language agencies, and appreciation initiatives for Balinese-language literary writers and cultural figures. However, implementation often encounters significant challenges, such as low levels of community participation, limited resources, and a lack of innovative, sustainable, and evidence-based programs.

These constraints, in turn, restrict the effectiveness of such policies at the grassroots level. Therefore, empirical studies that assess both the successes and obstacles of local government language policies, particularly in terms of their practical implementation and their impact on language use in educational, media, and social domains, are urgently required to formulate more effective and context-sensitive policy recommendations that align with local sociocultural dynamics. Based on these studies, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of

regional language preservation ultimately depends not only on the existence of formal regulations, but also on the consistency of policy implementation and its capacity to expand and sustain language use across educational, media, and everyday social domains.

### ***2.5 Research Gap and Urgency of the Study***

Based on the literature review presented above, it can be concluded that while research on the maintenance of regional languages has advanced significantly, most studies still emphasize the roles of families, formal education, and local communities as the primary agents of language preservation. Studies that explicitly position cultural festivals as instruments of government policy for the maintenance of regional languages and cultures remain limited, particularly within the Indonesian regional language context. Furthermore, existing literature tends to examine cultural festivals from cultural, tourism, or creative economy perspectives in isolation, without integrating the dimensions of language policy, public perception, and youth engagement within a comprehensive analytical framework.

These limitations highlight a research gap in comprehending how government-initiated and government-supported cultural festivals can serve as strategic mechanisms for both language preservation and cultural safeguarding amidst the pressures of globalization. Consequently, this study demonstrates academic urgency and conceptual novelty by examining the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival as a case study that integrates analyses of government policy, community perceptions, and youth participation in a comprehensive endeavor to sustain the Balinese language and culture in the era of globalization.

## **3. Method and Theory**

### ***3.1 Method***

This study employs a mixed-methods approach utilizing a sequential explanatory design. In this design, quantitative data are collected and analyzed initially, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. This approach is employed to assess the impact of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival as a government policy instrument for language maintenance. The study examines participants' perceptions, language use practices, and policy implementation. The use of a mixed-methods design enables quantitative data to provide measurable evidence of perception trends and perceived effectiveness. Qualitative data further elucidate and contextualize these findings within broader social and policy frameworks.

The initial phase of the study is the quantitative phase, which seeks to ascertain public and youth perceptions of the effectiveness of the Bulan

Bahasa Bali Festival in augmenting awareness, attitudes, and the utilization of the Balinese language. Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932). The questionnaire was meticulously designed to assess three primary dimensions: (1) awareness of the objectives and significance of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival, (2) attitudes towards the utilization of the Balinese language as a component of cultural identity, and (3) the application of the Balinese language in daily life. Each item was evaluated on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The instrument was distributed to individuals who had participated in or been directly exposed to the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival. A total of 180 respondents participated in the survey. Respondents were selected using purposive and convenience sampling techniques, based on their involvement in or familiarity with the festival as well as accessibility considerations. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, mean values, and response distributions, to describe general trends in participants’ perceptions of the festival. A map was developed by the authors to illustrate the distribution of respondents across nine administrative regions in Bali Province (Figure 1).

### Research Area and Respondent Distribution in Bali Province

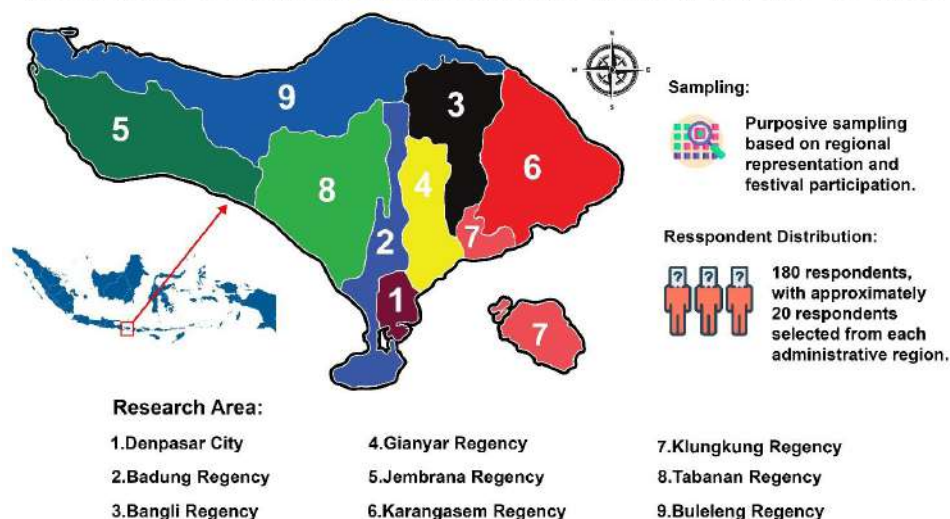


Figure 1. Research area and respondent distribution in Bali Province (Source: Developed by the authors, 2026).

This study encompassed 180 respondents from eight regencies and one municipality in Bali Province: Jembrana, Tabanan, Badung, Gianyar, Klungkung, Bangli, Karangasem, and Buleleng Regencies, as well as Denpasar City, which

operates across all administrative levels through a tiered system from local to provincial stages. This ensures broad geographical representation.

The questionnaires were distributed online via the Google Forms platform and shared with participants through community networks and festival-related groups. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics, encompassing mean Likert scores, percentages, and response distributions, as well as the Perception Index (PI) to assess participants' perceptions regarding the efficacy of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival in language preservation. The Perception Index was computed using the following formula:

$$IP = \frac{\sum (f_i \times s_i)}{N \times S_{\max}} \times 100$$

Explanation:

$f_i$  = frequency of responses for each answer category

$s_i$  = answer score (1–5 on the Likert scale)

$N$  = number of respondents

$S_{\max}$  = maximum score on the Likert scale (5)

The PI ranges from 0 to 100 and is categorized into four interpretative groups: very low (0–25), low (26–50), high (51–75), and very high (76–100). The utilization of this index serves to provide a succinct and easily comprehensible quantitative summary of respondents' perceptual inclinations, while simultaneously facilitating the integration of quantitative findings with qualitative insights during the subsequent analysis phase.

The second phase of the study involves a qualitative phase aimed at elucidating and interpreting the quantitative findings in greater depth. During this phase, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with local policymakers, festival organizers, cultural figures, and representatives of younger generations. A total of 12 informants were interviewed, selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, or participation in the Balinese Language Month Festival. The interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were conducted either face-to-face or online using the Balinese language, as it facilitated participants, particularly cultural figures and local community members, in expressing their perspectives, cultural experiences, and language practices more naturally and contextually. All interviews centered on participants' perspectives regarding the festival's role in language maintenance, policy implementation, and its impact on language use practices. Additionally, direct observations were conducted during the implementation of the Balinese Language Month Festival to investigate

practices of Balinese language use, levels of community participation, and the dynamics of social interaction within festival activities. Documentary analysis of government regulations, activity reports, promotional materials, and media archives was also employed as supporting data to enhance the policy analysis.

The questionnaire comprised 18 items assessed on a five-point Likert scale, distributed across three dimensions: participants’ perceptions of the festival’s efficacy (8 items), language usage practices during the festival (5 items), and opinions on government policy implementation (5 items). Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed in an integrated manner. The results of descriptive statistical analysis from the quantitative phase served as the foundation for determining the focus of the qualitative analysis. Subsequently, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis through stages of coding, categorization, and interpretation of key themes related to the role of government policy, festival effectiveness, and language usage practices. Data integration was conducted at the interpretation stage by comparing and linking quantitative and qualitative findings to generate complementary and convergent conclusions.

To ensure data validity and reliability, this study employed several strategies, including face validity testing of the questionnaire instrument, descriptive assessment of internal consistency, and triangulation of methods and data sources. In the qualitative phase, data credibility was enhanced through limited member checking and peer debriefing. Through this mixed-methods approach, the study is anticipated to provide a more comprehensive, objective, and evidence-based understanding of the effectiveness of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival as a strategy for the preservation of the Balinese language and culture.

### 3.2 Theory

The primary theoretical framework employed in this study is the theory of language maintenance as proposed by Fishman (1991, 2012). This theory posits that the sustainability of a language is significantly influenced by the expansion and continuity of its domains of use within social life, encompassing family, education, ritual practices, and public spaces. In the context of this study, the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival is conceptualized as an initiative aimed at expanding the domains of Balinese language utilization into public and cultural spaces that serve both symbolic and practical purposes. Consequently, this expansion contributes to the enhancement of the social functions of the Balinese language amidst the prevailing dominance of national and global languages. Fishman’s domain framework serves as a guiding principle for the analysis of festival activities across family, educational, and public domains.

Furthermore, this study utilizes the theory of language attitudes, which asserts that speakers' positive attitudes towards their mother tongue are instrumental in its sustained usage (Garrett, 2010). Public and youth perceptions of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival serve as indicators of language attitudes, encompassing cognitive dimensions (knowledge and awareness), affective dimensions (pride and emotional attachment), and conative dimensions (the inclination to employ the Balinese language). This theory holds particular relevance to the quantitative approach employed in this study, particularly in the measurement of perceptions through questionnaires and the Perception Index.

Another theoretical framework that underpins this study is language policy and planning theory. This theory posits that the government acts as a strategic actor in the preservation of minority languages through regulations, programs, and cultural interventions (May, 2013). The Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival is analyzed as an implementation of a culture-based language policy that operates in a top-down manner in terms of formulation and funding, while simultaneously incorporating bottom-up community participation. This theoretical perspective serves as the foundation for the qualitative analysis of the role of the Provincial Government of Bali, policy legitimacy, and the effectiveness of policy implementation at the social level.

Furthermore, this study adopts the perspective of cultural festivals as social practices and instruments of cultural preservation. It views festivals not merely as ceremonial events but as spaces for the production of meaning, identity, and living cultural practices (Getz, 2010). Within this framework, festivals are understood as media for intergenerational cultural transmission and as vehicles for language revitalization through participatory experiences. This perspective supports the use of observation and interviews in the qualitative phase to examine the dynamics of Balinese language use during the festival.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives aligns with the sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach employed in this study. Quantitative theories, such as language maintenance and language attitudes, are utilized to quantify general trends in public perceptions. Conversely, theories of language policy and cultural festivals are employed to interpret and enhance the findings through qualitative data. Through this integrated theoretical framework, the study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how the Balinese Language Month Festival functions as a policy mechanism, a cultural practice, and a social space in efforts to preserve the Balinese language and culture in the era of globalization. Concurrently, these perspectives facilitate a multi-level analysis that links policy design, cultural practice, and language behavior.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

This section presents the findings on the role of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival in supporting the maintenance of the Balinese language. It specifically focuses on participants’ perceptions, language use practices, and government policy. The results are organized into three main subsections. Section 4.1.1 presents the quantitative findings on participants’ perceptions, followed by qualitative findings in Section 4.1.2 on language use practices during the festival. Section 4.1.3 examines the role of government policy in positioning the festival as a language maintenance strategy. Collectively, these findings provide an assessment of the festival’s effectiveness in supporting the maintenance of the Balinese language.

#### 4.1.1 Presents the Quantitative Findings on Participants’ Perceptions

This subsection presents the quantitative findings on participants’ perceptions of the 2025 Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival, based on responses from 180 participants representing eight regencies and one municipality in Bali Province. This regional coverage reflects the province-wide implementation of the festival across multiple administrative levels, from local to provincial contexts. Prior to examining participants’ perceptions, it is crucial to contextualize the analysis within the broader framework of festival participation. Participation data indicate that the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival has experienced a general increase in the number of participants over time, rising from 245 participants in 2019 to 1,168 participants in 2026, despite some fluctuations across years (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Participants in Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival 2019–2026

| Year | Number of Participants | Number of Competitions | Prize Amount (IDR) |
|------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 2019 | 245                    | 12                     | 72,000,000         |
| 2020 | 660                    | 17                     | 169,500,000        |
| 2021 | 1,019                  | 17                     | 123,000,000        |
| 2022 | 600                    | 10                     | 81,000,000         |
| 2023 | 693                    | 17                     | 163,000,000        |
| 2024 | 852                    | 17                     | 175,000,000        |
| 2025 | 805                    | 17                     | 195,000,000        |
| 2026 | 1,168                  | 17                     | 369,000,000        |

Source: Compiled from interviews and observations conducted by the author with the Bali Provincial Government (2019–2026)

The overall upward trend signifies the expanding reach of the festival, as well as the strengthening of institutional support for its implementation across Bali. The extensive scope of implementation is further substantiated by participation data from 2025, which reveal a substantial level of community involvement. In that year, the festival engaged 1,487 of 1,500 customary villages (*desa adat*) and 667 of 716 villages/urban wards across Bali. Participation also extended to the education sector, with 131 of 152 senior high schools, as well as all vocational and special schools, organizing festival-related activities. Additionally, 12 provincial-level competitions involved 805 participants (Koran Jakarta, 2025).

The findings reveal that all respondents exhibited a substantial level of awareness regarding the existence and objectives of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival. Notably, no respondents were categorized into the very low or low perception levels, suggesting that the festival is well comprehended and favorably received by participants. This observation underscores the festival's efficacy in promoting language-related policies and augmenting public awareness of the significance of the Balinese language.

In terms of attitudes, respondents expressed strongly positive views toward the use of the Balinese language, particularly in cultural, artistic, and ceremonial contexts. These responses indicate a high level of appreciation of the Balinese language within its traditional domains. Such positive attitudes may reflect a sense of cultural attachment and identity associated with the language. However, it should be noted that this interpretation is based on self-reported perceptions rather than direct measurement of language behavior. At the same time, responses indicate that the use of the Balinese language in everyday life remains relatively limited. Many respondents reported a tendency to use Indonesian or foreign languages more frequently in informal and digital interactions, indicating a gap between positive attitudes and actual language practices.

To provide a more comprehensive quantitative overview, these dimensions were integrated into a Perception Index (PI). The analysis reveals an average Likert score of 4.03, which corresponds to a PI score of 80.6, placing it within the very high category. The distribution of respondents based on the Perception Index categories is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents’ Perception Index toward the Bali Language Month Festival

| Perception Index Category | PI Score Range | Number of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Very Low                  | 0–25           | 0                     | 0              |
| Low                       | 26–50          | 0                     | 0              |
| High                      | 51–75          | 108                   | 60.0           |
| Very High                 | 76–100         | 72                    | 40.0           |
| <b>Total</b>              |                | <b>180</b>            | <b>100</b>     |

Based on Table 2, all respondents are categorized within the high and very high perception categories, with 60.0% in the high category and 40.0% in the very high category. Notably, no respondents fall into the low or very low categories, indicating a consistently positive perception of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival among participants.

These findings suggest that the festival has been effective in strengthening awareness and fostering positive attitudes toward the Balinese language. However, as indicated in the previous analysis, this positive perception is not always accompanied by consistent language use in everyday contexts, particularly among younger generations.

Overall, while the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival demonstrates a strong impact at the level of perception and attitude, further efforts are required to translate this positive orientation into sustained language practices beyond the festival context.

#### 4.1.2 Language Use Practices during the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival: Insights from Interviews and Observations

During the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival, language use practices are demonstrated through a variety of competitive and participatory activities aimed at fostering the active utilization of the Balinese language. These activities encompass diverse language-based competitions, including storytelling (*mesatua*), speech contests (*pidarta*), poetry reading (*mabebasan*), and traditional dialogue performances. Each of these activities necessitates active participation in formal and performative contexts, thereby promoting the effective use of Balinese.



Figure 2. Balinese script writing competition (*nyurat aksara Bali*) (Source: Documentation of the Bali Provincial Government, 2025).

Among these activities, the Balinese script writing competition (*nyurat aksara Bali*) stands out as a particularly significant practice of language preservation (Figure 2). It not only requires linguistic competence but also literacy in the traditional writing system. As depicted in Figure 2, participants engage in writing Balinese script in a structured and formal setting, showcasing both technical proficiency and cultural knowledge. This activity exemplifies the ongoing transmission of Balinese script literacy, which is an integral aspect of sustaining the language beyond oral transmission.

Observations indicate that participants, including younger generations, exhibit a high level of engagement and concentration during the competition. This suggests that the festival serves as an effective space for practicing and reinforcing the use of the Balinese language in its written form. Additionally, interview data reveal that such competitions are perceived not only as evaluative events but also as meaningful learning experiences that encourage participants to deepen their understanding of Balinese language and script. Overall, these findings underscore the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival's role as a practical platform for language use, where linguistic knowledge is actively performed, practiced, and transmitted across generations.

The participation of younger generations in the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival transcends formal competition participation, encompassing interactive and guided learning experiences. As depicted in Figure 3, young participants engage

in small-group, hands-on activities under the supervision of an instructor, exemplifying a collaborative and participatory learning environment.



Figure 3. Youth engagement in guided, small-group cultural activities during the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival, illustrating intergenerational transmission of language and cultural knowledge (Source: Author’s documentation, 2025).

This setting exemplifies the process of intergenerational transmission, wherein cultural knowledge and language practices are imparted through direct interaction. The presence of an adult facilitator guiding the activity underscores the pivotal role of mentorship in facilitating the acquisition of both linguistic and cultural competencies among younger participants.

Observations reveal that such activities cultivate active engagement, curiosity, and peer interaction, fostering a conducive learning environment. Interview data further suggests that these informal and semi-structured activities are perceived as more accessible and enjoyable, particularly for younger participants, in contrast to formal competition settings. This indicates that the sustainability of the Balinese language relies not solely on formal performance spaces but also on continuous, guided practice embedded within everyday social learning contexts.

Beyond formal competitions, the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival also promotes the utilization of the Balinese language in interactive and communal environments. As depicted in Figure 4, participants engage in group-based activities, such as cultural workshops where students collaboratively prepare lontar leaves as a traditional medium for Balinese script writing. In these settings, participants interact using the Balinese language through guided instructions, peer discussions, and collaborative tasks related to the preparation process. These interactions involve practical language use, including asking and responding to questions, providing instructions, and discussing procedural steps in Balinese, thereby fostering spontaneous and communicative language use. The circular formation and participatory nature of the activity signify a dialogic and inclusive form of language use, enabling participants to actively negotiate meaning in real-time social interaction (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Communicative use of the Balinese language in a group-based interactive activity during the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival, illustrating spontaneous and participatory language practices (Source: Author's documentation, 2025).

Observations indicate that such activities foster a more relaxed and supportive atmosphere compared to formal competitions, facilitating participants, particularly younger generations, in confidently utilizing the

Balinese language. The incorporation of gestures, expressions, and collective responses further exemplifies the seamless integration of linguistic and cultural practices within a natural setting.

Interview data also suggests that participants perceive these interactive activities as more engaging and less intimidating than formal events, thereby encouraging more frequent language usage. This underscores the festival’s dual role as a formal platform for language performance and a social space that normalizes the everyday use of the Balinese language within the community. Institutional support, particularly from the Provincial Government of Bali, is instrumental in the organization and legitimization of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival as a formal language policy initiative. As depicted in Figure 5, the presence of an official jury panel and the acknowledgment of competition winners signify a structured and hierarchical evaluation system. In this system, participants represent their respective regions at the provincial level.



Figure 5. Winners of the Balinese-language *Dharmawacana* competition at the provincial level, accompanied by the official jury panel, illustrating institutional recognition and the role of the Provincial Government of Bali in organizing the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival. (Source: Documentation of the Bali Provincial Government, 2025).

This formal arrangement illustrates the multifaceted nature of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival. Beyond its primary focus on language, it serves as a comprehensive cultural event that fosters cultural identity. Within this framework, the festival also operates as an institutionalized mechanism for language preservation. The involvement of the provincial government ensures standardization, coordination, and continuity of the program across all regencies and municipalities. Furthermore, the selection process from local to provincial levels reinforces a sense of regional representation and collective participation in safeguarding the Balinese language.

The observational findings presented in Figures 2–5 are further substantiated by insights gained from interviews with prominent cultural and academic figures who were instrumental in the formulation and implementation of the Bulan Bahasa Bali policy. I Nyoman Suarka, a professor at Udayana University, cultural practitioner, and advocate for the Balinese language, as well as one of the key individuals responsible for the establishment of the Bulan Bahasa Bali program, underscores that the festival serves as a tangible manifestation of Bali Provincial Regulation No. 1 of 2018, which pertains to the promotion of the Balinese language, literature, and script. He emphasizes that:

*Bulan Bahasa Bali serves as an effort to strengthen the existence of the Balinese language and script, while also promoting the development of Balinese script toward digitalization, enabling broader dissemination, particularly among younger generations* (Interview with Professor I Nyoman Suarka, 3 February 2026).

This viewpoint aligns with field observations indicating that festival activities, encompassing scriptwriting competitions and interactive group practices, offer structured and socially supported environments conducive to language use.

Similarly, Professor I Made Surada emphasizes that the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival should be primarily understood as a cultural space that reinforces collective identity and transmits cultural values across generations, rather than merely as an annual ceremonial event. Within this broader cultural framework, the festival can also be viewed as a strategic instrument for sustaining Balinese civilization. He conceptualizes language as “a home of meaning through which values, ethics, cosmology, and collective worldviews are transmitted across generations,” (Interview with Professor I Made Surada, 3 February 2026) implying that language maintenance is inseparable from cultural continuity. However, he also cautions that the effectiveness of such initiatives depends on their ability to transcend symbolic and ceremonial dimensions toward more substantive efforts, including enhancing Balinese script literacy, innovating

language pedagogy, and fostering contemporary forms of Balinese cultural expression.

Despite these positive evaluations, the qualitative findings also indicate inconsistencies in the implementation of several festival activities. Although the festival is designed to promote cultural and linguistic values through specific themes, participants observed that these themes were not always consistently reflected in the competitions and evaluation processes. As one participant observed:

*In several competitions, the implementation does not always align with the intended theme. For example, in a geguritan competition with the theme Atma Kerti, some winning works were not clearly related to the theme”* (Interview with Gede Agus Budiadnyana, 35 years old, annual festival participant, 25 March 2026)

Identifying inconsistencies in the implementation of festival activities at the local level.

In everyday interactions, particularly in informal and digital contexts, Indonesian and foreign languages continue to dominate. This pattern reflects a disparity between the intensive language use observed during festival activities and the relatively limited integration of Balinese into daily communicative practices. Another participant also noted that the organization of the festival is sometimes “*inconsistent across administrative levels, making it challenging to ensure a structured progression from village to provincial stages*” (Interview with Diah Nirmala, 33 years old, annual festival participant, 25 March 2026). Furthermore, some participants reported that their involvement was occasionally compulsory rather than voluntary, which may hinder meaningful engagement.

Field observations further substantiate this finding by illustrating that the intensity of Balinese language usage varies across different activity types. As observed in formal competitions, guided learning sessions, and institutional events, language use is consistently high due to structured expectations and cultural framing. Conversely, informal interactions and peripheral activities exhibit less frequent use of Balinese, particularly among younger participants. This suggests that the festival effectively establishes an intensive yet situational domain of language practice, which has not yet been fully internalized into everyday communication.

In summary, these findings suggest that the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival serves as an effective platform for enhancing the visibility, legitimacy, and practice of the Balinese language in public and cultural domains, while also reinforcing its role as a marker of cultural identity. However, its impact remains largely episodic, relying on the temporal momentum of the event and strong

institutional support. Furthermore, qualitative evidence from participants indicates that the effectiveness of the festival is also influenced by challenges in implementation, including inconsistencies in competition management, uneven organizational coordination, and varying levels of participant engagement. These factors suggest that, beyond its symbolic and institutional success, the festival has not yet fully achieved sustained integration of the Balinese language into everyday communicative practices.

To enhance the sustainability of language maintenance, the festival's impact should be extended through ongoing engagement in community, educational, and digital environments. In accordance with Fishman's theory of language maintenance, this study elucidates that while the festival broadens the functional domains of the Balinese language, its long-term sustainability ultimately hinges on its consistent utilization in everyday social interactions beyond ceremonial and institutional contexts.

#### *4.1.3 Government Policy and the Implementation of Bulan Bahasa Bali as a Language Maintenance Strategy*

The implementation of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival exemplifies the proactive role of the Bali Provincial Government in promoting the utilization of the Balinese language within public and cultural spheres. Based on interviews conducted with policymakers, organizers, and cultural figures, the festival is comprehended not only as a formal policy initiative, but also as a practical mechanism for fostering language usage in structured social contexts. This initiative is supported by Governor Regulation No. 80 of 2018, which provides the legal and institutional foundation for its implementation. Nevertheless, the mere existence of formal regulations does not automatically ensure the efficacy of language preservation efforts.

The findings indicate that policy implementation continues to encounter several practical challenges, including inconsistencies in festival organization across administrative levels, varying levels of community participation, and disparities in local institutional capacity. These conditions suggest that the success of the policy is contingent not only on regulatory support, but also on sustained community engagement and the capacity of local stakeholders to translate policy objectives into meaningful language practices. Informants emphasized that this policy framework facilitates coordination across administrative levels and supports the organization of festival activities at the village, district, and provincial levels. However, they also acknowledged that the effectiveness of this policy is dependent on its local implementation, particularly in terms of consistency, participant engagement, and alignment with community needs.

Building upon these findings, the implementation of this policy is top-down in terms of formulation and budgeting. In practice, however, it involves a wide range of actors, including *desa adat* (customary villages), educational institutions, cultural communities, and younger generations. This pattern reflects a language policy model that combines a structural, state-led approach with bottom-up community participation. In terms of funding, the implementation of Bulan Bahasa Bali at the village level is primarily supported by financial assistance from the Bali Provincial Government, particularly through grant schemes such as Bantuan Keuangan Khusus (Special Financial Assistance or BKK). However, the amount of funding allocated to each *desa adat* varies and is not uniformly standardized, depending on local conditions and the scale of activities. In some cases, delays in the disbursement of provincial funds have even affected the implementation of festival activities at the village level. Within the framework of language policy and planning theory, the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival can be understood as a policy intervention aimed at expanding the domains of Balinese language use, particularly in public spaces, non-formal education, and cultural expression domains that were previously largely confined to domestic and ritual contexts.

Despite the positive outcomes of the interview, several challenges persist in the implementation of policies at the local level. Funding constraints, coupled with limitations in human resources and local management capacity, pose significant obstacles to the long-term sustainability of the festival’s impact. Furthermore, while community participation in the festival is relatively high, the regular and sustained use of the Balinese language beyond the festival period remains limited, particularly among younger generations. This situation suggests that, although the festival effectively creates symbolic and performative spaces for the Balinese language, it has not yet fully succeeded in embedding its usage within everyday communication practices.

In summary, the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival can be regarded as an effective policy strategy for expanding and legitimizing the use of the Balinese language in public and cultural spheres. However, its long-term impact hinges on stronger and more sustainable policy support. Consistent with the findings in the preceding subsection, language maintenance is not solely determined by the intensity of festival-based interventions but also by the extent to which language use is integrated into formal education, media, and daily social interaction, as elucidated in Fishman’s framework. With such reinforcement, government policy can serve not only as a facilitator of cultural activities but also as a pivotal driver in sustaining the vitality of the Balinese language in contemporary society.

## 4.2 Discussion

The generally positive perception of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival, particularly among its participants, underscores the significance of attitudinal support in language preservation endeavors. Positive attitudes towards the Balinese language contribute to heightened awareness and symbolic attachment, which are often regarded as pivotal elements in sustaining local languages. This pattern aligns with the findings of Marhum et al. (2023) in their study titled “Language Education Policy and Local Language Maintenance as Cultural Sustainability in Central Sulawesi.” This study emphasizes that positive public perceptions of local languages and awareness of the threat of language extinction are crucial factors in the success of language preservation as a component of cultural sustainability. In the context of Central Sulawesi, public awareness fosters synergy among educational policies, cultural activities, and community participation. This comparison reinforces the present study’s finding that robust public perceptions of the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival constitute an important form of social capital in supporting language policy, despite the fact that such positive perceptions have not yet fully translated into consistent language-use practices in daily life.

From a language-use practices perspective, interview and observational data indicate that the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival has created an intensive environment for the use of the Balinese language during structured activities, such as competitions, artistic performances, and language-related discussions. However, the use of Balinese tends to be situational and diminishes outside the festival context. This finding aligns with the sociolinguistic perspective proposed by Hidayat and Jannah (2023) in “Local Language Maintenance: A Cultural and Sociolinguistic Perspective,” which emphasizes that language maintenance depends not only on the presence of cultural symbols but also on the sustainability of language practices across diverse social domains. Their study highlights that cultural activities, including festivals, play an important role as catalysts for language revitalization but must be followed by the expansion of language use into non-ceremonial domains in order for a language to survive functionally.

Consequently, the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival can be understood as an initial space for the formation of language practices, but it has not yet fully succeeded in internalizing the Balinese language into the everyday communication of younger generations. This argument is further supported by Tangkas and Suari (2023), who demonstrate that the use of Balinese in digital media platforms, such as YouTube, enables the language to function beyond ceremonial settings and enter everyday communicative and entertainment domains, particularly among younger audiences. This finding suggests that the sustainability of

festival-based language practices may be strengthened when they are connected to contemporary media spaces that resonate with daily linguistic habits. This condition reflects the findings of Yonhartini et al. (2023), who argue that the maintenance of the Balinese language remains strongest in cultural and ritual domains, while its use in daily interpersonal communication continues to face pressure from dominant languages. Her study reinforces the present finding that without reinforcement in everyday social domains, cultural events such as festivals tend to produce situational rather than habitual language use.

In the context of festivals as policy instruments and cultural practices, the findings of this study align with Franklin et al.’s (2022) research in “The Adelaide Festival and the Development of Arts in Adelaide.” While focusing on the arts rather than language, this study demonstrates that institutionalized festivals can enhance cultural visibility and public participation. However, their impact may be transient if they are not integrated into everyday community practices. Similarly, the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival has successfully increased the public presence of the Balinese language, yet its contribution to long-term language preservation remains limited when language use is predominantly confined to ceremonial and festival contexts rather than being sustained in daily communication. This suggests that symbolic cultural events alone are insufficient without broader community-based language practices and intergenerational transmission.

From a language policy perspective, the findings of this study align with Wilson (2024) in “Language Policy and Its Influence on Language Maintenance among Indigenous Communities in New Zealand,” which emphasizes that the success of language maintenance is largely determined by the consistency of government policies, institutional support, and active community engagement. In the context of Bali, however, this dynamic is more complex, as language maintenance is also deeply shaped by the role of traditional institutions. As argued by Arka (2011), the sustainability of the Balinese language depends not only on formal policy interventions but also on the active involvement of *desa adat* and cultural practices that regulate language use within community life.

In the New Zealand context, the formal recognition of Indigenous languages and their integration into education, media, and public spaces have sustainably expanded domains of language use. Compared to this context, the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival demonstrates the government’s role as a facilitator and driver of culture-based language policy; however, its impact remains more pronounced in symbolic and cultural domains than in everyday communicative practices. This suggests that festival-based policies need to be complemented by other structural strategies such as strengthening formal education, Balinese-language media, and digital spaces so that language maintenance does not

remain temporary. This finding is consistent with Pastika et al. (2023), who emphasize that the protection of the Balinese language requires deliberate state intervention through legal frameworks, such as the Bali Provincial Regulation No. 1 of 2018. However, they also caution that language policies risk losing their effectiveness if they remain normative and symbolic without sustained implementation across education, literacy practices, and public communication.

Beyond comparisons with policy and cultural festival studies, the findings of this research can be further enriched through a multilayered sociopolitical perspective, as proposed by Zuo and Wang (2025) in “Ethnic Minority Language Maintenance from a Sociopolitical Multilayered Perspective: The Mongolian Case in Northeast China”. Their study demonstrates that minority language maintenance cannot be separated from the interaction among state policies, power dynamics, educational institutions, and community-level social practices. In the case of the Mongolian language in China, despite formal recognition, political, economic, and dominant-language pressures constrain the expansion of language-use domains in everyday life. This finding aligns with the present study, which reveals that while the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival is supported by local government policy, it still encounters challenges in institutionalizing the use of the Balinese language beyond symbolic and cultural domains. This comparison reinforces the argument that the success of language policy is not solely determined by the existence of regulations or cultural programs, but by the capacity of such policies to penetrate multiple social layers and sustain language practices across domains.

A distinct yet complementary perspective is presented by Dubinina et al. (2025) in their study titled “The Dynamics of Russian Language Maintenance in the U.S.-Based Russophone Diaspora.” This research elucidates the intricate interplay between identity, emotion, and language practices within diaspora communities. The study reveals that Russian language maintenance in the United States unfolds under ambiguous circumstances, where the language serves as a symbolic representation of cultural heritage. However, its utilization is often restricted to specific spaces and lacks consistent preservation in public life. While the diaspora context diverges from the local context of Bali, this finding holds relevance for the present study, particularly in elucidating the disparity between positive attitudes and actual Balinese language usage among younger generations. Analogous to Russophone diaspora communities, Balinese youth demonstrate pride and symbolic affiliation with the Balinese language, yet encounter dominant-language pressures that curtail its use in everyday interactions. This comparison reinforces the argument that language maintenance is frequently emotionally and identity-driven, necessitating structural support to ensure its functional viability.

Furthermore, the systematic review conducted by Gu et al. (2025) in “A Systematic Review of Family Language Policy Studies from 2008 to 2024” offers a crucial micro-level perspective for comprehending the limitations of festival-based and public policy interventions. The study underscores that the family constitutes the most pivotal domain in preserving language maintenance, as language practices within the domestic environment exert a significant influence on the linguistic proficiency and habitual language usage of younger generations. This insight holds substantial relevance for the current study, which demonstrates that the heightened Balinese language utilization during the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival does not fully persist in daily life. This implies that festival-based and public-space policy interventions must be supplemented by strengthened family-level language policies and early education initiatives, thereby ensuring that the expansion of language-use domains transcends cultural spaces and is also embedded within domestic practices.

In summary, the discussion suggests that the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival serves as an effective cultural policy instrument, particularly in raising awareness, cultivating positive attitudes, and increasing the visibility of the Balinese language in public and cultural spheres. However, this effectiveness is largely contingent upon the context, as the use of the Balinese language tends to diminish outside the festival setting and has not yet been fully integrated into everyday communicative practices. Nevertheless, as evidenced by international research on language policy in New Zealand, Mongolian language preservation in China, Russian diaspora language dynamics, and family language policy, sustainable language preservation cannot solely rely on symbolic or ceremonial interventions.

The persistent disparity between positive attitudes and everyday language-use practices, particularly among younger generations, underscores a global challenge in language maintenance, where dominant-language pressures, sociopolitical dynamics, and inadequate reinforcement of domestic domains hinder the expansion of language-use domains. Consequently, Balinese language maintenance through the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival should be comprehended as a component of a multifaceted strategy that encompasses government policy, cultural practices, formal education, family roles, and the utilization of media and digital spaces. Such integration is crucial to ensure that the expansion of Balinese language-use domains does not persist as a transient cultural phenomenon but evolves into sustainable language practices within the social fabric of Balinese society, as articulated in Fishman’s framework of language maintenance. This finding elucidates that while the festival successfully functions as a symbolic and institutional mechanism of language maintenance, its long-term efficacy hinges on the expansion of language use into everyday social domains.

## 5. Conclusion

The quantitative findings reveal a remarkably high level of participant perception, indicating that the festival has successfully generated strong attitudinal support for the Balinese language. Quantitative data from 180 respondents demonstrate a very high level of perception, with a mean Likert score of 4.03 and a Perception Index (PI) of 80.6, confirming the strong positive reception of the festival among participants. However, qualitative evidence suggests that this positive perception does not fully translate into sustained language use. While the intensity of Balinese language use increases during festival activities, its use in everyday contexts, particularly among younger generations, remains limited and situational. This indicates that the impact of the festival is primarily event-driven rather than behaviorally embedded in daily communication.

These findings position the Bulan Bahasa Bali Festival as a significant catalyst for promoting language awareness and engagement, while also highlighting its limitations in fostering long-term language maintenance. To achieve more sustainable outcomes, language use should be extended beyond festival contexts into everyday social domains, including family, education, and digital environments. This study has several limitations. The sample is restricted to active festival participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader Balinese community. Additionally, the cross-sectional design does not allow for an assessment of long-term impacts. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal approaches and involve more diverse participant groups. Further studies should also explore the role of family practices, formal education, and digital media in supporting sustained Balinese language use.

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### Disclaimer on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In the preparation of this manuscript, all processes of data analysis, interpretation of research findings, development of scientific arguments, and formulation of conclusions were carried out entirely by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the content, accuracy, and academic integrity of this manuscript.

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## Author Profiles

**I Made Dian Saputra** is an academic and lecturer at Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar who is actively engaged in the fields of Balinese language, literature, and culture. He has contributed to higher education development, research, and the preservation of regional languages, particularly

the Balinese language. In addition to his role as a lecturer, he is also actively involved in various academic and institutional activities within the postgraduate program of the university. Email: [diansaputra@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:diansaputra@uhnsugriwa.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8747-8575>

**Aldi Dwi Saputra** is a doctoral student in Indonesian Language Education at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret. He is actively involved in research in the fields of Indonesian language and literature education, Indonesian language teaching for foreign speakers, cultural studies, and local wisdom. Email: [aldidwisaputra@student.uns.ac.id](mailto:aldidwisaputra@student.uns.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8745-9572>

**Indriyo K. Sukmono** is a lecturer at the Council on Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University. Since 2001, he has taught Indonesian language and culture courses at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels at Yale University. In addition to his teaching activities, he has also been involved in various academic initiatives and the promotion of Indonesian culture in the United States. He serves as an advisor to the Yale Indonesia Forum (YIF) and is actively involved in the Consortium on Teaching of Indonesian and Malay (COTIM). He has also contributed to the development of audio-visual teaching materials and various academic activities related to the teaching of Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA). Email: [indriyo.sukmono@yale.edu](mailto:indriyo.sukmono@yale.edu); ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1498-1636>

# Pedagogical Reinterpretation of *Kakawin Nilacandra* for Deep Learning: A Model of Hindu Character Education

Heny Perbowosari<sup>1\*</sup> , Heri Purwanto<sup>2</sup> ,

I Dewa Gede Rat Dwiyan Putra<sup>3</sup> , Sandhya Tiwari<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Central University of Kashmir, India

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**Abstract:** A Deep Learning approach based on mindfulness, meaningfulness, and joy has become a focus of educational transformation in Indonesia; however, integrating this modern concept with local wisdom remains a challenge. This study presents a pedagogical reinterpretation of *Kakawin Nilacandra*, a Balinese literary work that narrates King Nilacandra's spiritual journey toward wisdom, self-control, and ethical leadership through Śiwa-Buddha teachings. Using a qualitative approach, the study employs content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, supported by triangulation and textual evidence. The findings reveal that *Kakawin Nilacandra* embodies educational values closely aligned with Deep Learning principles. The reinterpretation identifies three sequential learning stages: self-awareness, self-transformation, and self-internalization. It also demonstrates the text's relevance to teaching modules and its potential application in language, character, history, and citizenship education. These findings highlight how the reinterpretation of local literary wisdom can contribute to culturally grounded pedagogical innovation and support the implementation of Deep Learning in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** deep learning; Hindu character education; *Kakawin Nilacandra*; pedagogical reinterpretation; local wisdom

## 1. Introduction

The Deep Learning approach has become a central focus within Indonesia's current educational landscape. This approach is built upon three core principles: mindful, meaningful, and joyful, which are colloquially simplified by the term "Deep Learning Ful-Ful". This Deep Learning concept is expected to revolutionize classroom teaching and learning methods (Fajri, 2025).

\* Corresponding author's email: [henysari74@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:henysari74@uhnsugriwa.ac.id)

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Consequently, the design of the Deep Learning approach in Indonesia must be carefully tailored to meet various contemporary educational demands (Wijaya, 2025, p. 10).

Deep Learning is designed to provide students with a profound learning experience that encompasses understanding, application, and reflection (Bråten & Skeie, 2020). Learning experience itself is a process through which individuals internalize knowledge, develop skills, and form attitudes and values. This process is not limited to formal environments like schools; it also occurs in the workplace, at home, and in daily life through interactions with materials, educators, peers, or the surrounding environment (Tim Penyusun, 2025, p. 32). In character education, students must be able to internalize various types of knowledge through intellectual development, spiritual and emotional development, affective and creativity development, and physical and kinesthetics development (Abdillah, 2019, p. 42).

The concept of Deep Learning emphasizes the importance of a student's internal engagement through reflective thinking, connecting knowledge with life experiences, and the ability to reassess personal values or beliefs (Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024). Interestingly, these values have long been present in various traditional literary texts, including the *Kakawin Nilacandra*. *Kakawin Nilacandra* is an important Balinese literary text that portrays King Nīlācandra's spiritual journey and embodies moral, spiritual, and educational values.

Character education has become one of the central concerns of contemporary education, particularly in efforts to develop learners who possess not only cognitive competence but also moral, social, and spiritual integrity. Within the context of Hindu education, character formation is inseparable from the cultivation of ethical values, self-discipline, wisdom, responsibility, and spiritual awareness. Hindu educational traditions have long emphasized the importance of integrating knowledge, morality, and devotion as a holistic process of human development. However, educational practices often remain focused on knowledge transmission, while the internalization of values and character formation receives less attention. This situation highlights the need for educational approaches capable of fostering deeper engagement, reflection, and meaningful learning experiences (Gunada, Pramana, & Rudiarta, 2021, p. 311; Perbowosari & Rudiadnyana, 2024, p. 476).

The implementation of Deep Learning, however, requires culturally relevant learning resources that resonate with learners' social and cultural backgrounds. In the context of Hindu education, local literary traditions offer a valuable source of educational wisdom that can support the development of character-based learning. Among these traditions, *Kakawin Nilacandra* represents an important literary work containing moral, spiritual, and educational

teachings. The text narrates the spiritual journey of King Nīlācandra and presents various values related to self-control, ethical leadership, compassion, social responsibility, wisdom, and spiritual fulfillment. These values have significant potential to support contemporary educational goals, particularly those related to character development and Deep Learning.

Several previous studies on *Kakawin Nilacandra* have primarily focused on its philological aspects, literary structure, religious teachings, the *Śīwa–Buddha* encounter, and the cultural values embedded in the text (Poniman, 2019, p. 1; Widiyastana & Indrayani, 2020, p. 101; Geria & Yudha, 2022, p. 212; Purwanto & Wedana, 2026, p. 81). Previous studies have predominantly interpreted the text from theological, literary, philological, and cultural perspectives. Consequently, *Kakawin Nilacandra* has mainly been understood as a source of religious doctrine and literary heritage. Little attention has been given to its pedagogical structure as a narrative of learning and character formation. More importantly, no previous study has systematically examined how the educational processes embedded in *Kakawin Nilacandra* correspond to the principles of contemporary Deep Learning. This study contributes a new perspective by reinterpreting *Kakawin Nilacandra* as a pedagogically structured literary text whose narrative embodies the principles of meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning for Hindu character education (Baginda, 2016, p. 8).

This research gap is significant because integrating local wisdom into modern educational theory can enrich educational practices in Indonesia. Furthermore, studying the relationship between traditional literature and Deep Learning has the potential to open new horizons in understanding how past societies viewed the learning process as a form of self-transformation. This research is also relevant to the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasizes character strengthening, creativity, problem-solving, and high-order thinking skills. By extracting educational values from traditional works, educational institutions can develop learning models that are not only modern but also deeply rooted in the nation's culture.

In addition, the findings of this study have practical implications for contemporary educational practices in Indonesia. The educational values identified in *Kakawin Nilacandra* may serve as a foundation for the development of learning modules, instructional materials, and classroom activities that integrate local wisdom into the educational process. These resources can support the implementation of Deep Learning by fostering reflective inquiry, contextual understanding, ethical reasoning, and meaningful learning experiences among students. Furthermore, the integration of *Kakawin Nilacandra* into instructional modules may assist teachers in aligning curriculum objectives with culturally relevant content, thereby strengthening character education and promoting

more contextualized and culturally responsive learning environments in Indonesian schools (Fajri & Amrin, 2025, p. 25).

Based on the description provided above, the research questions to be addressed are: (1) what are the educational values in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* that align with the principles of Deep Learning? and (2) how are the educational values in *Kakawin Nilacandra* relevant to teaching practices in Indonesia, particularly as manifested in teaching modules?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Deep Learning in Indonesia

Deep Learning, originally introduced by Marton and Säljö (1976), emphasizes learners' active construction of meaning through critical thinking, conceptual understanding, and the application of knowledge across diverse contexts (Biggs & Tang, 2011, pp. 30–40; Sarnoto, 2025, p. 4). Its educational significance has influenced curriculum reforms in several countries, including Norway, where it has been integrated into the national curriculum since 2020 to foster broad competencies, reflective learning, and knowledge transfer (Bråten & Skeie, 2020, pp. 1–16).

Several other countries have also implemented Deep Learning to create a supportive environment for students to achieve their competencies, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, and Finland (Tan et al., 2017, p. 425; Halinen, 2018, p. 74; Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024, p. 28). In 2024, Indonesia initiated the discourse on the implementation of Deep Learning (Tim Penyusun, 2025, p. 25). The concept of Deep Learning in Indonesia is formulated as a “dignifying” approach that emphasizes the creation of a learning atmosphere and process that is mindful, meaningful, and joyful through the holistic and integrated development of the mind, heart, feeling, and body. The Deep Learning framework consists of four components: (1) graduate profile dimensions, (2) learning principles, (3) learning experiences, and (4) the learning framework (Tim Penyusun, 2025, p. 26) (Figure 1).

The learning principles form the fundamental characteristics of Deep Learning: mindful, meaningful, and joyful. Mindfulness is a state in which students undergo the learning process with full awareness, enabling them to engage actively and manage themselves during learning activities (Tim Penyusun, 2025, p. 30). Meaningful learning occurs when students are able to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts, moving beyond mere information comprehension to practical utility (Elyana and Agustiningrum, 2025, p. 91). Joyful learning is created through a positive, challenging, and enjoyable learning atmosphere that is capable of arousing motivation. When students experience joy, their emotional connection to the material increases, making

understanding, memory, and the application of knowledge easier (Elyana and Agustiningrum, 2025, p. 92).

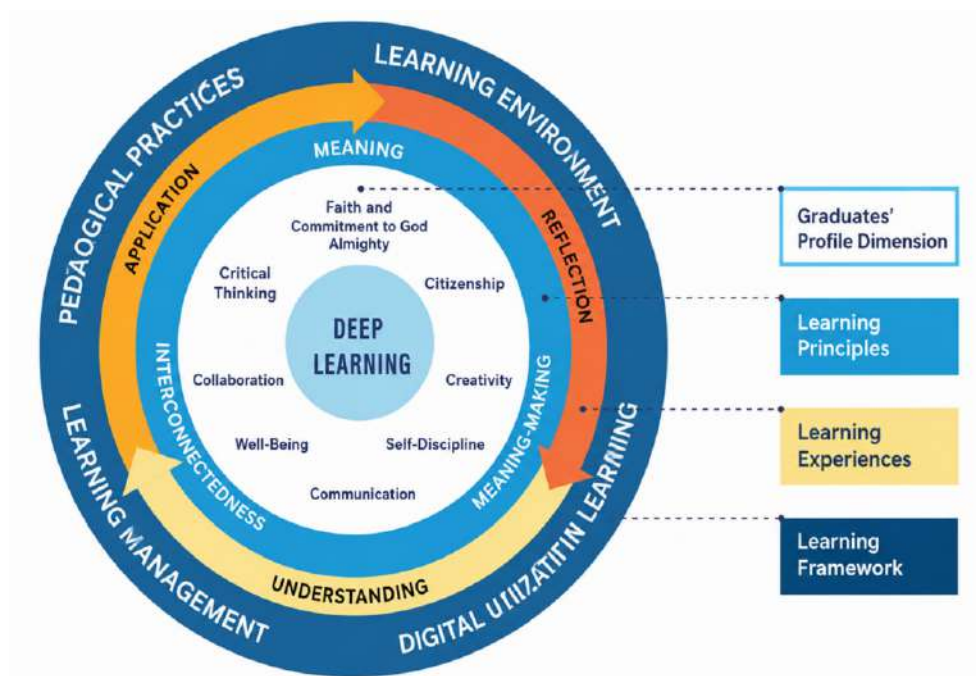


Figure 1. The Deep Learning Framework (Tim Penyusun, 2025, p. 27)

Character education occupies a central position in Hindu educational philosophy. Hindu education emphasizes the cultivation of self-discipline, moral responsibility, compassion, wisdom, spiritual awareness, and harmonious relationships with others. In the Hindu educational tradition, learning is understood as a process of self-transformation that integrates intellectual, ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions. Several studies have examined Hindu character education through religious texts, ethical teachings, and cultural practices. However, many of these studies focus on normative explanations of values without exploring how such values can be interpreted through contemporary educational frameworks. As a result, the relevance of Hindu educational values to current pedagogical approaches, including Deep Learning, remains underexplored (Sari & Ariyoga, 2023, p. 101; Giri, 2026, p. 10).

*Kakawin Nilacandra* is one of the important Balinese literary texts containing rich moral, spiritual, and educational teachings. The narrative portrays the spiritual journey of King Nīlācandra and presents values such as self-control, wisdom, ethical leadership, compassion, social responsibility, devotion to knowledge, and spiritual fulfillment. These values reflect the broader objectives

of Hindu character education and provide a culturally relevant source for contemporary learning. Previous studies on *Kakawin Nilacandra* have primarily examined theological aspects, particularly the encounter between *Śiwa* and Buddha traditions, religious teachings, literary characteristics, and cultural meanings embedded in the text. While these studies contribute significantly to understanding the religious and literary importance of the manuscript, little attention has been given to its educational dimensions. More specifically, no study has systematically analyzed how the educational values contained in *Kakawin Nilacandra* correspond to the principles of Deep Learning and contribute to Hindu character education in contemporary educational settings. Therefore, this study addresses an important gap by examining the educational values embedded in *Kakawin Nilacandra* through the lens of Deep Learning. This approach provides a bridge between traditional Hindu literary wisdom and contemporary educational innovation while contributing to the development of culturally grounded character education in Indonesia.

This study serves as an initial step in excavating the educational values contained within literary works, specifically the *Kakawin Nilacandra*. These educational values can be used as a source of reflection and a reference for implementing Deep Learning in Indonesia. By integrating local wisdom, ethics, and ancient philosophy into pedagogical practices, we can produce learning experiences that are contextual, meaningful, and shape student character holistically.

## 2.2 *Kakawin Nilacandra: A Literary Source of Hindu Character Education for Deep Learning*

Research connecting literary works to education has been conducted by various experts (Qur'ani, 2018, p. 182; Amalia and Octaviani, 2021, p. 416; Simanungkalit et al., 2024, p. 1451). Fundamentally, these studies explain that a strong link exists between literature and various educational values that foster character education. This is understandable as literature contains diverse life values, such as religious, psychological, moral, and socio-cultural values (Sukirman, 2021, p. 26).

Literature plays a significant role in character formation, cognitive development, and the cultivation of values such as religiousness, nationalism, and patriotism (Qur'ani, 2018, p. 183; Amalia & Octaviani, 2021, p. 417). Moreover, integrating local wisdom through literature enriches the *Kurikulum Merdeka* by promoting a more inclusive curriculum while strengthening institutional quality, teacher professionalism, and student competencies (Simanungkalit et al., 2024, pp. 1451–1452). Previous studies on *Kakawin Nilacandra* have primarily examined its theological, literary, and cultural

dimensions. Poniman (2019, p. 6), analyzed fundamental Hindu theological concepts embedded in the text, including the nature of *Ātman*, reincarnation (*punarbhawa*), karma, and the ultimate union of the self with God (*mokṣa*). In addition, Purwanto and Wedana (2026, p. 82) explored the encounter between *Śiwa* and Buddha traditions represented in the text, emphasizing its theological significance and contribution to religious harmony. Meanwhile, Geria (2019, p. 3) examined the literary creativity and distinctive characteristics of *Kakawin Nilacandra* within the Balinese literary tradition. More specifically, no study has systematically investigated how the educational values embedded in *Kakawin Nilacandra* correspond to the principles of Deep Learning and contribute to Hindu character education in contemporary educational contexts.

Examining the studies above reveals a shared framework: literary works are valuable assets for education, primarily for fostering character. However, as the Deep Learning approach was only recently designed, research using the Indonesian version of the Deep Learning framework has not yet been conducted, particularly regarding the exploration of values in classical literature. Therefore, this study on *Kakawin Nilacandra* focuses on its role as a literary work capable of contributing to the implementation of Deep Learning in Indonesia.

### 3. Method and Theory

#### 3.1 Method

This study employs a qualitative research design using content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate because the study aims to identify, interpret, and understand the educational values embedded in *Kakawin Nilacandra* and to examine their relevance to the principles of Deep Learning. The primary data consist of textual passages from *Kakawin Nilacandra*, which are systematically analyzed through content analysis to identify themes, concepts, and educational values. These findings are subsequently interpreted using Gadamerian hermeneutics to uncover deeper meanings within their religious, cultural, and educational contexts (Ahmadi, 2019, p. 6).

The primary data source used in this research is the book containing the translation of *Kakawin Nilacandra*, titled "*Kakawin Nilacandra Abad XX*" by Anak Agung Gde Alit Geria (2019), which is written in Indonesian. All quotations presented in this article have been translated into English by the authors. This text was selected because it provides a critically edited version of *Kakawin Nilacandra* accompanied by transliteration, translation, and contextual explanations. In addition, the work is based on the oldest available manuscript attributed to I Made Degung and is recognized as one of the most comprehensive contemporary references on *Kakawin Nilacandra*. This book contains three

*Kakawin Nilacandra* texts composed by three different authors in different years. This study specifically analyzes the oldest *Kakawin Nilacandra* text in the collection, composed in 1993. The text was completed by I Made Degung on Friday *Paing*, *Wuku Sinta*, the 13th day of the waxing moon (*Pananggal*) in the *Saka* year 1915 (Geria, 2019, p. 2). Secondary data sources, including relevant previous studies, scientific journals, books, and academic references, were also utilized to support the analysis phase.

The collected data is analyzed using content analysis (Wilson, 2016, p. 177). The implementation of content analysis is supported by Hermeneutic theory, three primary steps are followed: (1) Pre-understanding, (2) Text-Interpreter Dialogue, and (3) Recontextualization. In this specific context, the educational values found in *Kakawin Nilacandra* are actualized within the Deep Learning framework currently being implemented in Indonesia (Septaria, 2024, pp. 2–3).

Meanwhile, the analytical method employed in this study was triangulation. Triangulation is widely recognized as a technique for verifying and establishing the trustworthiness of research data by comparing information obtained from multiple sources, methods, or theoretical perspectives. The validity of the data was ensured through both source triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing the Hindu educational values identified in *Kakawin Nilacandra* with teachings found in the *Bhagavadgītā*, *Sarasamuccaya*, and previous studies on Hindu education.

Theoretical triangulation was carried out by interpreting the data through a hermeneutic approach, as well as through the perspectives of Hindu educational theory and Deep Learning theory. Through this process, the meanings derived from the text were not solely dependent on the researcher's individual interpretation but were verified through multiple sources and theoretical perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and validity of the research findings (Nurfajriani et al., 2024, p. 827).

### 3.2 Theory

The theoretical framework for this study is Hermeneutics. Literary works require interpretation because although they are composed of language, they contain many hidden or intentionally obscured meanings (Riffaterre, 1978). The process of assigning or interpreting the content of a literary work is fundamentally an encounter between a literary creation and the researcher, who simultaneously acts as the reader. When engaging with a literary text, the reader brings a set of knowledge, whether conscious or unconscious, which forms their horizon of expectation upon entering the world of the text, subsequently guiding the process of meaning-making (Jauss, 1975, p. 15). This

diverse knowledge, which Iser (1978, p. 45) refers to as the repertoire, creates the horizon of expectation that allows the reader to engage in a dialogue with the work.

Riffaterre (1978, p. 88) expresses a similar view, stating that interpreting a text begins with a heuristic reading, reading at the grammatical and mimetic level, followed by retroactive reading (a re-reading process, similar to the hermeneutic method, to discover deeper meaning). Within the context of literary communication (author, text, and reader), Iser's perspective on Gadamer's (1978) concept of hermeneutics reaffirms that the reader's position plays a vital role (Hardiman, 2015, pp. 180-182; Iswanto et al., 2021, p. 46). In this research, the researcher's horizon meets the horizon of the text, specifically the *Kakawin Nilacandra*. This encounter creates a tension, a process of interpretation and understanding, which is then made explicit through the interpretation of educational values within the *Kakawin Nilacandra*.

To provide a deeper analysis, this study also employs Ellen Langer's Mindfulness Theory. Langer conceptualizes mindfulness as a cognitive state characterized by active engagement in ongoing experiences, openness to new information and experiences, sensitivity to situational and contextual factors, and the ability to understand phenomena from multiple perspectives (Moafian et al, 2019, pp. 2-9). In this study, Ellen Langer's mindfulness theory is utilized to analyze the Hindu educational values contained in *Kakawin Nilacandra*, particularly those related to self-awareness, moral reflection, mental self-regulation, wisdom, and the search for meaning in life. These values reflect a learning process that fosters reflective awareness, contextual meaning-making, and a profound understanding of various dimensions of human existence (Waney, Kristinawati, & Setiawan, 2020, p. 77).

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 *Kakawin Nilacandra as Traditional Balinese Literature*

*Kakawin Nilacandra* is written in the Balinese script and utilizes the Old Javanese language (*Kawi*). The title "*Nilacandra*" is derived from the name of the story's protagonist (Geria, 2019). Etymologically, the word "*nila*" can mean blue or black (Mardiarsito et al., 1992, pp. 20 & 54), while "*candra*" means moon (Mardiarsito et al., 1992, p. 22). Therefore, in a literal sense, the name can be understood as the "Blue Moon" or "Black Moon". Interpretations regarding the meaning of the name may vary; however, what requires particular attention is the presence of *Śiwa-Buddha* elements. *Śiwa* is analogized as *nila* because *Śiwa* is also referred to as *Nilakantha*, while *Candra* (the moon) serves as a symbol of the Buddha, as this aligns with the collective perspective based on the moon's characteristics. This meaning appears consistent with the content of the *Kakawin*

*Nilacandra* text itself, as it incorporates *Śiwa-Buddha* elements (Geria, 2019, p. 1; Purwanto et al., 2025).

Based on the study by Putra (2021, p. 1), the development of literature in Bali can be categorized into three types: Traditional Balinese literature, Modern Balinese literature, and Indonesian literature. Traditional Balinese literature has flourished since the 13th century and reached its golden age in the 16th century, heavily influenced by Old Javanese literature. Interestingly, traditional Balinese literary works continued to be written well into the 2000s, necessitating further research and appreciation (Karmini, 2017, p. 150). When examining the three types of literature developing in Bali as described above, it can be stated that *Kakawin Nilacandra* is categorized as Traditional Balinese Literature, drawing its narrative sources from the *Mahabharata*. The story is structured in the form of *tembang* (songs/verse), such as *pupuh sinom*, *durma*, *ginada*, *pangkur*, *adri*, *ginanti*, *demung*, and *smarandana*.

The story within the *Kakawin Nilacandra* represents a hierarchical yet harmonious social structure consisting of kings, prime ministers (*patih*), ministers (*mantri*), sages (*resi*), warriors (*ksatria*), and the common people. The King is positioned as both the center of power and a moral role model. The relationship between the ruler and the people is depicted as mutually binding through duty (*swadharma*) and devotion (*bhakti*). The people live in peace because of the king's just and compassionate leadership. Furthermore, the inclusion of stories regarding the poor, orphans, and the marginalized reinforces a social consciousness that every individual, regardless of status, has an equal opportunity to achieve virtue through noble behavior.

On the other hand, the narrative portrays a society that learns through the exemplary conduct of its characters. Maharaja Nilacandra does not merely rule; he educates his people through symbols and parables. The construction of depictions of heaven and hell serves as an educational tool, allowing the community to understand the concrete consequences of good and bad deeds. This reflects a social view that moral education must be applicable and easily understood by all levels of society, including those who do not possess a profound mastery of literary teachings.

## 4.2 Educational Values of *Kakawin Nilacandra* in the Context of Deep Learning

### 4.2.1 Mindful Learning: Introspection and Self-Regulation

The *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript implicitly contains several points that intersect with the concept of mindfulness as intended in Deep Learning. The beginning of the manuscript describes the worship of Goddess *Saraswati*, who is regarded as the source of knowledge. The citation is as follows:

“Oh Goddess Saraswati, the wise and noble *shakti* of Lord Brahma, the source of knowledge who perpetually blesses the entire universe” (Geria, 2019, p.125).

The aforementioned citation can be interpreted to mean that every learning process must be underpinned by a focused mind. The worship of Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, signifies a high state of awareness and intention toward both spiritual and intellectual learning processes. In the context of Deep Learning, focus is defined as the student’s ability to consciously and meaningfully establish their learning objectives. Therefore, it can be argued that the exhortation found in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript aligns with the initial steps of the learning experience. Learners must possess a focused and concentrated attitude, as evidenced by the expression “*now Arjuna is diligently meditating, his body is perfect until reaching the state of dhyayī*” (Geria, 2019, p. 141). *Dhyāyī* refers to an individual who has attained a stable and sustained state of mental concentration, in which the mind remains firmly focused on the object of meditation and the entirety of one’s awareness is directed toward it without distraction (Geria, 2019). This condition illustrates a holistic and profound state of learning. It reflects that the ideal learner resides in a state of inner focus entirely directed toward the learning objectives. The term *dhāraṇa yoga* signifies a conscious concentration of the mind, aligning with the principle of focus in Deep Learning.

Concentration of the mind is also practiced by Sang Nilacandra during a battle, as stated in the phrase “*Nilacandra once again centered his thoughts*” (Geria, 2019, p. 93). This process can be described as metacognitive reflection. Metacognitive reflection is understood as a cognitive stage that allows students to review the cognitive processes they have undertaken to consider the progression or the results of their thinking activities. Through this reflection, students are able to realize their own way of thinking and evaluate the steps they have taken (Ramadani and Ubaidilah, 2023, p. 58).

Other texts also imply an awareness of the thinking process, specifically “*ahengkara enters buddhī, and buddhī enters citta; that citta enters the intellect (daya), and finally enters citta once more*” (Geria, 2019). In *Kakawin Nilacandra*, this is evident in the awareness of thought, *buddhī*, and *citta* as a unified sequence of inner consciousness (Gupta and Agrawal, 2021). The *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript describes how an individual must be capable of accepting the perspectives and knowledge of others. This is evident in several excerpts, such as: “*so noble was Yudhistira’s advice to King Naraja, and thus King Naraja followed the counsel of the King of Hastina*” (Geria, 2019, p. 154). King Nilacandra’s action in following the teachings of the King of Hastina reflects intellectual humility and the recognition that truth and knowledge can originate from outside

oneself. An interesting point is found in the sentence “*requesting King Krishna to understand the truth of Shiva’s teachings*” (Geria, 2019, p. 168). This can be interpreted to mean that the request to King Krishna to comprehend the truth of Śiwa’s teachings reflects the spiritual and intellectual openness that lies at the heart of deep learning (Sarnoto, 2025). Students actively open themselves to new truths and integrate them into their self-understanding and spiritual lives. This can be traced through the following expressions.

“A report of which reached King Krishna, who then wished to send envoys thither, commanding Sang Kretawarma and Satyaki to investigate the palace” (Geria, 2019, p. 130).

King Naraja’s (Nilacandra) persistence in applying himself daily to high-level knowledge demonstrates that curiosity drives a continuous and disciplined learning process. Moreover, the action taken by King Krishna dispatching Kretawarma and Satyaki to investigate directly reflects an urge to acquire a more holistic understanding through direct experience. This aligns with the assertion by Langer (in Mamu, 2025, p. 220) that learning conducted mindfully encourages students to be more sensitive to the nuances of new information, to pay attention to different contexts, and to open up opportunities for understanding concepts from diverse perspectives.

The urge to continuously study new knowledge is implied in the description “it is fitting that you must understand all of this, and furthermore, there is that which must be remembered and strengthened by the true Buddhist teachings” (Geria, 2019, p.162). An achievement in Deep Learning is certainly realized when every student can internalize the new knowledge they acquire. This form of internal appreciation is manifested in their ways of thinking and behaving (Darnanengsih and Rusyaid, 2020). The requirement for new knowledge is emphasized in the stanza “not just anyone is told such teachings; keep them now secret in the heart, for this is no different for those who hope for inner virtue” (Geria, 2019, p. 154). From this description, it can be seen that profound knowledge can only be understood and given meaning by those who possess inner readiness and sincere curiosity.

One element that fosters curiosity is influenced by comfort within the learning process. A calm and peaceful atmosphere in learning has been alluded to in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript “*now named Nilacandra, who loves peace and is patient; the purity of his mind is not overwhelmed by the nature of the five senses*” (Geria, 2019, p. 126). This excerpt describes a clarity of mind that is not dominated by sensory impulses. Such an inner state creates space for conscious and focused learning engagement, enabling students to open themselves to new knowledge and experiences.

#### 4.2.2 Meaningful Learning: Contextualization and Tangible Contribution

Contextual learning is grounded in the philosophical view that the learning process becomes more effective when instructional material is connected to the life contexts and professional worlds that students already know or have the potential to encounter (Trisniawati, 2015, p. 147). This contextual learning process appears to be reflected in the textual descriptions within the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript, as evidenced by the following excerpt.

“...the country becomes secure and peaceful because it is based on *Pancasila*; although differing in behavior, they are always united” (Geria, 2019, p. 125).

The mention of “*pancasila*” indicates an effort to contextualize ancient literary values within the foundation of the modern Indonesian state. When drawn into the framework of Deep Learning, such an attitude can serve as an inspiration for educational implementation in Indonesia (Sarnoto, 2025, p. 6) (see Figures 2).



Figure 2. Implementation of Deep Learning at Candra Kasih Elementary School, Denpasar (Photo: Documentation of Candra Kasih Elementary School, Denpasar)

The idea of character education that is relevant to real life is already present in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript, as seen in the description “practicing ultimate truth based on honesty in society is thanks to the love of his elder brother who bestowed such glory; Rsi Andasingha is his name, who made (Nilacandra)” (Geria, 2019, p. 125). This text demonstrates that the knowledge acquired by King Nilacandra from his brother (Rsi Andasingha) was applied in daily life. According to the contents of the text under study, it can be traced that *Nilacandra* consistently provides tangible contributions to his people. This is evidenced by the fact that whenever he encounters the disabled or the poor, he always provides them with food and clothing (Geria, 2019). From this text, one can observe the practice of humanitarian values or philanthropy toward fellow human beings.

The description above aligns with the concept of character education under the “social concern” indicator, which suggests that this character trait plays a vital role in forming individuals with social sensitivity, demonstrated through attitudes and actions oriented toward providing assistance to those in need. (Salim et al., 2022, p. 24). In the context of the utility of knowledge for society, King Nilacandra also implemented the *Catur Warga* teachings. This is demonstrated in the text below.

“...as well as with a friendly demeanor that earns him the respect of society, for he has fully understood all the teachings of the *Catur Warga*.” (Geria, 2019, p. 125).

According to the text above, *Catur Warga* consists of *Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (material well-being), *Kama* (legitimate desires), and *Moksha* (spiritual liberation). These four components are currently known as the teachings of *Catur Purusa Artha*, which are the four goals of human life in achieving a meaningful existence in the world (Astrid and Dewi G, 2023, p. 63). King Nilacandra successfully channeled the *Catur Warga* teachings into his social role as a leader. Aligning with the direction of this study, the *Catur Warga* teachings in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* text appear to harmonize with meaningful learning-based education. The value of *Dharma* teaches the importance of a moral foundation in action; *Artha* affirms the proportional function of material means; *Kama* guides the ethical fulfillment of pleasure; and *Moksha* emphasizes the ultimate goal of inner liberation.

The depiction of heaven is described as being full of peace and comfort; it is further detailed that “...his palace is like a supreme heaven beyond compare, also in pursuing knowledge his behavior in the world is like the people of old, the purity of his mind is not overwhelmed by the nature of the five senses...” (Geria, 2019, p. 126). Based on the description in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript, the purpose of

constructing these depictions of heaven and hell was to serve as a metaphorical or simulated representation (not literal) to teach humanity about ultimate truth. Furthermore, this instructional process is representative of Deep Learning; abstract knowledge is transferred into visual and architectural media to make it more accessible and understandable for students. The construction of heaven and hell can be categorized as a project-based activity. Elements of society, representing the students, were actively invited to build these two environments (Tahir, 2025, p. 197).

Meanwhile, another part of the text describes a portrayal of collaboration and working together to find the best solutions. This process can be seen as a form of collaboration and partnership between a leader and relevant parties. Through discussion, group work, and collective problem-solving, students are encouraged to broaden their perspectives and test their ideas within a social context (Sarnoto, 2025, p. 22).

The description above is further reinforced by King Nilacandra's behavior in advising his ministers and the public to always lead lives based on *Dharmasastra* (The Treatise on Dharma). It appears that the king acts as an educator providing solutions to the life problems of his people, linking the cause-and-effect of actions with the real conditions experienced by the populace. This evokes problem-based techniques, as stated by Hung (Sarnoto, 2025), Problem-Based Learning (PBL) trains critical thinking skills because students are confronted with real-world problems that demand solutions.

Meaningful learning occurs when students construct new knowledge by integrating new information into existing cognitive structures, resulting in deeper and more enduring understanding (Isma, 2025, p. 87). This concept is both explicitly and implicitly present in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript. When wanting to build his palace, the king recalled the past. Nilacandra built his palace based on spiritual experiences or memories of a past life (reincarnation). A clearer illustration of meaningful learning regarding the indicator of connection to prior experience can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Distribution of Textual Data Regarding Meaningful Learning Related to Prior Knowledge and Experience

| No | Text Excerpt                                                                                                       | Context of Prior Knowledge/Experience    | Analysis within Deep Learning Framework                |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | "...Now I compose words from the <i>parwa</i> (stories) of old..."                                                 | Classical Literature ( <i>Parwa</i> )    | Linked to previous experiences.                        |
| 2  | "...building it as it was seen when deceased in the told past..."                                                  | Spiritual Experience (Metaphysics)       | The learning experience to be applied in new contexts. |
| 3  | "...I remember King Naraja in the time of old..."                                                                  | Collective Memory or History             | Linked to previous experiences.                        |
| 4  | "... ( <i>Nilacandra</i> ) still remembers and receives us with respect..."                                        | Interpersonal Experience                 | Linked to previous experiences.                        |
| 5  | "...thanks to the love of his brother... Rsi Andasingha is his name, who made ( <i>Nilacandra</i> ) successful..." | Knowledge from a Mentor                  | foster the qualities of a lifelong learner             |
| 6  | "...imitating the devoted service of the poets..."                                                                 | Observation and Exemplarity              | The learning experience to be applied in new contexts. |
| 7  | "...once said to be named <i>Purnawijaya</i> ... now named <i>Nilacandra</i> ..."                                  | History and Self-Identity                | Linked to previous experiences.                        |
| 8  | "...remembering that he is the true Lord Vishnu..."                                                                | Theophanic Experience                    | Linked to previous experiences.                        |
| 9  | "...he fully understood all the teachings of <i>the Catur Warga</i> ..."                                           | Doctrinal Knowledge (Theology)           | be connected to other fields of study.                 |
| 10 | "...my memory is still fresh regarding the famous story of <i>Kamandaka</i> ..."                                   | Classical Literacy ( <i>Nitisastra</i> ) | Linked to previous experiences.                        |

Source: Organized from Geria (2021)

Based on the Table 1, it can be stated that existing knowledge serves several critical roles. Learning cannot be meaningful if new information lacks a connection to what is already known. Furthermore, meaningful learning allows an individual to reconstruct their identity based on an evaluation of the past. Experiences of past failures or successes are processed to form a more mature

character. The knowledge of his past existence serves as the starting point for Nilacandra to improve himself and become a wise king. The description of using memory to analyse enemy war tactics reflects how prior knowledge acts as a bridge to solve problems in a new context.

#### 4.2.3 Joyful Learning: Cultivating Feeling and Emotional Development

Several indicators define when learning can be considered “joyful”: an interactive learning environment, engaging and inspiring learning activities, motivating challenges, and the achievement of learning success, often referred to as the AHA moment” (Tim Penyusun, 2025). An AHA moment is an experience of understanding or realization that occurs when an individual recognizes a connection, meaning, or solution that had previously gone unnoticed. In cognitive psychology, an AHA moment is commonly referred to as an insight, describing the experience in which a concept that was initially confusing becomes clear and meaningful (Tim Penyusun, 2025). It is clear that such a learning atmosphere occurs simultaneously with Mindful and Meaningful Learning. As recorded in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript: “...all the people arrived because of their human obligations in the world; those enjoying virtue as well as those struck by wickedness were advised of the causes by him; that is what he always carried out together with his followers...” (Geria, 2019, p. 130). This atmosphere can be described as joyful because the people feel accepted and heard regarding their problems, thereby creating an interactive dialogue that is enlightening (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Implementation of Deep Learning at Candra Kasih Elementary School, Denpasar (Photo: Documentation of Candra Kasih Elementary School, Denpasar)

An engaging learning process is reflected in the expression: "...creating a temple of letters based on *guru-lagu* (rhythmic rules), may the essence of *Saraswati* grace every verse..." (Geria, 2019, p. 125). In this context, studying literature is approached creatively, likened to building a temple from a collection of words. The singing method has proven highly effective in motivating students, particularly at the elementary level, by increasing their enthusiasm for learning. Consequently, the learning atmosphere becomes more vibrant and enjoyable (Ni'mah, 2017, p. 187; Padmadewi, et al., 2025).

As previously discussed, the learning process implicit in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript utilizes visual media by manifesting heaven and hell into physical forms. This activity naturally boosts student enthusiasm because they are engaged in Project-Based Learning (PBL). This method serves as an effective alternative for delivering material to students, preventing boredom and disengagement. When a project is successfully completed, the sense of achievement makes the learning experience feel truly joyful. This is reflected in the expression: "...the understanding of the artificial heaven and hell has been enjoyed; so perfect and similar / to the original within the palace by him..." (Geria, 2019, p. 130).

One of the manifestations of character education is through the exemplary leadership of great figures, such as national heroes, historical personalities, and. Setianto (2019) explains that the affective aspect of history learning can be developed by linking historical material to the exemplary nature of heroes. The description provided above is also found implicitly in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript, although it focuses more on emulating the figure of a poet (*pujangga*). The excerpt reads: "... (so that) the intention arises to imitate the devoted service of the poet..." (Geria, 2019, p. 125). Other inspirational activities mentioned include the king's generosity in distributing jewels to the people and the Pandawa's struggle to uphold *dharma*.

Designing a challenging learning environment is occasionally necessary to stimulate students' critical thinking (Fatmawaty, 2024, p. 73). This concept is implicitly reflected in the story of Sri Kunarajaya, who found great joy in performing meditation (*semedi*) with a diligent and sincere heart. His place of meditation was far from the crowds, described metaphorically as becoming one with the forest, as he no longer returned to his home (Geria, 2019). In Hindu character education, this challenge is not viewed as an agonizing burden; rather, it is seen as a spiritual process that motivates one to achieve grace which, in a pedagogical context, equates to learning success.

#### 4.2.4 *The Spiritual Journey of King Nīlācandra as a Reflection of the Deep Learning Process*

The life journey of King Nīlācandra is inseparable from the beliefs he held. The values within these teachings shaped King Nīlācandra into an individual with profound spiritual strength and a leader respected by many. As explained in the preceding sub-chapters, the values of Hindu character education have been detailed and linked to the principles of Deep Learning.

The value of religiosity (*sraddha* and *bhakti*) can be considered the primary foundation of the character portrayed in the text. The figure of *Nilacandra* demonstrates that worldly and spiritual success can only be achieved through diligent meditation (*semedi*) and religious obedience. Meanwhile, there is an exceptionally strong presence of the values of integrity and honesty (*satya*). The text mentions the importance of practicing ultimate truth based on honesty within society, as well as behavior grounded in *satwam* (pure and calm) thoughts (Geria, 2019). This is in alignment with the Hindu teaching known as *Panca Satya*, or the Five Loyalties (Saputra, 2022, p. 4). The values of responsibility and discipline (*dharma*) are also reflected in the implementation of the *Catur Warga* teachings. This character education teaches that every individual possesses social and spiritual obligations that must be carried out in balance. *Nilacandra* is portrayed as a disciplined leader who pursued knowledge daily and consistently applied the laws of *Dharmasastra*.

The portrayal of the value of *Tat Twam Asi* (social and humanitarian values) can be observed through the interactions between the king, the people, and their environment. The characters of humility and compassion displayed by figures such as Rsi Andasingha and *Nilacandra* reflect the principle that helping others is a form of devotion to God. *Nilacandra's* ability to sense the suffering of his people and provide wise counsel demonstrates deep empathy. The character of the learner who reflects a “thirst for *Jnana*” (knowledge) representing the attitude of a lifelong learner—can be considered the pinnacle of the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript.

These values are manifested throughout the life journey of *Nilacandra* as the central figure. The opening of the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript begins with hymns of praise to Ida Hyang Saraswati as the ultimate source of knowledge and wisdom. The story then focuses on the main character, Maharaja Śrī Nīlācandra. Before attaining inner perfection, Nīlācandra is depicted as once being dominated by worldly passions and negative human traits. However, through a process of earnest spiritual learning, he was able to control his five senses (*panca indra*). This process can be described as a form of self-awareness an individual's understanding of themselves, recognizing both their strengths and weaknesses (Agniarahmah et al., 2023, p. 8). In Deep Learning, self-awareness

is crucial because it is a fundamental component of self-assessment. Therefore, self-assessment at the early stages of learning can serve as a guide to determine the most appropriate learning strategies or methods.

After attaining spiritual awareness, Nilacandra ruled Naraja Desa with profound compassion and justice. He fulfilled his *swadharma* (personal duty) as a king by prioritizing the welfare of his people, resulting in a kingdom that was secure, peaceful, and prosperous. This progression can certainly be described as self-transformation. Self-transformation is a process of internal change that brings about a shift in an individual's level of consciousness, way of thinking, and behavior, generally leading toward a better condition (Anderson and Anderson in Saleh and Humaidi, 2022, p. 2). Nilacandra, who initially lacked awareness (*avidya*), finally achieved enlightenment through consistent learning. This is further marked by his identity shift from *Purnawijaya* to *Nilacandra*.

In an effort to educate the people so they could understand the teachings of *dharma* concretely, Nilacandra, acting on the advice of his elder minister, constructed representations of heaven and hell around the palace. This imagery was intended as a means of moral education, allowing the community to witness the tangible consequences of good and evil deeds. The powerful educational message in this part is the cultivation of empathy, social solidarity, and sincerity as the foundation for forming a virtuous human character. The climax of the story occurs when Maharaja Yudhistira and the *Pandawas* visit Naraja Desa to witness the constructed representations of heaven and hell. The dialogues that take place reaffirm the law of cause and effect (*karma phala*) as a principle of moral education, teaching responsibility for every human action.

The description above illustrates the internalization of values within King Nilacandra, meaning that character education has been fully received and manifested through his attitudes and behaviors. It is no exaggeration to say that King Nilacandra achieved self-internalization, where his knowledge was not kept for himself but disseminated to his people (Sa'diyah and Gumilar, 2025, pp. 933-934). This is perfectly aligned with the spirit of Deep Learning, which posits that education is not merely a means to acquire knowledge, but an instrument of social transformation that allows humans to continue evolving alongside changing times (Tim Penyusun, 2025, p. 7). Regarding the journey of Nilacandra in the process of self-learning, it can be visualized in the diagram below (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. The Deep Learning Flow of the Figure *Nilacandra* in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* (Source: Tim Penyusun, 2025)

As explained in the principles of Deep Learning, the application of its three core principles can be carried out separately or simultaneously and does not necessarily have to be sequential (Tim Penyusun, 2025, p. 16). The finding of this study is that the first stage required when engaging in Deep Learning is self-awareness. The self-awareness stage in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* represents an individual's consciousness of their inner condition, strengths, and weaknesses. In an educational context, this stage reflects meaningful learning, as the learning process begins with personal experience and internal needs. The second stage is self-transformation, which describes the process of changing mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors through continuous learning. This aligns with the principles of learning that are both challenging and reflective. The third stage is self-internalization, demonstrated through the application of wise values in social life, specifically in *Nilācandra's* efforts to educate and protect his people. Values that have been internalized are manifested in concrete actions that benefit many, ensuring that learning becomes contextual and joyful for both the individual and society.

Although the findings were organized into the three dimensions of Deep Learning (mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning), the educational values embedded in *Kakawin Nilacandra* extend beyond these broad categories. The three dimensions function primarily as an analytical framework, while the text itself contains a wider range of Hindu educational values. Within the mindful dimension, the *kakawin* promotes self-awareness, self-discipline, moral reflection, wisdom, and critical consideration before action. Within the meaningful dimension, it emphasizes *dharma*, responsibility, devotion to knowledge, ethical leadership, respect for teachers, and the integration of learning with real-life experience. Within the joyful dimension, the text encourages inner harmony, spiritual fulfillment, positive social relationships, and the cultivation of learning as a meaningful and enriching life process.

### 4.3 Integration of Kakawin Nilacandra Educational Values into Hindu Religious Education Teaching Modules

This section describes the connection between the Deep Learning process implicit in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* manuscript and three specific teaching modules, representing the primary (SD), junior high (SMP), and senior high (SMA) levels of education (see Figure 5). The primary level module focuses on Grade III within the Hindu Religious Education and Character subject, developed by Desak Made Juniani from Sekolah Dasar Negeri 5 Penatih. Learning is centered on introducing the concept of *Tri Parartha*, classifying behavioral examples in daily life, and interpreting the values of compassion, sharing, and devotion to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi (Juniani, 2025). The junior high school teaching module focuses on Grade IX within the Hindu Religious Education and Character subject, developed by Elni Yuniati from SMP Dwijendra Denpasar. The module implements an active and reflective learning approach through group discussions, personal experience assignments, presentations, and assessments integrated with the *Pancasila* Student Profile (Yuniati, 2024).



Figure 5. Teaching Module Class III, IX, and X were edited using ChatGPT (Source: Adnyani, 2022; Yuniati, 2024; Juniani, 2025; chatgpt.com)

The teaching module for the senior high level focuses on Grade X (SMA/SMK) within the Hindu Religious Education and Character subject, developed by Ni Made Adnyani. It is designed to help Grade X students understand *Punarbhawa* (reincarnation) as one of the core tenets of Hinduism. Through active learning approaches such as discussions, reflections, sacred text analysis, and environmental observations it is intended that the teachings of *Punarbhawa* become meaningful and relevant to the students' real lives.

The three teaching modules mentioned above share a commonality in their application of meaningful learning principles, where each subject is consistently contextualized with real-life situations. Each module also strives to encourage students to shape their character toward a better direction. All three teaching modules demonstrate an orientation toward student engagement throughout the learning process. After analyzing the three modules, it is evident that the learning processes within the *Kakawin Nilacandra* share a strong connection with modern pedagogy. The educational values in the *Kakawin Nilacandra*, focusing on self-awareness, self-transformation, and self-internalization, are reflected in the teaching modules, though they vary in depth. To provide a concise overview of the relationship between the educational values in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* and the SD, SMP, and SMA teaching modules, the following table is presented:

Table 2. The Relationship Between Educational Values in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* and Teaching Modules

| No | Educational Value    | SD Module Component (Primary School)                                                        | Correlation Analysis                                                                              |
|----|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Self-Awareness       | Basic understanding of student behavior and the desire to become a better person.           | To recognize their daily behaviors.                                                               |
| 2  | Self-Transformation  | Learning experience in ethics and etiquette through visual and kinesthetic learning styles. | Habituation of <i>Asih</i> (compassion).                                                          |
| 3  | Self-Internalization | Examples of daily interactions with <i>Tri Parartha</i> at home and school.                 | Perform concrete acts of <i>Punia</i> (charity).                                                  |
| No | Educational Value    | SMP Module Component (Secondary School)                                                     | Correlation Analysis                                                                              |
| 1  | Self-Awareness       | Understanding that the self is a part of God ( <i>Atman</i> ).                              | To recognize their internal spiritual potential.                                                  |
| 2  | Self-Transformation  | Self-control and conquering "inner enemies."                                                | The module teaches systematic self-control techniques.                                            |
| 3  | Self-Internalization | Documenting the application of <i>Bhakti</i> and <i>Karma</i> in community life.            | Perform real service through the path of <i>Karma Marga</i> .                                     |
| No | Educational Value    | SMA Module Component (High School)                                                          | Correlation Analysis                                                                              |
| 1  | Self-Awareness       | The principle of <i>Punarbhawa</i> : that rebirth is determined by previous self-quality.   | The module teaches existential awareness.                                                         |
| 2  | Self-Transformation  | Analysing <i>Punarbhawa</i> teachings as a means of character improvement.                  | Students are invited to perform a deep paradigm shift.                                            |
| 3  | Self-Internalization | Internalization of <i>Sraddha</i> (faith) to become a steadfast individual.                 | Students are expected to reach a firm conviction that influences every moral decision in society. |

Source: Authors (2026)

The analysis presented in Table 2 reinforces the fact that the learning processes contained within the *Kakawin Nilacandra* can be effectively implemented in modern education. As previously outlined, the learning journey undertaken by Nīlācandra in the text has proven successful in shaping his character into a virtuous individual who provides significant value to his society. These learning outcomes are directly aligned with the Deep Learning approach currently being promoted by the Indonesian government, specifically through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Furthermore, it can be asserted that the deep learning process model found in the *Kakawin Nilacandra* can serve as a foundational guide for developing education in Indonesia. These modules embody the pedagogical transformation of textual values into structured learning experiences aligned with the principles of Deep Learning.

The implementation of these modules at Candra Kasih Elementary School illustrates the continuity between the literary text and educational practice. Classroom observations revealed that the learning activities encouraged students to construct knowledge through inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and contextual problem-solving, reflecting the principles of meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning (see Figures 3 and 4). The relationship among the literary text, the instructional modules, and classroom implementation forms a coherent pedagogical trajectory, beginning with the extraction of educational values from the text, followed by their transformation into learning materials, and culminating in their implementation in classroom practice.

The findings of this study have implications not only for Hindu Religious Education but also for broader educational contexts. The Hindu educational values identified in *Kakawin Nilacandra*, including self-awareness, ethical reflection, wisdom, responsibility, respect for knowledge, and meaningful engagement in learning, align closely with the principles of Deep Learning, particularly mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning.

In language education, *Kakawin Nilacandra* can be used as a literary and cultural text that promotes mindful learning. Students may engage in interpretive reading, reflective writing, critical discussion, and contextual analysis of the text. The use of *Kakawin Nilacandra* in language teaching also supports cultural literacy, character education, and communicative competence through meaningful interaction with local literary heritage. Classroom discussions may further encourage learners to explore multiple interpretations of a particular stanza, fostering openness to diverse perspectives and deeper contextual understanding. The educational values contained in *Kakawin Nilacandra* can also be integrated into social studies, citizenship education, history, literature, and character education.

Future research may focus on the empirical implementation of *Kakawin Nilacandra* -based learning models in different educational settings and subject areas. Experimental and classroom-based studies could examine the effectiveness of integrating *Kakawin Nilacandra* into language learning, character education, history, and civic education. Further studies may also investigate how local literary texts contribute to the development of students' critical thinking, cultural awareness, mindfulness, engagement, and deep learning competencies.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that *Kakawin Nilacandra* contains a comprehensive framework of Hindu character education that is highly relevant to the principles of Deep Learning. King Nīlācandra's spiritual journey reflects a transformative learning process consisting of three interconnected stages: self-awareness, self-transformation, and self-internalization. These stages demonstrate that character formation is not limited to the acquisition of moral knowledge but culminates in the embodiment of ethical values through concrete actions in society. Values such as integrity, honesty, responsibility, discipline, compassion, and lifelong learning are therefore internalized as lived educational practices rather than abstract ideals.

This study contributes a pedagogical innovation by reinterpreting *Kakawin Nilacandra* as a conceptual model for Hindu character education within the contemporary Deep Learning framework. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined *Kakawin Nilacandra* from theological, literary, or aesthetic perspectives, this research demonstrates its pedagogical relevance by translating textual values into a structured learning model. These three stages are reflected in the design of the primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary Hindu Religious Education teaching modules analysed in this study, indicating that the educational values embedded in the text can be systematically implemented across different educational levels.

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## Author Profiles

**Heny Perbowosari** is a lecturer at Postgraduate, I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa State Hindu University, Indonesia. She completed her doctoral degree at Universitas Hindu Indonesia. Her publication included *Kurikulum Cinta dan Pengembangan Karakter: Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Hindu* (Mafy Media, 2026). Her research interests include Hindu character education, Hindu educational philosophy, curriculum development, and Balinese literature. Email: [henysari74@uhnugriwa.ac.id](mailto:henysari74@uhnugriwa.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9275-6478>

**Heri Purwanto** is a lecturer at the Faculty of Brahma Widya, I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa State Hindu University, Indonesia. He received his bachelor's degree in Archaeology from Udayana University in 2017 and his master's degree in Brahma Widya from I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa State Hindu University in 2022. His publications include *Banda Neira: Bandar Rempah di Timur Nusantara* (Pustaka Indis, 2025), and *Tanah Suci yang Menyatukan: Warisan Siwa-Buddha dan Narasi Agama di Bali* (Dharma Pustaka Utama, 2026). His research interests include Hindu-Buddhist archaeology, iconography, classical literature, Hindu studies, temple reliefs, and cultural heritage. Email: heri.arkeo@uhnsugriwa.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4333-9528>

**I Dewa Gede Rat Dwiyan Putra** is a Lecturer at I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa State Hindu University, holding a doctoral degree in English Language Education. His research specialization is in language pedagogy, higher education, and teacher professional development. His work explores the integration of Hindu values, digital transformation, and interdisciplinary approaches to education and the teaching profession. He is actively engaged in academic collaborations in cultural and ethical contexts. Email: ratdwiyanaputra@uhnsugriwa.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2822-2188>

**Sandhya Tiwari** is Professor of English and Dean of the School of Languages at the Central University of Kashmir, Jammu & Kashmir, India. Her research focuses on English literature, cultural studies, gender studies, South Asian literature, and English language education. Her scholarly work explores interdisciplinary perspectives on literature, identity, culture, and pedagogy, with particular interests in feminist criticism, postcolonial studies, digital learning, and contemporary approaches to language and literary education. She actively contributes to academic research and international collaborations in literature, education, and cultural studies. Email: prof.sandhyatiwari@gmail.com; drstpu@gmail.com ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3582-0135>

## Mythology as a Catalyst for Creative Economy and Environmental Conservation: A Critical Comparison of the Manguni and Bali Starling Narratives

Mayske Rinny Liando<sup>1\*</sup> , Ni Wayan Sumitri<sup>2</sup> ,  
Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad<sup>3</sup> , Fince Leny Sambeka<sup>4</sup> ,  
Gerry Kadamehang<sup>5</sup> 

<sup>1,4</sup> Universitas Negeri Manado, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas PGRI Mahadewa, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

<sup>5</sup> Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This study is motivated by the importance of revitalizing local values through the construction of myths that can bridge spirituality, education, and the creative economy within the context of conservation and sustainable tourism. The research focuses on how the myths of the Manguni bird and the Bali Starling are constructed and transformed as media for education, conservation, and the creative economy, including challenges encountered. Critical discourse analysis, social construction and eco-biology theory are employed to interpret these phenomena. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that bird mythology in Bali and Minahasa communities both is constructed within local narratives and transformed into a medium for ecological ethics education, creative innovation, and ecotourism development. These findings emphasize the importance of policies that integrate such strategies into the management of ecotourism, and encourage the adoption of a development paradigm rooted in cultural authenticity.

**Keywords:** Bali starling; conservation; creative economy; manguni bird; myth

### 1. Introduction

Indonesia is a megadiverse country rich in flora, fauna, and cultural variety. Amid threats such as climate change, deforestation, urbanization, and local wisdom serves as a crucial asset for supporting environmental conservation and

\* Corresponding author's email: [mayske\\_liando@unima.ac.id](mailto:mayske_liando@unima.ac.id)

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socio-cultural sustainability (Victoria, et al., 2025; Aldyan, et al., 2024). Folklore and myths rooted in a harmonious relationship between humans and nature play a key role in transmitting ecological values and cultural identity across generations (Maffi & Woodley, 2010). In this context, birds as symbols of nature and culture hold significant importance. Many indigenous communities across the archipelago regard certain birds as signifier beings and spiritual mediators. One potential asset in Indonesia that is considered to play a positive role in this context is the myth of the Manguni bird in North Sulawesi and the Bali Starling or *Jalak Bali* (*Leucopsar rothschildi*) in Bali, thus this issue is considered necessary to examine from a multiple perspective, as it holds both theoretical and practical significance.

Within the oral tradition of the Minahasa people in North Sulawesi, the Manguni bird, a species of owl (*Otus Manadensis*), holds a special status. For the Minahasa, the Manguni represents a hierophanic reality that conveys divine messages into a socially and symbolically constructed world (Mamoto, 2007). The Manguni is viewed as a messenger of ancestors as well as a guardian of natural balance (Liando, 2021). Its call is believed to carry supernatural meaning, signaling danger, ancestral blessings, or marking important decisions. However, lately, the influences of modernization and globalization marked by economic growth and the expansion of global culture, this myth has undergone continuous processes of de-mythologization and re-mythologization in various sociocultural practices and its spiritual function, the Manguni myth also serves as an informal educational medium through folktales, customary rituals, and artistic symbols. Ecological values, such as prohibitions against forest destruction and respect for nocturnal wildlife are conveyed through Manguni stories. Empirically, over the past two decades, the Manguni image has also been developed in wooden handicrafts, *batik* motifs, group identity emblems, and cultural festivals, creating opportunities for a conservation-based creative economy (Wenas, 2021).

On the other hand, the *Jalak Bali* (*Leucopsar rothschildi*) is an endemic bird of Bali Island with both ecological and spiritual significance. In Balinese mythology, the Bali Starling stands as a cultural icon and a symbol of ecological conservation. With its brilliant white plumage and striking blue eyes, it is often regarded as a representation of purity and cosmic balance in Balinese Hindu tradition (Sukmawan & Febriani, 2023). However, over the past three decades, this species has been listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN, with its population continuing to decline due to hunting and habitat degradation (Birdlife International, 2023). van Balen et al. (2009) reported from field notes that: from ~300–400 individuals (1976/77) to 125–180 (1984), 13–14 (1990), recovered to 45 (1993), then dropped again to around 15 individuals in 2000. In

response to the alarming decline of the Bali Starling, the government through the Rare Animal Conservation Center has collaborated with local communities and international organizations since the 1980s to implement conservation programs involving captive breeding and reintroduction (Jepson, 2016; Jepson and Ladle, 2005). These efforts have focused on two key habitats: Ped Village Nusa Penida Island in Klungkung Regency and Bali Barat National Park (BBNP) in Jembrana Regency and Sumber Klampok Village in Buleleng Regency.

Alongside these conservation measures, the government is working with a Pentahelix network. The pentahelix concept is a collaborative development model that involves five key stakeholders working together in an integrated and synergistic manner such as: NGO's, communities, academic, and mass media has promoted the Bali Starling as an ecotourism attraction that combines environmental education, traditional rituals (such as the animal-related ritual *Tumpek Kandang* and the forest-protection ritual *Wana Kertih*), and the development of creative products from fine art to tourism merchandise. Today, the Bali Starling stands as both a symbol of Bali's tourism promotion and a driver of a creative economy rooted in wildlife conservation (Wenas, 2007).

Integrating fauna-related myths into formal and nonformal education has been proven to enhance ecological awareness. Storytelling grounded in local culture strengthens the teaching of science and environmental ethics (Banks, 2017; Ortega et al., 2023; Rawanda et al., 2020). In Minahasa, the story of the Manguni is incorporated into elementary school local content curricula and church activities to instill conservation values. In Bali, educational programs in Bali Barat National Park (BBNP) use the sacred narrative of the Bali Starling to foster pride and environmental concern among younger generations (Sukmawan & Febriani, 2023). While simultaneously inspiring the development of creative arts and the creative economy perspective, both myths hold significant potential. The global market for nature- and culture-based tourism is growing at a rate of 5–7% per year (UNESCO, 2021). Handicrafts, fashion, and festivals featuring Manguni and Bali Starling symbols can provide local communities with sources of income while expanding the impact of conservation through market mechanisms (Howkins, 2020). However, the risk of excessive commodification may shift their spiritual meaning into mere commercial products, underscoring the need for balanced governance.

This study focuses on how the myths of the Manguni Bird and the Bali Starling are constructed and transformed into mediums for education, conservation, and the creative economy, including the challenges encountered in these processes. By moving beyond descriptive ethnography toward a critical and integrative approach, this study repositions bird mythology as a transformative socio-cultural resource bridging ecological ethics, creative

economy development, and culturally grounded sustainable tourism. In doing so, it offers a new conceptual contribution that situates myth not as a static narrative, but as an active mechanism in contemporary sustainability discourse and policy praxis.

## 2. Literature Review

Studies on myth in traditional Indonesian societies generally position myth as an integral part of belief systems and cultural identity (Geertz, 1973; Eliade, 1959). In the context of biodiversity and local wisdom, several scholars argue that mythological narratives perform ecological functions by operating as mechanisms of social regulation against environmental exploitation (Maffi, 2010; Berkes, 2012). However, most of these studies remain largely descriptive and ethnographic in nature and have not systematically analyzed the dynamics of myth transformation within the contexts of modernity and the creative economy.

Research on the Manguni bird in Minahasa, for example, as discussed by Mamoto (2007) and Liando (2021), primarily focuses on its cosmological symbolism and spiritual meaning within local belief systems. Manguni is portrayed as a hierophanic symbol and a spiritual mediator within Minahasan cosmology. Its call and flight direction are interpreted as ancestral messages guiding collective decision-making (Liando, 2021). These studies successfully explain Manguni's position as a mediator between the ancestral realm and the human world, yet they pay limited attention to how this meaning is negotiated within the contexts of globalization and shifting social structures. In other words, the transformational and reconstructive dimensions of the Manguni myth have not been thoroughly examined. Consequently, without an analysis of such transformations, studies on Manguni risk falling into cultural romanticism and failing to capture contemporary social dynamics. From a social constructionist perspective, the process of demythologization resulting from modern rationalization does not necessarily erase the meaning of the Manguni myth; rather, it triggers a process of remythologization through cultural festivals and ethnic identity symbols, in which Manguni shifts from a cosmological symbol to a cultural-political emblem.

Previous literature consistently describes Manguni as a hierophanic symbol and spiritual mediator within Minahasan cosmology (Mamoto, 2007). Its call and flight direction are interpreted as ancestral signs guiding communal decisions (Liando, 2021). Beyond its spiritual function, the Manguni myth also serves as an informal educational medium transmitted through folktales, customary rituals, and artistic symbols (Marbun, 2025; Gosal et al., 2024). Ecological values—such as prohibitions against forest destruction and

respect for nocturnal wildlife—are conveyed through Manguni narratives. Over the past two decades, the image of Manguni has also been developed in wooden handicrafts, *batik* motifs, organizational emblems, and cultural festivals, generating opportunities for a conservation-based creative economy (Wenas, 2021). Nevertheless, these studies have not sufficiently examined how younger generations in Minahasa reinterpret this symbol within the contexts of urbanization and modern formal education. This article therefore emphasizes that without analyzing processes of construction and transformation, studies of Manguni remain limited to descriptive accounts and fail to address contemporary social reconfigurations.

Similarly, studies on the Bali Starling predominantly emphasize biological conservation, population dynamics, and species protection policies (Jepson & Ladle, 2005). More recently, the Bali Starling has been framed both as a symbol of Bali's tourism promotion and as a driver of a wildlife-based creative economy (Jepson, 2016). While these contributions are important, such approaches tend to separate ecological dimensions from symbolic and cultural ones. The Bali Starling is frequently treated as a technocratic conservation object rather than as a symbol continuously constructed and reproduced within social and economic relations. As a result, the interconnections among myth, cultural identity, and the creative economy have not been fully integrated within a comprehensive analytical framework.

The literature on the Bali Starling further indicates that the theory of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) has rarely been applied, despite its relevance for understanding myth not as a static entity but as a historical product continuously reproduced through social interaction. Through this theoretical lens, discourses surrounding Manguni and the Bali Starling can be examined as socially constructed and transformed within educational, conservation, and creative economic contexts, integrating symbolic, political, and economic analyses. Likewise, cultural ecology theory (Berkes, 2012), which highlights the role of local knowledge in conservation, has been widely employed. However, this perspective often idealizes indigenous communities as inherent guardians of nature without sufficiently connecting conservation practices to processes of symbolic commodification and global economic penetration. Therefore, in the context of Manguni and the Bali Starling, it is crucial to consider how these symbols function as forms of cultural capital that can be converted into economic value (Bourdieu, 1986). Within this framework of cultural capital, the Bali Starling can be understood as simultaneously embodying symbolic, conservation, and economic value. The internalization and institutionalization of this symbol through government policies demonstrate the interrelationship among conservation, regional identity, and tourism branding strategies.

Accordingly, this study adopts a distinct analytical position. It does not merely describe the symbolic meanings of Manguni and the Bali Starling but critically examines how these myths are constructed, negotiated, and transformed across three interconnected domains: education, conservation, and the creative economy. By doing so, the research seeks to bridge the fragmentation of previous studies and to offer a comparative and interdisciplinary approach. A critical review of earlier scholarship reveals a strong tendency toward descriptive analysis and single-perspective frameworks that have not adequately captured the dynamic processes of social reality construction and symbolic transformation. This gap therefore confirms the originality and scholarly contribution of the present study, as it holds the potential to generate new insights—whether by enriching, extending, or clarifying existing research findings.

### **3. Methods and Theory**

#### ***3.1 Methodological Approach***

This study employs a multi-method design, specifically qualitative methods (Geertz, 1973; Madison, 2005; Thompson, 2015), combined with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Fairclough (1995), and comparative case analysis techniques (Yin, 2018). This method focuses on uncovering the symbolic meanings embedded in social actions, and to identify similarities and differences in how the Manguni and Bali Starling myths function within education, cultural–environmental preservation, and creative economic development.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of socio-religious documents. Several informants related to the topic interviewed include: traditional leaders, religious figures, conservation managers, teachers, community members, and creative-economy practitioners in both Minahasa and Bali. Field studies were conducted to capture how the species is represented in rituals, conservation practices, and tourism narratives within local communities, providing insight into the living expression of myth in daily interactions. Meanwhile, document analysis involved examining traditional manuscripts, government conservation reports, and academic literature to trace how the myth evolved from a sacred symbol of purity and prosperity into a marker of identity and environmental ethics. By integrating these perspectives, the study seeks a holistic understanding of how the Manguni and Bali Starling myths are constructed and practiced as media for education, cultural and environmental conservation, and the creative economy, as well as the challenges that arise in utilizing these myths as instruments for sustainable development.

### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts an eclectic theoretical foundation, drawing on social construction of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966) and the cultural ecology framework emphasizes the reciprocal interactions between humans, culture, and the environment (Berkes, 2012). This theory explains how animal myths function as adaptive mechanisms that guide conservation behavior and regulate human–nature relationships. Berger & Luckman (1966), explain that social reality is formed through a continuous dialectical process consisting of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The myth of a bird provides a clear illustration of this process in action.

The social constructionist perspective is used to understand mythic reality as the result of social interaction and symbolic legitimation. In the transformation of education, innovation, and tourism development, this Berger framework becomes particularly relevant. In education, the myth is reframed as a medium for ecological ethics, integrating cultural narratives into environmental learning. In innovation, the symbolic meaning of the bird inspires creative industries, branding, artistic production, and community-based enterprises.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

In line with the title and problem formulation above, the main discussion of the results of this study, which will be described, consists of two parts. First, it describes how the myth of the Manguni bird and the Bali Starling is constructed and transformed by the Minahasa and Balinese Hindu communities as a marker of identity, a medium for education, conservation, and the development of the creative economy and ecotourism. Second, it presents the results of the analysis of the integration model and challenges of conservation, creative economy development, and ecotourism based on local wisdom. The discussion will be discussed as follows.

### **4.1 Construction and Transformed the Manguni Bird Myth in Minahasa**

#### **4.1.1 Construction and Transformed the Manguni Bird Myth as a Spiritual Sign and Identity**

The Manguni bird occupies a central position in the cosmology of the Minahasa people of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. In oral tradition, the distinctive call of the Manguni is considered a supernatural message from ancestors, signaling moral guidance, omens of good or bad fortune, or indications of natural change. The Manguni is also regarded as an ancestral messenger and a guardian of cosmic harmony and human-nature relationship (Mamoto, 2007; Liando, 2021). This role elevates the bird beyond a mere species, making it a spiritual marker that bridges the material and immaterial dimensions of Minahasan.

Semiotically, the Manguni functions as a “text of the sacred,” a symbol that embodies transcendent power. This belief simultaneously fosters ecological ethics, as prohibitions against disturbing the Manguni or damaging its habitat carry both social and spiritual consequences. Within traditional Minahasan cosmology, the universe is perceived as a sacred space where humans, nature, and ancestral spirits interact (Wenas, 2007). The Manguni is believed to serve as a medium of communication between ancestral spirits and the community. Its role as a spiritual signifier is present in various Minahasan rituals, such as village cleansing ceremonies (Foso Rumages), traditional weddings, funerals, and healing rites. When the bird calls at specific times—especially at night—people interpret the direction and intensity of its sound as messages. A local informant explained that a call heard from the north is often interpreted as a sign of good fortune, whereas one from the south may be taken as a warning of danger. The tone of the call is also significant; for instance, a “huu-huu” sound at night is believed to signal a warning or guidance.

Others explain, during village or agricultural field cleansing rituals, if the Manguni’s call is heard from a certain direction before the planting season, farmers interpret the direction of the call as a sign to begin or delay planting activities. In wedding ceremonies, hearing the Manguni’s call before the procession is understood as an ancestral blessing. In funeral rites, its appearance is believed to signal a smooth journey of the soul to the afterlife. These spiritual interpretations position the Manguni as a medium between the visible and invisible worlds, reinforcing the belief that human life must remain in harmony with nature and the ancestors (Liando, 2021). From a social construction perspective, this tradition affirms that the presence of the Manguni structures social conduct, serving as a symbol of group and religious identity as well as a link connecting the community to its origin narratives.

Empirically, the Manguni myth demonstrates a clear process of social construction and symbolic transformation beyond its original cosmological context. Traditionally understood as a hierophanic mediator between ancestors and the living community in Minahasan belief systems (Mamoto, 2007; Liando, 2021), Manguni has gradually been reconstructed as a marker of collective identity at multiple institutional levels.

At the regional level, the image of Manguni has been incorporated into district and municipal cultural branding in North Sulawesi, appearing in official logos, public monuments, socio-spirituality, and regional festivals. In this context, Manguni no longer functions solely as a spiritual signifier but is rearticulated as a cultural emblem representing vigilance, wisdom, and ancestral heritage. This institutional adoption reflects a shift from sacred cosmology to civic symbolism, where myth becomes a resource for regional

identity consolidation, and social solidarity (Marbun, 2025). Within military institutions, particularly in North Sulawesi-based units, Manguni imagery has also been used in insignia and unit emblems. Here, the bird's attributes—sharp vision, alertness, and strategic awareness—are selectively reinterpreted to align with military values such as readiness and territorial guardianship. The myth is thus transformed into a symbolic framework that legitimizes institutional ethos and collective discipline.

Similarly, among spiritual and cultural organizations in Minahasa, Manguni is maintained as a sacred symbol of ancestral continuity. For example, the Gereja Masehi Injili (MAESA) in Minahasa uses the Manguni as its spiritual identity symbol. Certain spiritual groups incorporate Manguni imagery in ritual spaces, regalia, and ceremonial narratives, reaffirming its role as a mediator between the visible and invisible realms. Thus, the spiritual construction of the Manguni signifies the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the supernatural within Minahasan culture.

These empirical examples indicate that the Manguni myth is not static but dynamically reconstructed across political, military, and spiritual and religious institutions. Through processes of institutionalization and symbolic recontextualization, Manguni shifts from a localized cosmological sign into a multi-layered identity marker simultaneously cultural, strategic, and spiritual. In this domain, rather than being fully secularized, the myth undergoes a process of reinterpretation that preserves its sacred dimension while adapting to contemporary organizational structures. In relation to this matter, the symbolization of Manguni within formal institutional domains as an emblem of Minahasa Regency identity (Figure 1), spiritual and religious group identity (Figure 2), and Brigade Military Minahasa District (Figure 3) is visually reflected in the following photographs.



Figure 1. Symbol of Minahasa Regency (Left). Figure 2. Symbol of Religious Injili Organization (Middle). Figure 3. Symbol of Brigade Manguni North Sulawesi (Right) (Source: Minahasa Regency Profile, 2024).

#### 4.1.2 *The Manguni Bird as a Transformative Medium of Cultural and Environmental Pedagogy*

The Manguni myth has also been constructed as a transformative educational tool for transmitting cultural values to younger generations of the Minahasa people. Folktales told by parents at bedtime emphasize values such as cooperation, caution, and harmony with nature. In nonformal education settings, the Manguni story is used to teach social norms: for example, repeated calls of the Manguni may be interpreted as a sign to postpone night travel, instilling respect for natural signs. Culturally based education programs initiated by local schools in Tomohon and Tondano incorporate the Manguni story into local curricula, linking oral tradition with wildlife conservation. In this way, the myth becomes a pedagogical medium that integrates traditional ecological knowledge into modern learning.

Field observations found that in the City of Manado, State Elementary School No. 49 Manado and Malalayang Early Childhood Education School, Manado, have incorporated learning materials on the importance of environmental and cultural conservation for sustainability into their educational curriculum. In interviews with Felny Liando (43 years), teachers at this elementary school, the main learning materials provided to students did not focus solely on Manguni, but were integrated into local content subjects, including the teaching of Minahasan folklore, local culture and language, character education based on Manguni values, art activities and creative projects, as well as school habituation programs that foster care for culture and the environment.

Myths play an important role as a medium for transmitting cultural values across generations. In the Minahasa community of North Sulawesi, the Manguni bird myth is not merely folklore but also a vehicle for cultural education. The distinctive call of this nocturnal bird is viewed as both a message from ancestors and a source of moral instruction that binds the community together (Liando, 2021; Mamoto, 2007). Cultural pedagogy refers to educational practices rooted in local wisdom, where knowledge, ethics, and spirituality are passed down through narratives and rituals (Tilaar, 2004; Sukmawan & Febriani, 2023). Thus, the Manguni myth functions as a “living classroom” that instills moral values, ecological ethics, and collective identity.

Cultural pedagogy, the “living classroom” emphasizes that learning takes place not only in formal school settings but also through the everyday practices of the community. This concept aligns the idea of sociocultural learning, where social interaction and cultural symbols serve as mediating tools of education. In the Manguni myth, the bird’s call serves as both a sign of communication with the ancestors and a medium for moral reflection. Empirically, informants explain that, in the Minahasa community, every parent recounts Manguni

stories to their children not merely for entertainment but also to instill respect for nature and to maintain social harmony.

A traditional figure from Paniki Village named Sinyo Rondonuwu (50 years) also stated that the Manguni myth contains various pedagogical messages. First, the value of environmental ethics: the Manguni's call on certain nights is believed to be a warning for the community to protect forests and avoid indiscriminate tree cutting. Second, the value of social solidarity: the Manguni is thought to appear to warn of danger, encouraging residents to protect one another. Third, the spiritual value: the Manguni's call is understood as communication from ancestors, reinforcing the belief in human connectedness with the supernatural world. These messages teach children that humans are not the sole rulers of nature but part of an interconnected ecosystem.

For example, Sendow et al. (2023) in his ethnographic study of Woloan Village, describes the practice of cultural pedagogy through the "Malam Manguni" (Manguni Night) tradition. In in-depth interviews with Pdt. Prof. Dr W.A. Roeroe (70 years) as Catholic Priest and Yuliana Sundalangi (50 years) as a customary leader explained that each year, when the Manguni population becomes more vocal during the rainy season, the community holds an *adat* (customary) gathering. This event involves children and teenagers who listen to ancestral stories about the Manguni while waiting for the bird to call. When the Manguni's voice is heard, the village elders pause their storytelling and invite participants to reflect, interpreting the direction of the call as a symbolic message from the ancestors. The session concludes with a discussion of values, children are asked to express the moral lessons they have learned, such as the importance of keeping the forest clean or helping one another during disasters.

#### *4.1.3 Construction and Transformation of Manguni Bird Myth as Medium of Creative Economy and Tourism Development*

The creative economy and culture-based tourism are strategic sectors that complement each other in promoting sustainable development. UNWTO (2022) described, the creative economy emphasizes the use of creativity, knowledge, and cultural heritage to generate added value. In the context of tourism, the creative tourism approach encourages visitors to actively participate in local cultural activities.

The myth of the Manguni bird in Minahasan society originally derives from a local cosmological system that views the bird as a spiritual sign and a symbol of ancestral wisdom. In traditional practice, the sound and appearance of the Manguni are interpreted as specific signs influencing collective decision-making, particularly in customary contexts and in shaping human–nature relations. However, within contemporary social dynamics, this myth has undergone a

process of reconstruction through interactions among indigenous communities, local government, creative economy actors, and educational institutions.

In North Sulawesi, the construction and transformation of the Manguni myth as a medium for the creative economy and tourism promotion—particularly through the Manguni Festival—proceeds through three stages: (1) symbolic reinterpretation, (2) creative commodification, and (3) transformation toward ecotourism. In the stage of symbolic reinterpretation, the spiritual values of the Manguni—vigilance, ecological harmony, and communal identity—are codified into visual and narrative representations that are more communicative to a broader public. The Manguni symbol is manifested in woodcrafts, textile motifs, performing arts, and destination promotional materials. At this stage, the myth shifts from the sacred sphere to the public domain, without entirely relinquishing its cultural legitimacy. This transformation reflects a negotiation mechanism between the preservation of traditional values and the demands of the modern economy.

In the stage of creative commodification, the Manguni myth is translated into cultural narrative-based products and tourism experiences. Empirically, in Woloan Village, wood artisans have developed Manguni-themed carvings marketed as distinctive Minahasan souvenirs. These products possess not only aesthetic value but also identity narratives that enhance their appeal in the tourism market. Furthermore, thematic art performances and storytelling-based tour packages—combining the Manguni story with village visits and craft demonstrations—create educational and participatory tourism experiences. This approach aligns with the trend of experiential tourism and culture-based creative economy development (UNWTO, 2022).

This empirical evidence is consistent with Marbun's (2025) assertion that Manguni serves as a sign of nature, a bearer of divine messages, and a social symbol that strengthens the collective cohesion of the Minahasa community. Meanwhile, Gosal et al. (2024) show that, in the contemporary era, Manguni has also been reconstructed as a Minahasan cultural identity through the medium of art, indicating that its meaning does not end within the mythological sphere but continues to be reproduced in modern cultural practices. Thus, for the Minahasa people, Manguni has become a dynamic cultural symbol that moves from the realm of traditional myth toward representations of identity, spirituality, and contemporary cultural expression.

The transformation toward ecotourism occurs when the Manguni myth is linked to ecological awareness. The forest habitat around Tondano is positioned not merely as a narrative backdrop but as a conservation space with educational value. The Tondano ecotourism tour packages represent this transformation by connecting the myth with knowledge of forest ecosystems, thereby expanding

the meaning of Manguni from a spiritual symbol into a medium of environmental literacy. This integration demonstrates that myth can function as a bridge between traditional knowledge and modern science, while simultaneously reinforcing the dimension of sustainability. The process illustrates that myth is not a static entity but a social reality that can be reproduced and transformed in response to contemporary needs.

The impacts of this construction and transformation are widely regarded as positive by festival organizers and the local community. Since its inception in 2018, the Manguni Festival—organized through collaboration between indigenous communities and local government—has integrated MSME exhibitions, art performances, local culinary offerings, and educational tours. A report by the BPS Kabupaten Minahasa (2023) indicates that the festival attracts approximately 15,000 visitors annually, generating an estimated economic circulation exceeding IDR 10 billion. The largest contributions derive from the sale of Manguni-themed woodcrafts, woven products, and ecology-based tourism packages. These data indicate that the myth has functioned as both destination branding and a source of local economic value added. Visually, the construction and transformation of the Manguni myth in the contexts of culture festival and creative economy activities is illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4. The Minahasa Cakalele dance, inspired by the spirit of the Manguni bird in both its choreography and costume (left); children happily interacting with a Manguni bird at the Bukit Kasih tourist attraction (centre); and a Manguni bird calmly visiting a village administrative office without showing any fear of being captured (right). (Photos: Rev. Sepmy Fricilya Langkay, S.Th. [left]; and Dr. Aldjon Dapa [centre and right].)

Positive impacts are also evident in increased community participation and income diversification. MSME actors gain access to new markets through product differentiation rooted in cultural identity. Moreover, the integration of the Manguni myth into educational programs in several indigenous schools in Tomohon has strengthened youth awareness of forest conservation and cultural heritage. This synergy between the creative economy and ecotourism generates a multiplier effect: increased income, cultural preservation, and enhanced environmental literacy.

Sendow's et al. (2023) study in Woloan Village also demonstrates how the Manguni myth has transformed into a systematic pedagogical practice, ranging from storytelling and sensory engagement (listening to the bird's call) to collective reflection. More recently, several schools and community organizations have integrated the Manguni narrative into environmental education and cultural tourism programs. For instance, the Indigenous School in Tomohon has adopted the "Malam Manguni" tradition as part of its extracurricular activities, combining traditional storytelling with scientific knowledge of forest ecology. These efforts position the Manguni myth as a bridge between traditional education and modern science.

Another positive impact is the emergence of young entrepreneurs who develop creative products such as bamboo-based souvenirs, digital tour guide applications featuring the Manguni story, and interactive storytelling performances. This model aligns with the concept of value co-creation, in which local communities, government, and creative industry actors collaborate to generate added value. Conservation-oriented tourism initiatives have proven effective in enhancing ecological awareness. It is estimated that there has been approximately a 20% increase in community-managed protected forest areas since the festival began, as a portion of tourism revenue is allocated to conservation activities.

Conceptually, the construction and transformation of the Manguni myth can be formulated as an integrative model based on three dimensions: cultural legitimacy, creative economic innovation, and ecological sustainability. The myth functions as a core narrative linking these dimensions within a collaborative governance framework. These findings affirm that the Manguni myth, as an element of intangible cultural heritage, holds strategic capacity as an instrument for economic development and conservation, provided that commodification processes are conducted in a participatory and culturally sensitive manner.

## 4.2 Construction of the Bali Starling Myth in Balinese

### 4.2.1 Construction of the Bali Starling Myth in Balinese Religious Tradition and Ecology

The Bali Starling (*Leucopsar rothschildi*) is an endemic bird of Bali Island that carries both ecological and spiritual significance for the Balinese Hindu community. With its pure white plumage accented by black wing markings and bright blue eye rings, the Bali Starling symbolizes purity and natural balance (Figure 5). For centuries, Balinese society has embedded this bird within layers of religious narratives and myths that affirm the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and divine forces (Lansing, 2006).



Figure 5. The Bali Starling's striking beauty and immaculate white plumage symbolize purity. (Photo: Courtesy of Bali Bird Park, 2026)

In oral tradition and Bali mythology, the Bali Starling is often told as an incarnation of Dewi Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and wisdom (Suarka & Bawa, 2023). Its beauty and melodious song are believed to convey messages of harmony, marking the presence of virtue in village life. On many occasions, the appearance of the Bali Starling before religious ceremonies such as *odalan* or *piodalan* temple festivals is regarded as a good omen, as if the universe itself is blessing the ritual. Naturally fallen feathers are even kept as instruments for *tirtha*, or holy water, reinforcing the belief that this species embodies sacredness. The myth that venerates the Bali Starling as a sacred being influences community behavior. Many customary villages incorporate prohibitions against hunting the Bali Starling into their *awig-awig*, or traditional laws violations of these prohibitions not only incur social sanctions but are also believed to invite spiritual misfortune. Ecological awareness grows alongside

the belief that protecting the Bali Starling means maintaining cosmic balance (Geertz, 1973). Local knowledge about breeding seasons, nesting tree locations, and methods for maintaining forest ecosystems has been passed down through generations as part of religious obligations (Ardhana, 2017; Sukmawan & Febriani, 2023).

These sacred values intertwine with modern conservation efforts. When the Bali Starling population declined sharply due to hunting and habitat loss in the late 20th century, various release programs were designed by leveraging customary legitimacy (Birdlife International, 2020). Rituals such as “*melaspas burung*” (bird consecration) and temple festival were combined with bird release ceremonies to emphasize the unity of spiritual and ecological elements. Empirically, these activities have been carried out in several conservation areas, such as in Tengkundak Village, Penebel District, Tabanan Regency, and in Ped Village, Nusa Penida, Klungkung Regency. This approach proved effective: community participation increased because conservation was viewed not merely as a scientific project but as an act of devotion to safeguard a divine trust.

Furthermore, the Bali Starling myth has inspired a creative economy rooted in local wisdom. The bird’s motif appears in paintings, wood carvings, silver jewelry, and *endek* textiles sold to tourists. The Bali Starling Festival in Buleleng, for example, festival participants and committee explained that integrating art performances, conservation exhibitions, and environmental education, can be generating economic value while instilling ecological awareness in younger generations. The beauty and symbolism of the Bali Starling serve as an artistic inspiration that supports community well-being without compromising environmental sustainability (Richards, 2018).

Nevertheless, challenges remain, as the high black-market price of the Bali Starling continues to drive illegal hunting (BirdLife International, 2023). Tensions between short-term economic needs and the long-term religious–ecological values present an ongoing test for conservation sustainability. To address these issues, cross-sector collaboration—among government, academics, local communities, business actors, and the media—is essential (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). A pentahelix approach that uses myth as a communication framework has proven effective in mobilizing collective emotions, fostering a sense of ownership, and strengthening community-based conservation (Hall, 2011).

#### 4.2.2 Construction of Bali Starling as a Conservation Icon and Collective Identity

The Bali Starling, the only bird endemic to Bali, is not merely an endangered species but also a symbol of pride and collective identity for the Balinese people. Known for its pure white plumage, black-tipped wings, and

striking blue eye rings, the bird has been recognized as a protected species since the 1970s and designated as the official fauna emblem of Bali Province Birdlife (BirdLife International, 2023). Its high ecological value combined with deep cultural meaning makes the Bali Starling a conservation icon closely intertwined with the island's collective identity.

The uniqueness of the Bali Starling has long captivated researchers and nature enthusiasts. This species is found only in the western part of Bali, with its primary habitat in the monsoon forests of Bali Barat National Park (Pramatama et al., 2022). Threats from illegal hunting and habitat loss caused the wild population to plummet, at one point declining to only a few dozen individuals in the 1990s (Jepson, 2016). This critical condition prompted various science-based conservation initiatives, including breeding and release programs involving government agencies, NGOs, and local communities (van Balen et al., 2009). The success of these programs is measured not only by the increase in population but also by greater community engagement, highlighting a conservation process that is both social and ecological (Sutomo & van Etten, 2021).

Integrating religious values with modern conservation programs creates a distinctive preservation model often referred to as biocultural conservation (Maffi, 2010). In this model, culture and ecology are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Preserving the Bali Starling means preserving Bali's identity itself, as the bird embodies harmony at the core of the Balinese Hindu philosophy Tri Hita Karana, which emphasizes harmonious relationships among humans, nature, and the divine (Pitana, 2019). Thus, the Bali Starling myth in Balinese religious tradition and ecology is more than inherited folklore; it is a living social force. It affirms the awareness that protecting endangered species is a form of reverence for nature and the Creator. The Bali Starling stands as a concrete example of how cultural narratives can drive sustainable conservation actions while simultaneously creating opportunities in the creative economy. Protecting this bird safeguards not only spiritual heritage and ecosystem balance but also the continuity of Balinese identity for future generations.

Within Balinese culture, the Bali Starling holds a special place in the collective imagination of the Hindu Balinese community. The bird is often associated with purity and natural harmony, which emphasizes balanced relationships among humans, nature, and God. The appearance of the Bali Starling during religious ceremonies is believed to bring good omens, while customary village laws (*awig-awig*) in several villages protect it from hunting (Ardhana, 2017). The mythological narratives surrounding the Bali Starling reinforce its role as a collective symbol uniting religious and ecological dimension. The integration of these two dimensions within conservation efforts has been

initiated by customary institutions in several Balinese villages in collaboration with international organizations, successfully increasing the bird's population significantly. The population increased from approximately 6–10 individuals to 600 individuals, representing an approximately 60–100-fold increase over the period. Although the population declined by 48 individuals from 600 to 552 as of April 2023, the total number of Bali Starlings remains relatively high (Budiastrawan, 2024; Sakti, 2024). This success cannot be separated from the involvement of customary villages and the penta helix approach in conservation efforts.

The Bali Starling conservation initiative has also been implemented in Desa Tengkudak, where it builds upon a local tradition of releasing birds during the annual celebration of Indonesia's Independence Day on 17 August. This symbolic practice later evolved into an ecological movement when, in 2024, the community began collaborating with Friends of the National Parks Foundation (FNPF) Bali through the Kampung Jalak Bali release–care program. Through this community-based approach, residents became involved as habitat guardians, population monitors, and environmental educators for the village's younger generation.

Since the program began (2024–2026), Made Sukadana, head of the conservation group, explained that 24 pairs of Bali Starlings had been released into the wild. Regular monitoring has shown significant progress: the population has grown to 60 individuals, including 24 offspring born from the released birds. This success not only reflects the effectiveness of community-based conservation strategies but also strengthens the position of Tengkudak village as an example of collaborative practice between local wisdom and modern conservation in Bali. This achievement then became the starting point for developing Tengkudak village which has been developed into a tourism village with the Bali Starling as its local branding icon. Another example of integrated Bali Starling conservation and ecotourism development can be found in Ped Village on Nusa Penida Island, which actively involves the local community. Visually, these activities in Tengkudak village are shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6. The Bali Starling conservation program in Tengkidak Village, Tabanan, involves the government, local community, and students (Source: private document, 05/27/2026; The Bali Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) Bali Starling Tengkidak Tabanan, 2026).

The iconization of the Bali Starling is also reflected in various art products and the creative economy. The Bali Starling motif frequently adorns *endek* textiles, wood carvings, and visual artworks sold to tourists. Local governments and cultural communities regularly organize Bali Starling themed festivals, such as the Bali Starling Festival in Buleleng, which combines art performances, environmental education, and conservation exhibitions. These activities not only generate income but also strengthen a shared identity rooted in the symbol of this endemic species. Thus, the Bali Starling has become a cultural “brand” that harmoniously integrates conservation values and the creative economy.

Empirically, various institutions in Bali have shown tangible contributions to the conservation of the Bali Starling. The Bali Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) collaborates with Tegal Bunder and Tengkidak villages to develop breeding and release programs, while local schools integrate environmental learning through bird-friendly gardens and educational visits. Bali Green Education also incorporates the Bali Starling into ecological literacy practices, as illustrated by Green School Bali’s collaboration with Begawan Foundation. Students were involved in feeding Bali Starlings, monitoring breeding pairs, fundraising, and auditing released birds in Nusa Penida. The release of four breeding pairs from the Begawan breeding facility on the Green School campus demonstrates how school-based ecological education can be linked directly to endangered species conservation.

Within the framework of collective identity theory, construction of the symbols like the Bali Starling function as shared signifiers that foster community pride and a sense of belonging. Collective awareness is built through social practices such as community involvement in bird-release programs or

habitat monitoring, which reinforce social and ecological bonds (Hall, 2011). Conservation programs that leverage cultural narratives have proven more effective because they engage the emotional dimensions of society. A study in Bali Barat National Park shows that community participation increases when conservation is linked to religious teachings and customary rituals (Gandhiadi et al., 2023).

Although significant progress has been made, challenges remain. Illegal hunting continues to pose a threat due to the high international market price of the Bali Starling (Birdlife International, 2020). Climate change and land conversion further add to the complexity of the issue. In the context of conservation efforts in Tangkudak village, local informants explained that the main challenges include the birds' dependence on humans due to being accustomed to being fed by residents and visitors, as well as threats from predators such as cats.

#### *4.2.3 The Bali Starling Myth in the Context of Creative Economy and Sustainable Cultural Tourism*

The Bali Starling myth provides a cultural lens for linking ecological conservation with the creative economy and sustainable cultural tourism. As Bali's endemic and endangered bird, the Bali Starling carries ecological, symbolic, and cultural significance. Its myth can inspire storytelling, local art, educational media, and community-based tourism products while strengthening conservation awareness. When managed ethically, this narrative can support local economic creativity without reducing the bird and its cultural meaning into mere tourism commodities.

Community-based tourism programs engage residents in conservation activities, such as bird-watching tours and conservation workshops that instill environmental education values. The narrative of the Bali Starling myth adds a unique dimension for visitors, combining spiritual experience, natural beauty, and ecological learning. This approach aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism, which emphasize biodiversity protection and the enhancement of local economic well-being (UNWTO, 2022). Thus, conservation-based tourism not only safeguards ecosystems but also strengthens Balinese pride in their cultural heritage.

Despite its great potential, threats such as habitat destruction, hunting, and illegal trade continue to endanger the survival of the Bali Starling (BirdLife International, 2023). Successful conservation efforts require cross-sector collaboration among government, indigenous communities, business actors, academics, and the media within a pentahelix governance framework. Strategies such as certifying eco-friendly creative products, promoting conservation-based tourism, and running educational digital campaigns can raise public

awareness while fostering global commitment to Bali Starling preservation. This collaboration underscores that environmental conservation, and economic development need not be in conflict, but can progress hand in hand when supported by a shared commitment.

Empirically, the conservation success of the Bali Starling in Desa Ped has become a catalyst for local ecotourism development. Through community-based breeding, habitat protection, and custom-supported regulations, the village successfully increased the population of the once-critically endangered species. This achievement transformed Desa Ped into a learning site where visitors can observe conservation practices, participate in environmental education, and engage with local guides. As a result, the village's conservation efforts function not only as ecological action but also as a driver of sustainable ecotourism and community empowerment.

In other area, the integration of the Bali Starling release program, environmental conservation, and the creative economy to support tourism development through the regular organization of the Buleleng Festival (Bulfest) has been implemented by the regency government. According to Mr. Hartika, S.T., M.A.P. (Acting Head of the Environmental Agency of Buleleng Regency) and I Gede Suyasa, S.P. (Head of Tejakula Subdistrict), who both served as members of the organizing committee, the festival held in 2024–2025 not only received a positive response from the community but also contributed to the development of tourism in Buleleng Regency.

#### *4.3 Integration and Challenges of Conservation, Creative Economy, and Sustainable Tourism*

The myths of the Manguni Bird in Minahasa and the Bali Starling on the Island of the Gods embody local wisdom rich in both ecological and spiritual meaning. Both serve as markers of collective identity, reminders of environmental balance, and symbols of humanity's harmonious relationship with nature. Integrating these myths into conservation strategies and creative-economy development offers significant potential to create sustainable tourism rooted in culture.

In the context of Minahasa society, discussions of signs or practices considered good (permissible) and bad (prohibited) are closely connected to local belief systems, customary law, and cosmological worldviews that have been passed down through generations. These signs function as ethical guidelines shaping social behavior, spiritual life, and the relationship between humans and nature (Mamoto, 2007; Liando, 2021; Berkes, 2012; Maffi, 2010; Marbun, 2025). These religious and spiritual meanings open opportunities for preservation campaigns that resonate with the community's emotions.

Conservation efforts can be strengthened through myth-based education, such as interpretive forest tours in Minahasa, highlighting the Manguni as a forest guardian. While the Bali Starling stands as a protected endemic species icon or conservation programs in Bali Barat National Park emphasizing the Bali Starling as a symbol of purity (Suarka, 2023; Ardana, 2017); economic creative (Howkins, 2013); good moment to activities and the relationship between rituals and community participation in nature conservation (Gandhiadi, et al., 2023). Such mythic narratives help raise ecological awareness and foster a sense of stewardship for endangered species.

From the perspective of the creative economy, the Manguni and Bali Starling myths inspire performing arts, handicrafts, and other creative products of economic value. For instance, Manguni motifs can be adapted into textile designs or souvenirs, while the Bali Starling's image is utilized in wood carvings, dance performances, and themed culinary creations. These practices empower local micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), create employment opportunities, and expand the cultural creative-economy value chain. In sustainable tourism, integrating these myths adds a unique dimension to visitor experiences. Cultural festivals, ritual performances, and educational tour packages centered on the stories of the Manguni and Bali Starling can become distinctive attractions. Tourists not only enjoy natural beauty but also gain insight into the life philosophies of local communities, aligning with the principles of sustainable tourism that balance economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects in a national context. The striking beauty of the Bali Starling and the Manguni bird enriches the appeal of bird parks and zoological gardens in various regions, including Bali. Tourism enterprises that showcase these iconic birds as visitor attractions also contribute to conservation by supporting captive breeding and releasing the birds into the wild, thereby offsetting the commercial use of these species through tangible conservation efforts.

However, significant challenges remain. Commodifying these myths risks reducing their sacred value to mere commercial attractions. Increased tourist visits could also put pressure on the natural habitats of both birds, conflicting with conservation goals. Collaborative governance among indigenous communities, government, business actors, and academics is essential to ensure that these mythic narratives remain authentic and undiminished. Through participatory approaches and management grounded in local wisdom, integrating the Manguni and Bali Starling myths can become a model of harmonizing conservation, the creative economy, and sustainable tourism—maintaining a balance between economic use and the preservation of culture and nature (Imlabla & Sahusilawane, 2025).

## 5. Conclusion

The representations of the Manguni bird in Minahasa and the Bali Starling in Bali show that myths and fauna symbols are not static, but are continually reshaped through social, political, and ecological interactions. From a social construction perspective, both birds are positioned as markers of identity and local knowledge that are constantly reinterpreted by communities, institutions, and the state. Within political ecology, these myths function as instruments of legitimacy that guide conservation practices, resource governance, and the distribution of power among customary authorities, government actors, and economic stakeholders.

In terms of cultural and environmental conservation, both myths play strategic roles as mediums of preservation. The Minahasa people view the Manguni as a forest guardian and an indicator of ecosystem health, whereas the Bali Starling has become a nationally and internationally recognized conservation icon. The construction of these myths encourages community participation in protecting habitats and traditions, demonstrating that conservation is not merely a technical task but also a ritual and ethical one. A notable difference lies in institutionalization: Bali Starling conservation has been incorporated into international organizations: Rare Animal Conservation Center and Bali Barat's Tourism Policies, while Manguni conservation relies more on customary practices and civil society movements.

Using a multi-perspective approach this study finds that both myths offer significant opportunities for praxis-based and theoretical development rooted in local support. In practical terms, the Manguni inspires performing arts, woodcraft, and cultural festivals that highlight Minahasa's spiritual narratives. Meanwhile, the Bali Starling, with its exotic image, drives ecotourism, dance performances, and high-value souvenir products. Theoretically, the study of these two birds affirms that myth-based conservation operates not only at the ecological level but also as an arena of meaning-making, narrative contestation, and identity negotiation. This underscores the need for a multi-perspective approach to fully understand the transformations of values, practices, and policies that accompany these evolving mythic constructions.

However, this study focuses only on bird myths from two ethnic groups—Minahasa and Bali—so it does not represent the functions and meanings of myths from the thousands of other ethnic groups across the Indonesian archipelago. Recommendations for further research comparative studies of bird myths among other ethnic groups in Indonesia, using different theories and approaches, are needed to enrich and expand upon the existing body of research.

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In writing this article, we utilized AI to assist in drafting sentences; however, we consciously treated it solely as a supplementary tool rather than as research data.

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### Author Profiles

**Mayske Rinny Liando**, is a senior lecturer at Universitas Negeri Manado (Manado State University, North Sulawesi). Her research includes Language, Literature, and culture. She has published articles in several reputable international journals (Q1) and the National Journals Sinta 2 and Sinta 3. Email: mayske\_liando@unima.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5828-8982>

**Ni Wayan Sumitri**, is a lecturer at Universitas PGRI Mahadewa Indonesia. Doctoral degree in Linguistics. Has written articles in Sinta 2 national journals including Jurnal Ranah: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa (2022); Jurnal Masyarakat Indonesia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Indonesia (2023); and the International Journal Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences (2024). Currently involved in international collaborative research with the Australian National University. Project title Languages of Barrier Islands, Sumatera: Description History and Typology, 2025-2027. Email: [wsumitri66@gmail.com](mailto:wsumitri66@gmail.com) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0191-8134>

**Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad** is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), specializing in traditional Malay literature. Her research focuses on philology and Malay manuscript studies, as well as literature and culture. She also conducts research on the diplomatic relations of Malay sultanates in Malay masterpieces and Malay letters. During her tenure at UPM, she has authored numerous academic articles in national and international journals. Email: [salmahjan@upm.edu.my](mailto:salmahjan@upm.edu.my) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4143-8549>

**Fince Leny Sambeka** is a professor and still actively teaches in the Japanese Language Education undergraduate program and the Indonesian Language Education Postgraduate program at Manado State University. She has participated in trainings both domestically and internationally, including the Japanese Teachers Training program in Tokyo and writing articles for international journals at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. Her research focuses on linguistics, and she has written numerous academic articles in

national. Email: [fincesambeka@unima.ac.id](mailto:fincesambeka@unima.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6517-5115>

**Gerry Kadamehang** is a doctoral student at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. He is interested in research in Language, Literature, and Culture. He has conducted several studies and published them in the national journal Sinta 2. Several studies have also been published in international journals, and he is an active author. He most recently attended an international seminar at Education Hong Kong University in July 2025. Email: [gerrykadamehang.2025@student.uny.ac.id](mailto:gerrykadamehang.2025@student.uny.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5038-8629>

## Constructing Religious Moderation and Multiculturalism: A Case Study of Pulukan Village, Jembrana Regency, West Bali

A.A.Ngurah Anom Kumbara<sup>1\*</sup> , Nuning Indah Pratiwi<sup>2</sup> ,  
Susilo Edi Purwanto<sup>3</sup> , I Wayan Suardiana<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1,4</sup> Universitas Udayana, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Pendidikan Nasional, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Universitas Hindu Negeri Gede Puja, Mataram, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Jembrana Regency in West Bali is a multicultural region shaped by long-standing religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity, further reinforced by its historical ties with neighboring Java through migration and trade. Using Pulukan Village as a case study, this research examines how religious moderation and multiculturalism are constructed in everyday community life. The study employs a qualitative approach combining critical ethnography and ethnomethodology. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving religious leaders, customary leaders, village officials, and community members from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. The findings show that religious moderation is sustained not only through formal policies but also through everyday practices, including cooperation, interfaith participation in community activities, and dialogue-based conflict resolution. Multiculturalism is strengthened through continuous interaction, adaptation, identity negotiation, and mutual recognition of differences. This study demonstrates how locally rooted values and participatory community practices can foster social cohesion and provides insights for promoting religious moderation in other multicultural settings.

**Keywords:** religious moderation; articulation identity; multiculturalism; Pulukan Village

### 1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the world's most culturally diverse nations, characterised by the coexistence of hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, religions, and local traditions. This diversity constitutes an important foundation of national identity but does not automatically produce harmonious social relations.

\* Corresponding author's email: anom\_kumbara@unud.ac.id

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Diversity develops into multiculturalism only when differences are recognised, equality is respected, and individuals and communities can maintain their identities while participating in a shared social and political order (Parekh, 2000). In this sense, multiculturalism extends beyond demographic plurality to encompass the social processes through which mutual respect, inclusion, and justice are continuously negotiated. Religious moderation complements this perspective by promoting balanced and inclusive religious attitudes that uphold both freedom of belief and respect for the rights of others. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs conceptualises religious moderation through four interrelated dimensions: national commitment, tolerance, rejection of violence, and accommodation of local culture (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019; Junaedi, 2019).

Rather than being shaped solely through state policies or formal religious discourse, multiculturalism and religious moderation are also constructed through everyday social practices. Wise and Velayutham (2009) describe this process as *everyday multiculturalism*, referring to routine interactions through which people from different cultural and religious backgrounds negotiate coexistence in daily life. Mutual assistance, neighbourhood cooperation, food sharing, participation in social ceremonies, and informal communication foster trust, reciprocity, and social intimacy while allowing communities to maintain their distinct identities. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding religious relations in Indonesian villages, where everyday interaction often plays a more significant role than formal institutions in sustaining social cohesion.

Jembrana Regency, located in the western part of Bali, provides an important setting for examining these processes. As the gateway connecting Bali and Java through Gilimanuk Port, Jembrana has historically experienced intensive migration, trade, labour mobility, and intercultural exchange. These historical processes have produced a socially plural region where Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and other religious communities interact in everyday life. According to population data for 2025, Hindus constitute about 71% of the regency's population and Muslims about 27%, while smaller Christian, Buddhist, and Confucian communities contribute to its religious diversity (Dinas Kependudukan dan Pencatatan Sipil Kabupaten Jembrana, 2026a).

Within this multicultural setting, Pulukan Village represents a particularly significant case. Historical records and local oral traditions indicate that the village was established through successive waves of migration beginning in the late nineteenth century, initially by settlers from Air Kuning, followed by migrants from East Java, Madura, Karangasem, Nusa Penida, and Bugis-

Makassar communities. Consequently, Pulukan developed as a village shaped by migration rather than by a single ethnic origin. Today, approximately 70% of its residents depend on agriculture, while the population consists predominantly of Balinese Hindus (54.6%) and Javanese, Madurese, and Bugis-Makassarese Muslims (45.1%), with a small Christian minority. This relatively balanced religious composition has created an everyday social environment in which different communities interact continuously through farming, local markets, customary organisations, neighbourhood associations, and religious and cultural events. Such conditions make Pulukan an appropriate site for examining how religious moderation is embedded in everyday multicultural practices.

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of local culture in maintaining interreligious harmony in Jembrana. Sabarudin and Arif (2019) found that local wisdom functions as an important social bond among religious communities in Kampung Loloan, while Gede Agung et al. (2024) showed that intercultural communication, local cultural activities, and community leadership strengthen social cohesion in multicultural communities. Focusing specifically on Pulukan, Putri et al. (2020) identified multicultural values such as *Tat Twam Asi, menyama braya*, mutual cooperation, and participation in one another's social and cultural activities as important mechanisms for maintaining harmonious relations between religious communities. Their study also explained how these values are transmitted through processes of socialisation and enculturation.

Despite these important contributions, previous studies have largely described multicultural values and educational processes without examining how everyday cultural practices actively construct religious moderation. Limited attention has been given to the ways in which local traditions are negotiated by majority and minority communities, institutionalised by families, religious leaders, customary organisations, and village authorities, and sustained amid contemporary social change. Likewise, the relationship between multicultural practices and the four dimensions of religious moderation—national commitment, tolerance, rejection of violence, and accommodation of local culture—has received little scholarly attention.

This study addresses these gaps by examining Pulukan Village as a multicultural social space in which religious moderation is continuously produced through everyday interaction. Drawing upon the perspectives of critical ethnography and ethnomethodology, it investigates how local practices such as *ngejot, menyama braya, nguwopin*, mutual cooperation, and participation in religious and cultural activities become mechanisms for negotiating religious difference and strengthening social cohesion. By connecting everyday multiculturalism with the Indonesian concept of religious moderation, this

study contributes both theoretically and empirically to understanding how interreligious harmony is socially constructed at the community level. It also offers a community-based model of religious moderation that may inform broader discussions of multicultural coexistence in Indonesia and other culturally diverse societies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Religious Moderation and Multiculturalism*

Religious moderation refers to a way of understanding and practising religion that maintains balance, justice, and proportionality while rejecting both excessive rigidity and the relativisation of religious commitment (Junaedi, 2019). It does not require believers to weaken their religious convictions; rather, it regulates how those convictions are expressed within a socially diverse environment. In Indonesia, the concept has developed from an academic and theological discourse into a national policy framework. The Ministry of Religious Affairs identifies four principal indicators of religious moderation: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). Its institutional significance was subsequently reinforced through Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023, which positions religious moderation as a shared responsibility of government institutions, religious communities, and citizens. Consequently, religious moderation should be examined not only as an individual attitude but also as a social process embedded in institutions, public policy, and everyday intergroup relations.

Religious moderation is closely related to multiculturalism, although the two concepts are analytically distinct. Multiculturalism recognises cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity as a legitimate and valuable component of collective life (Kymlicka, 1995; Hoon, 2017). It rejects forced assimilation and stresses equal recognition, participation, and access to public resources. Religious moderation provides the ethical and practical orientation through which this diversity can be managed without eliminating religious differences. In the Indonesian context, this relationship is grounded in Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which place unity and diversity within the same national framework. Nevertheless, formal recognition alone does not automatically produce harmonious relations. Prejudice, unequal representation, social segregation, and competition over public legitimacy may continue beneath dominant narratives of tolerance.

Religious moderation should not be understood merely as a set of normative indicators or a government programme, but as a social process that is continuously constructed, negotiated, practised, and contested. Huda et al.,

(2017) and Mukhoyyaroh et al., (2025) shows that tolerance in Indonesia often operates within moral, political, and religious boundaries shaped by dominant groups. Therefore, studies of religious moderation must examine not only social harmony but also power relations, majority–minority positions, limits of social acceptance, and forms of discrimination hidden behind narratives of harmony.

Recent studies therefore emphasise the importance of lived and everyday forms of moderation. The concept of everyday multiculturalism directs attention to routine encounters in workplaces, neighbourhoods, markets, schools, and community organisations, where people learn to negotiate differences through practical interaction rather than through formal dialogue alone (Wise & Velayutham 2009). Everyday encounters may create familiarity, interpersonal trust, and a shared sense of responsibility that transcend formal religious boundaries.

Studies of Hindu–Muslim relations in Bali demonstrate that interreligious relations are dynamic. Karim (2016) found that these relations may take the form of cooperation, accommodation, and tolerance, but may also involve competition and conflict. Social harmony is supported by a history of interaction, shared economic interests, effective communication, and mechanisms of social integration.

Wiguna et al. (2024) examined the religious moderation index among 285 students at MAN 1 Jembrana using four indicators: national commitment, tolerance, nonviolence, and an accommodating attitude toward local culture. The study reported a religious moderation index of 3.45, which was classified as very high. More specifically, national commitment scored 3.10, tolerance 3.46, nonviolence 3.49, and acceptance of local culture 3.51. These findings indicate that religious moderation in Jembrana is strengthened through education, the habituation of tolerance, participation in local cultural practices, and institutional support. Nevertheless, the study recommends further strengthening Pancasila values, preventing radicalism, respecting other religious beliefs, and promoting cooperation with religious and customary leaders. Also, suggest that religious moderation becomes socially meaningful when it is enacted through repeated cooperation. Such practices transform tolerance from a passive willingness to coexist into an active capacity to communicate, cooperate, and assume responsibility for members of other religious and ethnic groups.

## ***2.2 Articulation of Religiosity and Cultural Identity***

Religiosity concerns the extent to which religious beliefs, rituals, knowledge, experiences, and ethical consequences are internalised and practised in individual and collective life (Glock & Stark, 1965). However, religiosity is never expressed in a social vacuum. Its meanings and manifestations are shaped

by language, cultural conventions, social institutions, historical memories, and relations of power. The articulation of religiosity therefore refers to the process through which religious commitments are expressed, connected to cultural meanings, and positioned within a particular social context.

Hall (1996) views articulation as a contingent process of connecting elements that do not possess a fixed or necessary relationship. Religious values, ethnic identities, local traditions, and political interests may be connected in different ways under different historical and social conditions. Similarly, Li (2000) explains identity articulation as a process of positioning and claim-making through which groups define themselves, negotiate recognition, and respond to available political and cultural opportunities. Identity is consequently not merely inherited but actively articulated in relation to other identities and structures of authority.

Cultural identity is thus not a static inheritance but an ongoing construction produced through shared memories, symbols, traditions, language, and social interaction. In multiethnic societies, identity is continually renegotiated through migration, intermarriage, generational change, economic exchange, cultural hybridity, and unequal access to authority and representation (Bhabha, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Individuals and communities may retain particular religious and ethnic affiliations while simultaneously developing a shared local identity based on residence, neighbourhood relations, economic interdependence, and participation in village life.

Recent research in Bali supports this relational understanding of cultural identity. Wulan et al. (2023) show that Muslim identity in North Bali develops through accommodation and interaction with the surrounding Balinese cultural environment. Rather than producing complete assimilation, these interactions enable Muslim communities to preserve their religious identity while participating in Balinese cultural life. Pradnyantari et al., (2025) likewise find that social harmony among Balinese, Javanese, and Madurese communities in Jembrana is sustained through acculturation, interreligious communication, shared traditions, and the formation of an inclusive local identity that crosses ethnic boundaries. Meanwhile, Sosiowati et al., (2025) examined the preservation of the Loloan Malay language through the religious rituals of Burdah and Ngelenggang. The study found that Loloan Malay, as a marker of identity among the Muslim minority community in Jembrana, is maintained through cultural materials, the recitation of religious verses, ritual communication, and the transmission of tradition to younger generations.

From a religious-political perspective, the presence of a faith-affiliated orphanage in Pulukan, despite the religion's small local following, may represent symbolic religious articulation. It does not necessarily signal conflict or deliberate

expansion, but raises questions about religious visibility, recognition, humanitarian service, institutional authority, and majority–minority interpretations of religious institutions in shared social space. Its meaning should therefore be derived from local narratives and interactions, not predetermined assumptions. The Pulukan case is analytically valuable because it examines religious moderation, multiculturalism, and identity articulation as interconnected processes. Harmony is understood not as permanent or conflict-free, but as a negotiated achievement continually reproduced through mutual recognition, equitable participation, cultural accommodation, dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful management of difference across religious and cultural groups.

### 3. Research Methods and Theory

#### 3.1 Method

This study employs a multi-method approach combining critical ethnography (Madison, 2005; Thompson, 2015) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). Critical ethnography is used to interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in everyday social actions, while ethnomethodology examines how individuals construct, maintain, and understand social order through routine practices. Social reality is therefore viewed not as an objective entity but as something continuously produced through interaction.

Ethnomethodology is applied to investigate how Pulukan residents negotiate religious and cultural values through conversations, social activities, and communal rituals. Two central concepts are indexicality and reflexivity. Indexicality refers to the context-dependent meanings of utterances and actions, whereas reflexivity indicates that social actions both reflect and actively construct reality. These concepts guide the interpretation of observations and in-depth interviews. Religious moderation, identity articulation, and multiculturalism are consequently understood not merely as internalized values but as products of everyday social practices.

Data were collected from August 10 to 25, 2025, through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of relevant socio-religious documents. Informants were purposively selected based on their structural and functional roles, including traditional village heads (*bendesa adat*), village officials, religious leaders, fishermen, farmers, and other residents. Data analysis followed three interactive stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These processes were conducted simultaneously to ensure contextual accuracy, reliability, objectivity, and validity. Integrating these methodological perspectives enables a holistic understanding of how religious moderation and multiculturalism are experienced, negotiated, and transmitted within Pulukan's multireligious community.

### 3.2 Theory

This study applies Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice (1984, 1991) and Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). Bourdieu's perspective reveals that apparently harmonious religious relations may contain ideological contestation among actors seeking economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital through particular strategies and practices. His framework emphasizes the interrelationship between habitus, field, capital, agents, structures, and power.

Habitus refers to historically formed and enduring dispositions that shape how individuals perceive, think, feel, and act. Past experiences are internalized as schemes that guide individual and collective practices without completely determining them (Bourdieu, 1984, 1991). The field, represented in this study by Pulukan Village, is a structured social arena governed by particular rules and power relations. Within this arena, actors compete, exchange, and convert cultural, social, economic, and symbolic capital to obtain or maintain positions and influence.

Schutz's phenomenology is used to examine how Pulukan residents construct and interpret their everyday lifeworld. It emphasizes subjectivity, common-sense knowledge, and practical reasoning through which social realities acquire meaning. Community members interpret and objectify social life through accumulated experiences, shared knowledge, and everyday interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1973).

Phenomenology also highlights typification, through which individuals classify experiences and situations, and language, which transmits meanings and socially shared interpretations (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). Religious practices in Pulukan are therefore understood not merely as observable activities but as cognitive and ideological constructions articulated through language. Combining social practice theory and phenomenology allows the study to analyze both power relations and subjective meanings underlying religious moderation, cultural identity, and multicultural coexistence.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

Before analysing religious moderation and multiculturalism in Pulukan Village, it is important to briefly describe the village as the social and historical setting of this study.

Pulukan Village is located in Pekutatan District, Jembrana Regency, West Bali, approximately 3 km from the subdistrict capital, 26 km from the regency capital, and 60 km from Denpasar. According to village records and local oral history, the area remained dense forest until around 1874, when it was opened for settlement by pioneers from Air Kuning, Jembrana, led by Pak Daris and Pak

Rais with permission from the Dutch colonial administration and the support of the King of Jembrana. A second wave of migrants from East Java and Madura arrived in 1899, followed by settlers from Karangasem, Nusa Penida, and Bugis-Makassar communities. Around 1910, the growing settlement formally established the village administration, with Pak Daris serving as the first *mekel* (village head). Local tradition also traces the name *Pulukan* to a Dutch colonial directive requiring settlers to live in a centralized settlement, reflecting the village's early colonial history.

Today, Pulukan represents a distinctive multicultural community whose social fabric has been shaped by successive waves of migration and long-term interethnic interaction. Village Profile Data (2020–2024) record a population of 5,036 in 2024. About 70% of residents depend on agriculture, including rice cultivation and plantation crops such as coconut, clove, cocoa, and vanilla, while the remainder work as labourers, artisans, private-sector employees, and civil servants. The population consists predominantly of Balinese Hindus, alongside Javanese, Madurese, and Bugis-Makassarese Muslims, with Christians forming a small minority. This ethnic and religious diversity, combined with a shared agrarian livelihood and a long history of coexistence, has created a social environment in which interfaith relations are embedded not only in formal religious practices but also in everyday cooperation, customary institutions, and local cultural values. This historical and social context makes Pulukan an appropriate case for examining the dynamics of religious moderation and multiculturalism in contemporary Bali.

#### ***4.1 Forms of Articulation of Religiosity in Pulukan Village***

##### ***4.1.1 Interfaith Participation in Socio-Religious Activities***

Interfaith participation in socio-religious activities represents a tangible expression of solidarity that transcends theological boundaries. In Pulukan Village, for instance, interactions between Hindu and Muslim communities extend beyond their respective ritual spheres into collaborative social practices rooted in the value of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). Activities such as the construction of *balai banjar* (community halls), road repairs, and disaster response are carried out collectively without distinction of religion. Examples of disaster-mitigation activities include those carried out in Banjar Ledok, Pulukan Village, which actively involve all community elements (the Village Apparatus, BUMDes, and the Village Consultative Body (BPD) in disaster response and risk-reduction efforts. Regular community clean-up activities, such as the Friday Clean-Up Program, are also routinely conducted in the Pulukan Village area and at the Village Monument as an expression of collective care and preparedness toward environmental changes that may increase disaster risks,

such as local flooding caused by waste accumulation. In this context, interfaith involvement demonstrates that social solidarity often outweighs identity-based divisions.

One of the primary articulations of religiosity can be observed in Hindu religious ceremonies (*odalan*), such as, subak temple ceremonies, the village office, and cremation rituals (*ngaben*), which serve to reinforce spiritual identity while maintaining social cohesion (McKay, 2023). Collaboration in *Subak* temple ceremonies in Pulukan Village reflects the deep communal values of Balinese culture, where farmers, village leaders, and temple priests work together to maintain the balance between nature, humans, and the divine. These ceremonies are organized collectively through the Subak organization, with each member contributing time and resources to prepare offerings, clean irrigation channels, and coordinate rituals offering to Dewi Shri, the goddess of fertility and prosperity. The collaboration extends beyond religious duties, strengthening social harmony and mutual trust among villagers. Through this shared responsibility, the Subak system in Pulukan not only preserves agricultural sustainability but also reinforces the living tradition of gotong royong as a form of spiritual and ecological stewardship. In this context, Nurun, a farmer originally from Madura and a member of the subak, explained:

“As residents of Pulukan and members of the *subak*, we always work together during ceremonies held at the *Subak* temple, as well as in maintaining the irrigation channels that serve our rice fields.” (Interview, August 15, 2025).

At the same time, the presence of Muslim and Christian groups in Pulukan highlights the space for diversity, where communal prayer practices (*shalat berjamaah*), Islamic religious celebrations such as Idul Fitri and Idul Adha, as well as Christian observances such as Christmas, are also recognized as integral components of the village’s religious landscape. Such interreligious cooperation can also be found in several multireligious villages in Jembrana Regency, including Ekasari, Blimbingsari, and Gumbrih Village in Pekutatan District.

This pattern of participation reflects two important dimensions. First, as a means of social integration, joint activities cultivate a sense of belonging to the village and strengthen community cohesion. Second, as a cultural strategy, interfaith cooperation articulates values of harmony and tolerance in concrete practices, thereby minimizing potential conflict. The presence of religious leaders also plays a pivotal role in directing participation, for example through calls for peace and reinforcement of the *menyama braya* principle that is widely embraced by all residents.

These practices demonstrate that religious moderation in Pulukan operates not only at the level of discourse, sermons, or government policies, but is also embodied in recurring social actions. Local traditions provide spaces of encounter that enable community members to build mutual trust without having to relinquish their religious identities. In this context, local culture is not merely a legacy of the past, but a social resource that is actively mobilized to manage differences. Interfaith participation in socio-religious activities has thus become a hallmark of Pulukan's plural society. The involvement of Hindu and Muslim communities extends beyond ritual observances into shared social engagement that reinforces togetherness. For example, Wayan Armawa as village leader, explaining that during the annual Hindu ceremonies such as *Ngerupuk* with *ogoh-ogoh* parades, and *Nyepi*, Muslim residents assist with traffic management, logistical preparations, or simply attend to offer moral support. Empirically, this phenomenon can be observed in the annual *ogoh-ogoh* procession, a Hindu ritual held on the eve of the Caka New Year (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. *Ogoh-ogoh* parade involving elementary school students from different religious backgrounds, fostering awareness and the practice of religious moderation from an early age in Pulukan Village (Source: Pulukan Village Profile, 2020–2024).



Figure 2. Religious moderation in practice, demonstrated through the Hindu *ogoh-ogoh* parade, which is supported by members of other religious communities in Pulukan Village (Source: Pulukan Village Profile, 2020–2024).

Conversely, during Islamic holidays such as Idul-Fitri, Idul Adha, and *Rokat Tase* (sea harvest ritual), Hindu villagers often take part in cleaning mosque compounds, preparing communal meals, and preparing ritual equipment or visiting Muslim neighbour as a gesture of fraternity. This phenomenon affirms the findings of the research Anwar in Indonesia (2021), and Wulan et al., (2023), studies et Nort Bali, that levels of religious moderation tend to be higher in societies with frequent interreligious interactions across social, economic, and cultural domains.

These patterns show that socio-religious activities provide productive spaces for interfaith interaction, strengthening social cohesion and collective belonging. Religious leaders sustain such participation by promoting *menyama braya*, enabling harmony to prevail over differences. Interfaith involvement is therefore not merely symbolic but functions as a social mechanism regulating communal ethics, negotiation, and cultural hybridity (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Bhabha, 1994). This supports Geertz (1973) and Woodward (2011), who argue that religiosity interacts with cultural identity and local norms to maintain social

#### 4.1.2 *Integration of Local Cultural Elements in Religious Rituals*

The integration of local cultural elements into religious rituals in Pulukan illustrates the close relationship between spirituality and cultural identity. The articulation of religiosity is reflected in how religious communities adopt local cultural elements into their practices. For example, Bugis Muslims, during certain religious events, often use the Balinese language to greet participants from different faiths or adapt their dress codes in accordance with local norms of modesty when attending customary ceremonies. Similarly, Hindu communities demonstrate openness by inviting local Muslim leaders as guests at village rituals.

These practices resonate with Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019), framework on religious moderation, which emphasizes accommodation of local culture as a pillar of interreligious harmony. Such integration not only affirms cultural adaptability but also demonstrates how religious communities in Pulukan creatively articulate their faith in ways that respect and reinforce shared cultural values. For example: *Megibung* activities are held at the time of breaking the fast to enliven the month of Ramadhan 1443 Hijriah, 2025 years. At the same moment, especially in Idul Hadha celebration, muslim residents shared various foods with their Hindu neighbours as an expression of their religious fellowship and social bonding.

The practice of *ngejot*, or the reciprocal sharing of food, constitutes an important form of everyday interreligious interaction within the community. A muslim resident Agus Muin described this practice as follows :

“As a Muslim resident who happens to live next door to Mrs. Suri, my family shares food with her family during Idul Adha and Idul Fitri. Conversely, during the Galungan celebration, Mrs. Suri also shares food, particularly traditional cakes, with our family. This practice has continued for decades, which has helped maintain harmonious relations between us as neighbors.” (Interview, August 20, 2025)

This testimony illustrates that *ngejot* is not merely an act of exchanging food, but also a socially embedded tradition that strengthens reciprocal relationships between neighbors of different religious backgrounds. Such traditions were once widely practised across Bali but have now largely disappeared in urban areas. In Pulukan, however, they remain a common part of everyday community life. The continuous exchange during Islamic and Hindu religious celebrations reflects mutual recognition, respect, and willingness to participate symbolically in one another’s moments of celebration. Through this practice, religious differences do not become barriers to social interaction but instead provide opportunities to reinforce solidarity and peaceful coexistence.

The tradition should therefore be preserved because it plays an important role in maintaining harmonious relations among neighbors despite their different religious beliefs. Its continuity over several decades demonstrates that interreligious tolerance is not only expressed through formal discourse or institutional programs, but is also practiced through simple, recurring, and meaningful acts in everyday life. In this context, *ngejot* functions as a form of social reciprocity that nurtures mutual trust, strengthens communal bonds, and contributes to the sustainability of religious moderation at the local community level.

Similarly, collectively the Java Muslim community integrates local cultural traditions into the celebration of Idul Fitri or the Prophet's Birthday (*Maulid Nabi*), such as through the recitation of *barzanji* and collective feasts organized through *gotong royong*. These practices demonstrate that religion and foods exchange traditions in Pulukan mutually enrich one another in sustaining social cohesion.

Thus, these practices highlight two key aspects. First, the integration of culture into rituals serves as a medium of tradition trans mission, as younger generations are not only introduced to spiritual dimensions but also to local arts, symbols, values, and identity. Second, such integration reinforces social cohesion, as rituals become venues for interaction and encounters among residents of different backgrounds. This reality is in line with the acculturation model (Barry, 1997), and the third space (Bhabha, 1994), that the integration strategy is an ideal form, because it allows society to maintain its cultural identity while building active participation in the dominant culture and building a shared social space.

## 4.2 Forms of Articulation of Cultural Identity

Pulukan Village, in Pekutatan District, Jembrana Regency, Bali, is not only a meeting ground for various religions but also for diverse ethnic and cultural identities. Its population consists of indigenous Balinese Hindus, Muslim communities of Bugis, Javanese, and Madurese origin, as well as a relatively small Christian community. This configuration makes Pulukan a microcosm of cultural plurality, where identities do not exist in isolation but are continuously negotiated and articulated in everyday life. The forms of articulation of cultural identity in Pulukan will be described as follows.

### 4.2.1 Language and Arts as Media of Integration and Differentiation

Language and the arts constitute some of the most flexible markers of cultural identity in Pulukan. Residents commonly use the Balinese language in public interactions, particularly in spaces such as markets or village meetings, even though at home they may speak their respective mother tongues (Balinese, Javanese, Bugis

and Madurese). Bilingualism or even multilingualism becomes a social skill that facilitates cross-group interactions. From S. Hall (1996) perspective, this practice represents an articulation of identity in which language serves dual functions: strengthening solidarity with the broader community while simultaneously preserving ethnic distinctiveness in private spaces. While Bourdieu (1991), through his concept of *habitus*, explains that language and the arts are everyday practices that simultaneously consolidate social and symbolic positions.

In daily interactions, Pulukan residents often use a mix of Balinese, Javanese, and Madurese. For instance, in a market conversation, a vendor might say: “*Niki murah je*” (Bali) → “This is really cheap, isn’t it?”, “*Sak akehé beli*” (Jawa) → “Just buy as much as you can.”, “*Ben mareh masak di dapur*” (Madura) → “Later you’ll get tired of cooking in the kitchen.” Such linguistic mixing is not merely practical communication but also reflects the mosaic of multiethnic identities that distinguishes Pulukan from other villages. In ritual contexts, Balinese tends to dominate, affirming cultural cohesion, while in economic spaces, mixed languages signify adaptation and openness.

Art serves to strengthen collective integration through ritual practices and creativity. The Rejang and Legong dance performed during *odalan* temple ceremonies and Gandrung dance during wedding ceremonies or national day celebrations involves women of various ages, creating intergenerational bridges. Pulukan’s *gamelan* features distinctive rhythms that combine classical Balinese patterns with improvisational beats influenced by its coastal setting. The carvings on temple shrines (*pelinggih*) also display differentiation: motifs of marine flora and small boats adorn sacred structures, signifying Pulukan’s identity as a fishing village with unique cultural character. Collaborative performances of the Hindu-Balinese: Legong dance and the Islamic Gandrung and Rebana are frequently staged together during national independence celebrations and village festivals, functioning as cultural negotiations (S. Hall, 1996) in performative spaces. Thus, the analysis of mixed languages and local arts demonstrates a performative arena and as *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1991).

In the arts, collaborations between the Banyuwangi Gandrung Dance and the Balinese Legong used *Rindik* or *Tetabuhan* (traditional Balinese gamelan music), not only performed in formal celebration, but also are often performed at weddings and cultural celebrations involving Hindus and Muslims. In Hindu religious rituals, for example, the emphasis is not solely on prayers and offerings but also on the incorporation of traditional music (*tetabuhan*), dance, and customary attire as offerings to *Sang Hyang Widhi* (God). These cultural elements render rituals not only sacred but also vital spaces for the preservation of local arts, and social integration. Empirically, this phenomenon is visually depicted in Figure 3.



Figure 3. A collaborative performance of East Java's *Gandrung* dance and the Balinese *Legong* dance during the Pulukan Youth Organization (*Karang Taruna*) anniversary and Indonesia's Independence Day celebration, 17 August 2025 (Source: Document of the Anthropology Study Program, Udayana University, 2025).

In the context of multi-ethnic interaction dynamics, Hobsbawm (1992), emphasizes that traditions are “re-invented” in response to multicultural conditions. Pulukan not only integrates its residents through language and arts but also asserts differentiated identities amidst interactions with other communities. Cultural identity here is fluid, dynamic, and continuously produced through linguistic and artistic practices rooted in daily life as well as ritual. This empirical phenomenon affirms the findings of the studies (Sosiowati et al. 2025; Sutrisno, et al., 2024; Soraya, 2023), that language serves as an effective adaptive strategy in maintaining cultural identity in cross-cultural interactions: Bali-Melayu in Jembrana, Bali-Java in Banyuwangi and Bali-Muna in Southeast Sulawesi.

#### 4.2.2 Culinary Practices as a Space of Cultural Exchange

Culinary practices carry complex meanings because they not only serve to fulfil biological needs but also represent cultural identity, social values, historical experiences, religious symbols, and patterns of intergroup relations. Through the practices of preparing, serving, and sharing food, communities express their traditions, build solidarity, negotiate differences, and preserve collective memory (Saihu et al., 2019; Ariana et al., 2023). Culinary traditions in Pulukan provide a particularly fluid medium for articulating identity. Each ethnic group

preserves its distinctive cuisine—such as Bugis-style grilled fish, Balinese *lawar*, or Madurese *sate*—yet they also modify recipes so that dishes can be shared across religious boundaries without violating dietary restrictions. For instance, *lawar* is often prepared with chicken or vegetables so that it is permissible (*halal*) for Muslims. Food is thus not merely a means of biological sustenance but also a symbolic arena where cultural exchange unfolds dynamically. Each dish embodies narratives of identity that bring together the Balinese, Javanese, and Madurese communities who have long coexisted.

Traditional Balinese dishes such as *lawar*, *sate lilit*, and *jukut ares*, seasoned with *base genep* (a complete spice mix), frequently appear side by side with Javanese *pecel*, *rawon*, and Madurese *sate* (chicken or goat) during weddings and ritual ceremonies. This culinary juxtaposition creates a dialectic of taste that represents cultural integration. The practice of *ngejot* the sharing of food one day before celebration, during or after rituals functions not only as a religious act but also as a means of reinforcing solidarity across communities, as the shared dishes often combine elements from multiple culinary traditions.

Empirically, the interfaith and interethnic *ngejot* tradition has been practiced by the Pulukan community since the Dutch colonial period up to the present day. Informants (the hamlet head and the *bendesa adat* of Pulukan I Ketut Sarta) explained the following regarding the *ngejot* tradition:

“We, the residents of the village, especially in Pulukan Hamlet and Banjar Tinggi, where the Muslim population is larger than the Hindu population continue to carry out the *ngejot* reciprocally during annual celebrations, such as Nyepi and Galungan for Hindus, and Idul-Fitr for Muslims” So, we continue to preserve this tradition, not only because of the ancestral bonds of our forebears who worked together to build this village, but also as an expression of gratitude, fellowship, and kinship with relatives and neighbors, and in this way, *rukun* among us is sustainably maintained” (Interview, August 20, 2025).

Similarly, in public arenas, the morning market in Pulukan serves as a concrete ethnographic site. As one Balinese vendor explained: “I sell *laklak* cake here, but next to me a Madurese friend sells *sate*—Sometimes people buy both for breakfast, so we complement each other.” This statement highlights the market as not just a space of economic transaction but also a social meeting point where cultural identities are connected through cuisine. Culinary practices, therefore, operate as a form of cultural brokerage (Geertz, 1973), where identities are negotiated through taste, recipes, and the act of sharing meals.

Food promotes integration by creating shared experiences across ethnic and religious boundaries while preserving culinary distinctions, including

spicy Madurese flavors, fiery Balinese seasonings, and sweeter Javanese tastes. Within Bourdieu's (1984) framework, cuisine functions as cultural capital that expresses status and legitimizes identity. Culinary practices in Pulukan therefore facilitate cultural exchange, celebrate diversity, and strengthen a fluid collective identity rooted in multiculturalism. This process reflects cultural hybridity, through which identities evolve through adaptation, interaction, and innovation (Bhabha, 1994).

#### 4.2.3 Participation in Intercommunity Customary and Religious Events

Another significant form of cultural identity articulation is the participation of residents across communities in customary and religious events. Although not directly involved in the rituals themselves, attendance as invited guests or as contributors of assistance is considered part of the social norm. For example, Muslims attend *ngaben* (Hindu cremation ceremonies) to provide moral support, while Hindus participate in *selamatan* gatherings held by Muslim families. Similarly, during Islamic celebrations such as *Mauludan* and *Idul-Fitri*, as well as Hindu festivities such as *Nyepi* and *Galungan*, Muslim groups both participate in and respect the norms of the celebrations. As one informant, Bu Muadah, a Muslim woman, explained:

"When Nyepi belongs to the Balinese Hindus, we respect it, even though we can still play in the street together with Balinese neighbors. Actually, during Nyepi, because it is a holiday, we have more time for social interaction. Muslim prayers also continue, with mutual tolerance." (Interview conducted on August 20, 2025).

This narrative illustrates the formation of situated identities (Yuval-Davis, 2011), where individuals adapt the expression of their identities according to the social context and the relational field in which the event takes place. Intercommunity participation in customary and religious activities in Pulukan represents a manifestation of social cohesion built on the principle of multiculturalism. The presence of Balinese, Javanese, and Madurese ethnic groups in the same social space fosters a unique pattern of participation, where cultural boundaries do not hinder involvement in public rituals. As one Madurese villager Nurun stated:

"We participate in *ngayah* (voluntary service) at the Subak Temple, even though we do not pray. It feels like a form of gratitude because we have been accepted to live here" (Interview, August 20, 2025).

This quotation illustrates that participation does not necessarily take spiritual form but rather social contribution to collective harmony. Conversely,

during the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday (*Maulid Nabi*), Balinese villagers (*pecalang*) often help by lending equipment, managing traffic, or joining communal feasts.

These practices reflect reciprocity that strengthens solidarity across religious and ethnic boundaries. Through Turner's (1969) concept of *communitas*, shared experiences transcend formal structures and reduce social segregation. Such participation creates bridging social capital and cultural capital that connect diverse groups and sustain village harmony (Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1984). Although residents retain distinct religious identities, they cooperate through social contributions. Thus, Pulukan's rituals and *gotong royong* constitute social arenas where intercommunity solidarity and lived multiculturalism are continuously reproduced.

#### 4.2.4 Inclusive Management of Social Spaces

The inclusive management of social spaces in Pulukan reflects a concrete practice of multiculturalism rooted in local wisdom. Social spaces such as *balai banjar* (community hall), the village hall, markets, and ritual areas are not owned exclusively by a single community but are managed openly for all ethnic groups coexisting in the village—Balinese, Javanese, and Madurese. For instance, the *balai banjar*, traditionally used for customary meetings, is also utilized by Muslim communities for social activities such as *pengajian* (religious study gatherings) or family weddings, with the approval and support of customary leaders. As one Balinese elder, Pak Nengah Kayun noted:

"This banjar belongs to everyone". If it is used for good purposes, it is open to all." Likewise, village roads are often lent to Muslim residents for wedding processions, illustrating flexibility in spatial governance that strengthens social cohesion. (Interview, August 20, 2025).

In the context of village government management, the village head explained that some Pulukan village employees are Muslim, even though we are the majority. The involvement of Muslims in government has been ongoing for a long time, stemming from the village's founding.

At the village market, intergroup interactions occur intensively. Madurese traders sell *sate* and other specialties, Javanese traders offer *tempeh*, while Balinese vendors sell traditional cakes (*jajan*). The market thus becomes an inclusive social space, enabling everyday cultural exchanges through transactions, conversations, and food-sharing practices. Such inclusivity not only reduces segregation but also fosters bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000), which connects differences across groups. An ethnographic account highlights how inclusive space helps defuse potential conflict. A minor tension once arose

over the use of loudspeakers for a Muslim *pengajian* coinciding with Hindu *gamelan* rehearsals at the *balai banjar*. Instead of escalating, customary and religious leaders met at the *balai banjar* and agreed on an alternating schedule. As a Javanese resident, Agus Rahman, explained:

“If we had insisted, it would have led to conflict. But because we had a common space to talk, the problem was resolved.” (Interview, August 25, 2025).

This case demonstrates that inclusive spaces are not only arenas for interaction but also mechanisms of conflict resolution through deliberation. Empirically, such practices align with the frameworks of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), the public sphere (Habermas, 1989); notion of community dynamics (Turner, 1969). The management of social spaces in Pulukan represents practical agreements that create and sustain social order while serving as arenas for inclusive identity articulation.

Open public spaces allow equal participation in social and religious activities, representing lived experiences of equality in collective domains. By reducing group dominance and opening opportunities for dialogue across identities (Barry, 1997), Pulukan’s inclusive spatial governance is not merely an adaptive strategy to diversity but a means of fostering social resilience. In this sense, inclusivity transforms social spaces (Bhabha, 1994) into collective assets where differences are not divisive but instead become sources of strength in maintaining village harmony (Hobsbawm, n.d. 2003).

### ***4.3 Potential Drivers of Building Religious Moderation and Multiculturalism***

#### ***4.3.1 Historical Factors in the Formation of Multicultural Identity***

Historical factors play a crucial role in shaping multicultural identity in Pulukan Village. Its geographical location along the Jembrana coast has made it a strategic trade point since the era of the West Bali kingdom. This coastal route connected Pulukan with communities in East Java and Madura through the mobility of traders, fishermen, and migrant workers. Such historical processes created cross-ethnic interactions that continue to the present (Geertz, 1973) emphasizes that migration and economic exchanges not only affect social structures but also shape cultural patterns transmitted across generations.

In addition to migration, Dutch colonialism since 1898, significantly influenced Pulukan’s social configuration (Pulukan Village Profile, 2020-2024). The implementation of forced cultivation systems and coffee plantations in Jembrana attracted migrants from Karangasem, Nusa Penida, and Java, while the Dutch also recruited plantation laborers, further layering Pulukan’s multicultural landscape. S. Hall (1996), explains that cultural identity is shaped

by collective historical experiences, including colonialism and migration. In Pulukan, the memory of colonial history not only left an economic legacy but also fostered solidarity among groups who collectively endured injustice.

Empiric evidence reveals that the presence of Bali, Madurese, Bugis, and Javanese communities in Pulukan dates back to early 20th-century fishing migrations and continued into the Dutch colonial period. These groups settled near the coast, built modest homes, and gradually integrated into village life. As one village elder recalled: “The Madurese and Bugis have long been here, since my grandfather was a child. They joined in fishing, took part in community work, so they have long been considered part of us.” Interview conducted with Wayan Kari on August 25, 2025).

This testimony underscores that diversity in Pulukan is not a recent phenomenon but the result of a long historical accumulation of interactions. Historical factors thus form both the foundation of cohesion and social differentiation. Migration generated interethnic connections, while colonialism cultivated collective awareness of solidarity. According to Bourdieu (1984,1991), these historical experiences have been internalized into habitus, evident in practices of gotong royong, linguistic hybridity (Balinese, Javanese, Madurese), and patterns of participation in shared rituals. Pulukan therefore illustrates how history is not merely a narrative of the past but also a form of cultural capital that continues to shape the village’s multicultural identity today.

#### 4.3.2 *Inclusive Leadership in Pulukan’s Multicultural Context*

Inclusive leadership is a crucial factor in maintaining social harmony within multicultural communities such as Pulukan Village. The concept emphasizes the involvement of all groups without discrimination and prioritizes equality in decision-making. In practice, inclusive leadership is not only about formal representation but also about the leader’s ability to listen, mediate, and accommodate the ethnic and religious diversity present at the local level.

Interreligious relations in Pulukan generally unfold harmoniously, yet they are not entirely free from tensions. One source of contention has been cases of interfaith marriage, which have sparked sharp differences of opinion within the community. For some residents, such marriages are perceived as challenging customary norms and religious teachings, raising concerns over the erosion of cultural identity and spiritual values. Another sensitive issue has been the scheduling of Nyepi on 2025 coinciding with Friday prayers during major Islamic celebrations, which required accommodative solutions. This event occurred in 2025, when Nyepi fell on 29 March 2025 and Idul Fitri was expected on 31 March 2025 (1 Shawwal 1446 H).

Although the two celebrations did not fall on the exact same date, they took place in very close proximity within the same festive period, which was considered to have the potential for social tensions. Therefore, preventive measures were deemed necessary beforehand. Resolving these differences sometimes generates heated discussions and potential conflicts, necessitating active mediation by village authorities, religious leaders, and customary figures to find common ground and prevent divisions. The Bendesa Adat of Pulukan, I Ketut Sarta, has been serving since 2023, explained regarding such cases:

“In resolving cases of interfaith marriage and in arranging Nyepi celebrations that coincided with communal Friday prayers in the mosque for major Islamic holidays, we always reach decisions through deliberation. If decisions were imposed from above, we might feel excluded. But because we are invited to talk and deliberate together, we feel ownership of the decisions and thus are willing to comply.” (Interview, August 25, 2025).

This illustrates how local leadership in Pulukan demonstrates inclusivity by involving village officials, religious leaders, and customary figures in safeguarding social harmony. They serve not only as moral and cultural symbols but also as facilitators of communication among residents from diverse ethnic, religious, and professional backgrounds. By prioritizing open dialogue and deliberation, these leaders ensure that every voice has space to be heard, so that decisions reflect shared interests.

Inclusive leadership in Pulukan is also visible in the management of customary activities. During *odalan* (temple ceremonies), customary leaders openly accept assistance from non-Hindu villagers, for example: they contribute by providing offerings in the form of snacks and bottled drinking water as well as participating in maintaining security in the area during festival in the *ogoh-ogoh* parade held as part of the *Ngerupuk* ceremony before Nyepi. Conversely, Muslim leaders receive support from village authorities, Customary Village Security Unit (KAMDA), when organizing Idul Fitri and Maulid Nabi celebrations. These practices resonate with Turner’s view, where collective experiences transcend structural boundaries to foster a sense of togetherness (Turner, 1969).

Findings show that inclusive leadership in Pulukan is participatory, ensuring dialogue and minority representation (Habermas, 1989); adaptive, balancing local traditions and migrant needs; and symbolic, creating shared solidarity through cultural and religious cooperation (Laksana et al., 2022; Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1991).

#### 4.3.3 Social Norms Emphasizing Harmony (*Rukun*)

Social norms centered on *rukun* (harmony) provide a foundation for multicultural life in Pulukan Village. As an unwritten guideline, *rukun* regulates interactions among Balinese, Javanese, and Madurese residents while preventing conflict. Anthropologically, it functions as social glue (Durkheim, 1912), sustaining cohesion through tolerance, compromise, and mutual respect. In everyday life, minor disputes, including land-boundary disagreements, are resolved through mediation at the *balai banjar* or village office using *musyawarah*. As one customary leader I Ketut Sarta stated, “It is better to yield a little than to insist stubbornly until relationships break apart; what matters most is staying harmonious.” This illustrates how harmony is prioritized over individual interests. *Rukun* is also expressed through *gotong royong* during religious activities. Non-Hindu residents assist with food preparation during *odalan*, while Hindu residents participate in work for Maulid Nabi celebrations. These reciprocal practices reinforce solidarity and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000), allowing communities to coexist without erasing distinct identities.

Historically, *rukun* developed in the early twentieth century when Madurese fishermen and Javanese laborers migrated to the Jembrana coast. Although their arrival initially raised concerns about resource competition, customary leaders and migrant representatives formed an unwritten agreement: newcomers were accepted if they joined *ngayah* and respected local customs. This intergenerational norm performs three functions: regulative, by discouraging confrontation; integrative, by connecting communities through cooperation; and preventive, by promoting peaceful dispute resolution. In Habermas’s (1989) framework, *rukun* may be understood as a medium of rational communication through which consensus is produced.

In Pulukan, *rukun* is therefore both a cultural value and a historically reproduced social practice. It is reinforced through *gotong royong*, *menyama braya*, reciprocal visiting, and everyday interaction. Pak Ahmad explained that Hindu, Muslim, and Christian residents maintain close relations, visit during religious celebrations, discuss daily concerns, and support social welfare, including assistance provided by an orphanage to disadvantaged families (Interview, August 25, 2025). This account illustrates that social norms emphasizing harmony are not only internalized as abstract values but are actively enacted in daily communal life.

## 5. Conclusion

The articulation of religiosity in Pulukan village, Jembrana, Bali, represents a dynamic integration between religious values and cultural identity in the context of a multiethnic and multireligious society. By applying a multi-perspective approach in this micro study, it is found that religiosity articulation

in Pulukan is not confined to the private domain but emerges as a social force shaping norms, habitus, and interactions among residents. Here, religiosity is practiced contextually, where religious values are articulated through local cultural media and embedded in everyday interactions.

This phenomenon resonates with the principles of religious moderation—tolerance, inclusivity, cultural accommodation—as well as with multiculturalism, which regards diversity as a social asset to be managed equitably. That effective religious moderation in multiethnic societies is not solely the result of top-down approaches but emerges organically from collective experiences and social consensus. Nevertheless, the sustainability of this model faces challenges from globalization, generational shifts, and the potential politicization of identity. Therefore, strengthening multicultural education, facilitating interfaith dialogue, and promoting public policies sensitive to local contexts constitute strategic steps to preserve and expand the social harmony already established. In order to development of religious moderation in multi-ethnic societies grounded in multiculturalism, Desa Pulukan offers a micro-model of religious moderation that is potentially replicable elsewhere, provided that historical interactions, inclusive leadership, and social norms emphasizing harmony are present as prerequisites.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding this article.

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## Author Profiles

**AA Ngurah Anom Kumbara**, is a professor and senior lecturer in Anthropology and Cultural Studies at Udayana University. He has published four reference books in Cultural Studies, several internationally reputable journals (Q1 and Q2, and the national journal). Email: anom\_kumbara@unud.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3620-4814>

**Nuning Indah Pratiwi** is a senior lecturer in political communication at the Universitas Pendidikan Nasional (The National University of Education), Bali, Indonesia. She has written several articles in reputable international journals (Q2) and the National Journal. Email: nuningindahpratiwi@undiknas.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8022-3500>

**Susilo Edi Purwanto** is a senior lecturer at the Graduate School of the Master's Program in Hindu Religious Education at the Gede Pujana Hindu State University, Mataram. Email : edisusilocs@gmail.com ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2304-0274>

**I Wayan Suardiana** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Balinese Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University. He serves as the Coordinator of the Master's Program in Cultural Studies at the same university. He has written several articles in reputable international journals and publish same books. Email: i.suardiana@unud.ac.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2315-1162>

# Atomic Habits, Mental Health, and Poverty Reduction: Adaptive Ritual Practices in Bali

I Made Adi Surya Pradnya<sup>1\*</sup> , I Putu Andre Suhardiana<sup>2</sup> ,

I Made Danu Tirta<sup>3</sup>, Thanakorn Choosukhserm<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Mahamakut Buddhist University, Thailand

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**Abstract:** The practice of Balinese Hinduism is increasingly challenged by the economic costs of ritual obligations, contributing to *ritual-induced poverty* and associated mental health burdens. Although previous studies have documented these problems, little attention has been paid to practical solutions. This qualitative study examines alternative forms of *yadnya* rituals in Bali that reduce both economic and psychological burdens. Data were collected through interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving ritual practitioners, crematorium managers, *griya* priests, and religious leaders in Bangli, Denpasar, Gianyar, and Karangasem. The analysis identifies four adaptive practices: alternative ritual venues, crematorium-based ceremonies, digital technologies, and collective rituals. These innovations reduced ritual costs by approximately 90-97% while alleviating psychological distress associated with social expectations and financial pressure. This study contributes by demonstrating that theological reinterpretation by religious leaders enables communities to preserve ritual values while adapting to contemporary economic and mental health challenges.

**Keywords:** *yadnya*; Balinese Hinduism; mental health; poverty reduction; atomic habits

## 1. Introduction

Hinduism, particularly in Bali, is a religion and social organizing principle, practiced by 86.8% of the population (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2025; Kusnandar, 2022; Picard, 2017). According to the latest provincial statistics, approximately 3.9 million Hindus live across Bali's eight regencies and one municipality (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Bali, 2025). This creates an unparalleled area of practice outside the Indian subcontinent, positioning Hinduism as the definitive blanket of Balinese perception of being, interpreting

\* Corresponding author's email: [suryapradnya.edu@gmail.com](mailto:suryapradnya.edu@gmail.com)

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and including local customs with theological teachings to form a cultural practice (Ardhana 2022; Putra et al. 2025). This singular cultural practice is the belief in and practice of the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy, the relational harmony between (a) God (*Parhyangan*), (b) humans (*Pawongan*), and (c) the natural world (*Palemahan*), as a local and original principle to promote ecological control, community governance, and social sustainability (Lestari et al., 2025; Marhaeni, 2023). Adherence to this philosophy is expressed through *yadnya*, the ceremonial offering of the five *Panca Yadnya*, illustrating the community's commitment to religious practice (Suara et al., 2018).

More recent studies pinpoint challenges. The implementation of *yadnya* rituals shows what researchers call 'Causal Euphoria Ritual Yajña' (Oka Widana, 2025): the decline of religious literacy, the modernisation of religion, and the commodification of the sacred shift focus from religious and spiritual obligation to social obligation. The socio-economic changes and crises, such as climate change and the spiritual disruption of the pandemic, raise the question: How can Balinese Hinduism adapt socio-economically while retaining the integrity of its theology? (Wirawan et al., 2022). Bali serves as an exemplary community to demonstrate the balance religious communities seek between preserving sacred practices and adapting to modernity, globalization, and socio-economically driven change (Suardana et al., 2022).

*Yadnya* comes from the Sanskrit root *yaj*, meaning 'to worship' or 'to offer.' It is the first of the ritual frameworks that Balinese Hindus have constructed to express worship and keep the cosmos in balance (Hooykaas, 2013). *Yadnya* is categorized into five types called *Panca Yadnya*: *Dewa Yadnya* (offerings to gods), *Bhuta Yadnya* (offerings to elemental forces), *Rsi Yadnya* (offerings to spiritual teachers), *Pitra Yadnya* (offerings to ancestors including cremation), and *Manusa Yadnya* (offerings marking life-cycle events from conception to marriage). These five obligations contain an integrated system of theology addressing the five universal debts (*Panca Rna*) owed to gods, ancestors, sages, fellow human beings, and nature (Suastika, 2021; Wartayasa, 2018). The performance of every ritual requires high precision: appropriate timing according to the Balinese *wariga* calendrical system, a purified sacred space, *banten* (offerings) representing cosmic elements, prescribed liturgical texts, and the direction of a qualified priest (*sulinggi/pinandita*) as mediator (Maulana et al., 2022). *Yadnya* is far more than a religious obligation, it is the primary means through which Balinese Hindus spiritually settle their debts, sustain the cosmos, and socially weave relationships into a harmonious order.

In the past, the *yadnya* ceremony showed sincere devotion (*bhakti*) for the attainment of spiritual peace, but today, the ritual is shifting from purely theological obligation to a marker of social standing, community identity,

and paradoxically, a source of socio-economic and mental stress (Surpa & Wismayanti, 2022). Families, from a social expectation perspective, are pushed to meet growing community demands of ritual performances, resulting in what Reztrianti et al. (2025) calls ‘ritual consumption’ of little theological significance.

There are large economic costs associated with these practices. Balinese exposed to economic strain from wedding costs are described as being economically marginalized (Singgalen, 2020), with effects extending to household expenditure on food, health care, and children’s education. Development economists call this ‘ritual-induced-poverty-traps’ (Aldashev, 2024). Families cycle between holding rituals and being in debt without any chance of accumulating capital. This increases psychological suffering, leading to anxiety, depression, and social isolation, a phenomenon documented in developing countries where ritualistic pressure has become a pressure cooker of morbidity (Lund, 2012; Ivashchenko & Ivanov, 2019).

Although these difficulties have been described by various authors, little research has been carried out on community-based, self-organized problem-solving projects. Specifically, there has been no systematic application of behavioural-cultural frameworks, such as Atomic Habits theory, to explore how grassroots ritual adaptations originate and disperse, and there has been no examination within existing studies of how social theology can legitimate such changes as theologically appropriate.

Given this gap, this study is driven by a question: What other types of *yadnya* have arisen as adaptive solutions to alleviate mental stress and poverty in Bali? Secondary questions ask: (1) What are the economic costs and psychological comfort of other venues? (2) How do crematorium services manage time restrictions? (3) What digital technologies have been employed in crisis adaptations? (4) What are the financial and social benefits of collective implementation? (5) How does the notion of atomic habits relate to rational decision-making? (6) What theological credibility do religious leaders confer on alternative practices? and (7) What is the socio-economic impact on Balinese households that are middle to lower income?

This study’s significance is multifaceted. In theory, it creates a framework in social theology to theorize the religious response to psychological and economic stressors. In practice, it documents evidence-based elements in the Balinese community that attend to tensions between religious fulfilment and economic needs, applicable to other communities facing similar issues. To explore these emerging practices, the study utilizes two theoretical frameworks: Atomic Habits theory by James Clear (2018) and social theology. Atomic Habits theory explains how small behavioral changes (through identity shift, ease, accessibility, and compounding) can lead to significant long-term outcomes.

Social theology examines how religious traditions adapt while retaining their core identity. Together these frameworks enable analyses of how contemporary kinds of *yadnya* can shoulder the mental and socio-economic burdens by dealing with the uncertainty of mental obligations and economic burdens of theologically oriented *yadnya*.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Socio-Economic and Psychological Burdens of *Yadnya* Practice

*Yadnya*, from the Sanskrit root *yaj*, meaning ‘to worship’ or ‘to offer,’ is a ceremony of Balinese Hinduism and a social organizing principle. *Yadnya* embodies the obligation of every person in a culture. It is the fulfillment of a sacrifice that keeps the universe in balance (Hooykaas, 2013). Although a Balinese practice, *yadnya* is divided into five categories *Panca Yadnya*, which overlap and control the ritual functions of the entire life cycle and beyond. These include *Dewa Yadnya* (offerings to deities and manifestations of the divine), *Bhuta Yadnya* (offerings to the elementals for the balance of nature), *Rsi Yadnya* (offerings to the spiritual teachers or guides), *Pitra Yadnya* (offerings to the deceased ancestors, or cremation ceremonies), and *Manusa Yadnya* (offerings marking life-cycle events of humans from conception to marriage) (Sujarwo et al., 2019; Suastika, 2021).

The ritual of *yadnya* requires five elements, namely the divine timing based on the Balinese Wariga Calendar, a sacred space that has been purified, *banten* offerings that represent the cosmic elements, liturgical texts that are prescribed, and the leadership of a qualified priest (*sulinggih/pinandita*) (Maulana et al., 2022). *Yadnya* also serves to sustain cosmic order and community engagement (*ngayah*) through social cohesion (Suara et al., 2018). The *yadnya* has its contextual significance and social value in the broader doctrine of *Tri Hita Karana* of *Parhyangan* (God), *Pawongan* (people) and *Palemahan* (nature) (Lestari et al., 2025; Marhaeni, 2023).

This collection of literature, however, is mostly theological and functional in its description of *yadnya* and gives little attention to the way economic forces pervert these practices. Oka Widana (2025), using the concept of ‘Causal Euphoria Ritual *Yajña* (CERiYa)’ phenomena, describes the deterioration of religious literacy, modernization of religion, and sacralization of the market, which shift the focus of rituals from spiritual to social performance. According to Singgalen (2020), Balinese weddings contribute to the economic marginalization of families, which in turn affects household spending on food, health care, and children’s education. Development economists refer to this as ‘ritual-induced-poverty-traps’ (Aldashev, 2024), where households are caught in a loop of ritual performance and debt with no opportunity of positive net value. Reztrianti et

al. (2025) describe ‘ritual consumption’ as a type of expenditure that has no economic or theological significance but is driven by social expectations.

Economic stress in Bali is triggered by the *magebagan* tradition (mourning gatherings that require hosts to supply food for dozens of guests over numerous days), hospital storage fees for the remains of the deceased, and opportunity costs of ritual delays (Meidayanti Mustika et al., 2021). These are significant descriptions, but previous research do not explain how societies build solutions to these demands. They do a good job documenting the problem, but they do not offer a framework for understanding how grassroots problem-solving gets produced. Also the psychological features of ritual pressure are mentioned (Lund, 2012; Megatsari et al., 2020), but not hypothesized in terms of behavioral change / community adaptation: anxiety, depression, social isolation. The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring the pressures and the coping strategies devised by Balinese families as a response.

## 2.2 Existing Research on Ritual Adaptation and Its Limitations

There is now a body of research detailing adaptive strategies in Balinese Hinduism. However, this literature is scattered and primarily descriptive. Suardana (2018) describes the changes in the economic venue, the scheduling of the rituals and the role changes in ritual participation. Wahyuni and Lumanauw (2024) study the tactics families apply in non-traditional wedding locations such as Taman Prakerti Bhuwana, stating that the venue choice helps relieve the obligations before and after the ceremony, making the attendees feel less worried and more content than home ceremonies.

Crematoriums for *Pitra Yadnya*, as described by Huang and Rockwell (2023), address several problems simultaneously: ceremonial time pressure, financial burden from hospitality duties, and hospital storage challenges during death surges. Börner (2024) speaks about digital tools like Zoom and Whatsapp, which enabled participation in rituals when it was not possible to meet in person during the pandemic. Online invites and recorded rituals have remained as adopted habits post-pandemic. Surpi et al. (2025) describe collective *yadnya* implementations, in which community associations perform mass ceremonies (*metatah*, *ngaben*, rituals for pregnancy and infant death) at much lower cost than individual ceremonies, improving socio-psychological support for participants undergoing emotional distress.

This material is useful as documentation, but is limited in three ways. First, it is atheoretical, it defines what adaptations are, but does not offer an explanatory process for how or why these adaptations develop, disperse / become accepted. Secondly, it treats each of the adaptations (change of venue, usage of crematoria, digital technologies, collective ceremonies) as separate

phenomena, rather than as interconnected responses to a shared set of demands. Third, no research has looked at the theological legitimacy of these changes to date.

No study has addressed whether religious leaders view such adjustments as theologically valid. Nor has any research considered how Hindu teaching might actively advocate rather than simply tolerate ritual simplification. The present study tackles these constraints by utilizing behavioral and theological frameworks to conceptualize adaptation as a process and by investigating the religious rationale that supports transformation.

### 2.3 The Theoretical Gap

The above review shows a theoretical gap. The socio-economic and psychological costs of *yadnya* are well documented, and adaptive practices have been observed and reported, but no study has combined behavioral theory with theological analysis to explain how ritual transformation occurs and obtains legitimacy. However, no research has applied behavioral change models (those that explain how minor changes in individual practice aggregate into significant social change) to the context of Balinese Hindu ritual.

No study has considered what social theology could provide in terms of a religious reason that allows communities to engage in economically rational actions without feeling they are forsaking their faith. This gap matters, because without theoretical integration documented changes can be rejected as transient crisis responses or aberrations from practice. To fill this gap, the present study applies two complementary frameworks: Clear's (2018) Atomic Habits theory to evaluate how minor behavioral changes occur, are performed more easily, and compound into community-wide adjustments in *yadnya* practice; and social theology to understand how these changes are legitimated as theologically suitable by religious leaders.

## 3. Method and Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Research Design and Approach

The method used in this study is qualitative with a social theology approach. The object of research is the practice of *yadnya* in Balinese Hindu society, especially the mental and economic difficulties of the practitioners. A qualitative method was chosen because it provides for a knowledge of social phenomena in their natural setting, particularly the interplay of religious responsibility, economic constraint and psychological well-being (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This question is well suited to the social theology approach because it allows for the investigation of how religious traditions reorient themselves under social influences, but do so while maintaining theological

integrity. Such an approach speaks directly to the research topics by focusing on participants' experiences, decision-making and the religious rationale they and their leaders give for adapting rituals. The researchers used purposive sampling to identify the participants of the study as those with first-hand, practical experience in alternative *yadnya*.

### 3.2 Participants and Sampling

There are three participant categories that capture a diversity of perspectives on the phenomenon. The first group engaged with alternative *yadnya* methods, such as I Gusti Ngurah Andika Manik Pradnyaningrat, I Made Yogi Pratama Putra, I Gede Tilem, and others, who could describe in detail the psychological and economic effects, both positive and negative, of implementing *yadnya*, as well as motivate others to enact the changing process and share their personal experiences.

The second group consisted of managers of *yadnya*, such as I Nyoman Karsana, Manager of Bebalang Crematorium in Bangli. Jro Mangku Alit, Manager of Santayana Crematorium in Denpasar, and Jro Mangku Dodi, Chair of Pinandita Sanggraha Nusantara Bali, who provided information related to the alternative *yadnya* facilities and programs, their operational and financial management, and the preparation of collective rituals and management of cremations.

The third group comprised religious leaders and priests, including Ida Bhagawan Agra Segening, who focused on the theologically and spiritually legitimate and authentic aspects of the practices of alternative *yadnya*. Their contribution was needed in determining how alternative practices of *yadnya* remained true to the meaning of the ritual, kept the spirit of *yadnya*, and aligned with the Hindu religious texts and traditions. Data were gathered from several sites, including crematoria in Bangli and Denpasar, *gria* (priests' compounds) in Gianyar, and community groups in Karangasem. This deliberate selection across roles and locales meant that the study recorded the phenomenon from the viewpoints of individuals who practice, manage and legitimate alternative *yadnya*.

### 3.3 Data Collection

The data gathering was carried out in five stages. In Stage 1 (preparation), the researchers formulated the research questions based on their initial impressions of social pathologies in Balinese culture and the lack of attention to mental health and economic issues after the pandemic. After setting the research objectives, the researchers designed some tools including interview protocols for each type of informant. The researchers reviewed literature to construct the theoretical

framework and to identify research gaps. Stage 2 (fieldwork). The fieldwork was done in several parts of Bali, such as the crematoria of Bangli and Denpasar, the *gria* of Gianyar, and community groups in Karangasem and other places.

Four methods of data collecting were used in the study. First, all participants participated in individual interviews taking place between 60 and 120 minutes. The interviews focused on individual stories and experiences on the alternative *yadnya*, the decision-making process, financial aspects, psychological impacts and theological viewpoints. All interviews were conducted in the Balinese and Indonesian languages to allow participants to feel comfortable and express themselves organically. Second, researchers did participant observation by attending and observing several alternative *yadnya* ceremonies such as collective *ngaben*, *mass sapuleger*, and wedding ceremonies at alternative settings. This allowed the researchers to observe and feel the social activities, social structures and emotional climate of the setting directly. Third, researchers documented alternative *yadnya* practices, facilities, ceremonial preparations, digital media use, and community engagement using photography and video. Fourth, the researchers did literature studies on the relevant Hindu texts, regional rules, and earlier studies on *yadnya* and its socio-economic links. Stage 3 (data organization).

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in Balinese and Indonesian. Transcripts were then sorted by informant category and ceremony type for further study. During Stage 4 (data verification), the researchers were involved in member checking by returning to selected participants to confirm the accuracy of preliminary interpretations. Stage 5 (data storage). All data were saved on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process was guided by the notion of Atomic Habits (Clear, 2018) and social theology. It looked at incremental changes in individual behavior towards *yadnya* practices and how these practices could lead to large-scale social changes influencing mental health and poverty reduction. The analysis was conducted in several rounds to capture the numerous ways the different types of data could be interpreted. Thematic analysis: The researchers conducted a thematic analysis in order to characterize repeating patterns and topics using interview transcripts, observation notes and documents. The process involved multiple steps.

First, all interviews were transcribed word by word in the original language, and then translated into English. Second, the researchers read over each transcript several times to become comfortable with the data. Third, relevant portions were given beginning codes (cost savings, social anxiety,

priest justification). Fourth, codes were compared and combined into probable themes. Fifth, themes were checked against the complete data set for internal coherence. Sixth, themes were identified and recognized, which led to four alternative *yadnya* practices provided in the results: venue options, crematorium utilization, digital technology adaption, and collective *yadnya* implementation.

*Interpretive analysis:* The researchers used social theology for interpretive analysis, and they set their findings in the context of Balinese Hinduism and social reality. This method helped to understand the ways informants addressed the tension between religious social obligation (theology) and economic social reality and the ways alternative methods were employed to preserve the integrity of religious activities while addressing social challenges successfully.

*Comparative Analysis:* An alternate *yadnya* practice was comparatively analyzed for its return. This covered the comparison of alternative and conventional approaches with relation to psycho-social elements, prices and time. Particular comparisons include the financial cost analysis of individual ceremonies versus communal rituals, time efficiency of crematorium versus traditional *ngaben*, and psychological and emotional results of venue ceremonies versus home ceremonies. These comparisons offered empirical support for the advantages of alternate techniques.

*Theoretical Integration:* The phenomenon of rational change of individual behavior, identity of the practitioner, norms of practice, ease and accessibility of practice, supportive environment, design of crematorium facilities, community habits and social norms all contributing to the community embrace of alternative practices was understood through theoretical integration of Atomic Habits theory. The four selected behaviors were analyzed using the four principles of Atomic Habits: identity change, ease of behavior, environment design and compounding effects.

*Triangulation and Validation:* Data triangulation was utilized to ensure validity and minimize the potential for bias from a single source. Researchers triangulated findings from several sources including practitioner interviews, manager interviews, religious leader interviews, participant observation, and photographic recording.

*Reflexivity and iterative analysis:* The analysis was conducted in iterations where conclusions were exposed to new data for confirmation. Researcher reflexivity was maintained through acknowledgment of position and bias. The principal investigator, a Balinese Hindu familiar with *yadnya* ceremonies, recognized that this insider status facilitated access but risked assuming common understanding. To mitigate this, introspective memos were produced before and after each interview, and peer debriefing sessions were conducted with non-participating colleagues.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

This study received written ethical clearance from the research ethics council of Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar prior to data collection. All participants provided written informed consent after being informed of the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants who preferred verbal consent for cultural reasons were asked to give verbal consent in the presence of a witness and this was documented.

*Anonymity and Confidentiality:* Participants were given the option of pseudonyms/ actual names in publications. Most participants, notably religious leaders and facility managers, chose to be identified by name since their roles were public. All persons who wished to remain anonymous have been given a pseudonym and all identifying details have been erased. All raw data are saved on password protected devices and only available to the study team.

*Cultural Sensitivity:* The study was carried out with great attention to the traditions of Balinese Hinduism and the protocols of rituals. Researchers dressed appropriately in terms of traditional costume during participant observation when entering hallowed locations. Permission to document the events was requested from community leaders and ritual hosts. No ritual artifacts / processes were disturbed in the sake of documenting. The researchers also made sure that they did not create an economic hardship for the host families.

*Data Storage:* Interview recordings, transcripts and images will be kept for five years post publication. All identifiable data will be securely erased after five years.

### 3.6 Theoretical Framework

This study brings together two theoretical frameworks, Atomic Habits theory (Clear, 2018) and social theology. Their combination is warranted because behavioral change in religious contexts involves both an explanation of how habits change at the individual level (Atomic Habits) and an account of how such changes attain communal religious legitimacy (social theology). Neither framework alone is enough, behavioral theory shows how change occurs, social theology explains how it is accepted.

Clear's (2018) Atomic Habits theory has a conceptual model for how small habitual changes in a person's daily routine can result in large-scale changes over long periods of time. Four of the theory's fundamental concepts, identity change, ease of behavior, ease of access, and compounding, provide a framework for analyzing stretching alternative practices in the context of *yadnya*.

The principle of identity change posits that in order for a change in behavior to be profound, there must be a change in the way the person perceives themselves. When a person's self-perception changes and they begin seeing themselves as a person that performs *yadnya* rituals in a sincere and economically rational way, and not just a person that performs the ritual to show a display of wealth, their behavior and ritualistic/cultural practices will align with their new self-perception. This identity change is supported by the Theological reframing from the religious authorities, who rationalize and provide the religious/spiritual validity of simplistically structured *yadnya* ceremonies.

The second principle states that behavior will become easier to change, adopt, and practice alternative *yadnya* rituals. Obstacles to the timely completion of the cremation ritual and burial ceremonies have been removed by the services offered by crematoriums. Digital invitations have taken care of the 'printing and distributing' obstacle to the completion of the ritual; and collective rituals, as opposed to individual ritual practices, simplified the preparation for the ritual. These changes, which made the 'least resistant' pathways to the completion of the ritual also the pathways that maintained the legitimacy / validity of the ritual, have encouraged the ongoing continuation and practice of the rituals.

The third principle, designing environments for success focuses on the provision of certain facilities and the structuring of a community organization. The construction of crematoriums, *gria* venues, and the scheduling of collective ceremonies make it easier for people to adopt alternatives. When participants are surrounded by others making the same choice, the community leaders making the choice, and the ceremonial calendar, the people adopt new habits in part because of the behavioral ecosystem.

The principle of compounding effects describes how a base shift in individual behavior aggregates to a more complex social shift. Each family that successfully performs alternative *yadnya* becomes a model for others, each community organization that institutionalizes collective ceremonies shifts the social norm, and each religious leader who provides a rationale for the practice expounds the acceptable scope further. Cumulatively, these changes affect how society perceives the practice of *yadnya*.

The framework that describes how religious traditions shift while retaining their core identity is known as social theology. In the Balinese context, the adaptation of a certain practice is done through the legitimization of alternative practices in a manner that preserves the fundamental aspects of the ritual while exercising non-essentials. Suara et al. (2018) show how priests and religious leaders attempt to adapt while still remaining in the bounds of their traditions.

In their theological arguments, emphasis is placed on the central pillars of *yadnya*, where in ritual setting, venue, and scale, materials are considered practical and are relegated to the background. Sincere offerings (*bhakti*), and priestly direction and proper timing, are placed at the forefront. This hierarchical formulation of the elements of ritual permits the flexibility of practice without compromising its theological integrity. Donder et al. (2025) attempt to trace this flexibility to the first principles of Hindu philosophy. They argue that the Vedic tradition views sacrifice as a means of maintaining the cosmos rather than as an end in itself, while the *Rta* (cosmic order) is maintained with the proper intention (cosmic order), not by excessive material means. This means of critique, while providing justification for a ritual that is not economically excessive, fully permits as sincere, practice that is economically proportionate.

The Hindu ethical principles of *desa, kala, patra* (literally place, time, and circumstance) further support flexible practice. This principle suggests that a religious duty is to be fulfilled with consideration to the surrounding context, and therefore provides a justification for flexible practice of the ceremony while maintaining the intended spiritual focus. In present-day Bali, the principles of *desa, kala, patra* provide justification for the flexibility in the practice of *yadnya* to suit the current economic situation while maintaining its meaning.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Result

Field findings from Bangli, Denpasar, Gianyar and Karangasem show a shift in how Balinese Hindu households manage religious duties under economic and psychological stresses. Practitioners scale, stage, and administer *yadnya* to avoid the risk of financial and mental pain while retaining theological legitimacy (*desa, kala, patra*). These adaptations show that religious responsibility can be reconfigured into financially sustainable actions. Empirical data collected from crematoriums, *gria* (priest compounds), and community organizations identified four operating paths of alternate *yadnya*. An illustration of this conceptual framework is given in Chart 1.

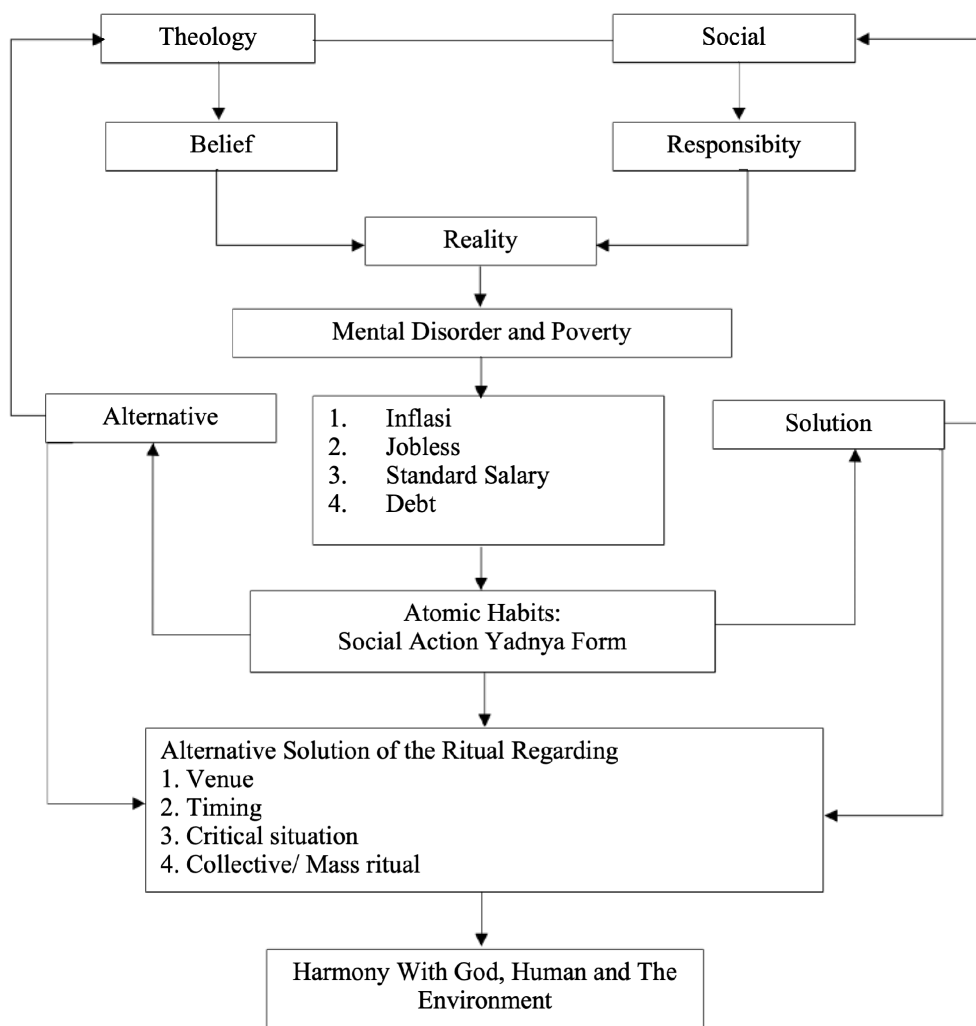


Chart 1. Alternative Forms of *Yadnya* in Reducing Mental Burden and Poverty in Bali (Source: Processed Primary Data, 2025)

Four forms of alternative *yadnya* practices were determined based on interviews, participant observations, and documents collected from multiple research sites in Bali, including crematoriums in Bangli and Denpasar, *gria* in Gianyar, and community organizations in Karangasem. The identified practices include, (1) venue alternatives, (2) use of crematoriums for timing alternatives, (3) digital technology for critical situations, and (4) community *yadnya* practices (collective/ mass ritual).

#### 4.1.1 Alternative Venues for *Yadnya* Practices

One of the observations made is that given the rising number of Balinese people and families that are opting for alternative venues for the execution of

*yadnya* ceremonies, there is now an increased number of venues being used.

I Gusti Ngurah Andika Manik Pradnyaningrat chose to have his wedding at Taman Prakerti Bhuwana in Desa Beng, Gianyar, and explains his reasoning:

‘I chose to have my wedding at Taman Prakerti Bhuana because of how provides a good service with a good and clean area. I also do not want to burden my family to prepare a wedding at home because they also have their own activities. After the ceremony, I also do not have to clean the ceremony place, decorations, and so on. I feel more comfortable and at peace with my *yadnya*. I can directly greet the guests without thinking about the place. For me, the cost of renting the ceremony area is not expensive at all since it is also included the ceremony needs and is even more affordable than holding a wedding ceremony at home.’ (Interview, I Gusti Ngurah Andika Manik Pradnyaningrat, 15 June 2025).

Here, three interrelated aspects of venue choice are addressed: logistical alleviation due to family burden, psychological relief due to diminished post-ceremony burdens and economic gain through bundled pricing. The participant focusing on ‘comfort and peace’ rather than material display signals a change from ritual as social performance (Oka Widana, 2025) to ritual as personally meaningful spirituality. This is in line with Clear’s (2018) principle of ‘make it easy’ where removing friction (cleanup, logistics, family coordination) means the alternative behavior becomes far more likely to be repeated.

Yogi Pratama Putra, who performed a three-month ceremony for his second child at a *gria* in Gianyar, also provided supporting data:

‘I chose *Gria* in Gianyar for the three-month ceremony for my second child mainly for cost efficiency. If the ceremony had been held at home, I would have had to arrange the supplies for chairs, tables, a place for *yadnya*, and other decorations. I would also have had to ask neighbors to help decorate the house, so that would cost more. At the *Gria*, I don’t have to worry about decorations since they have everything set up beautifully and in accordance with Balinese *yadnya* traditions’ (Interview, I Made Yogi Pratama Putra, 14 August 2025).

The economic logic is laid bare here. Comparing the cost of an individual ceremony at a home (more than Rp50,000,000 if social obligations such as entertainment and catering are added), with *Gria* package (Rp10,000,000) means there is an over 80% price reduction, Yogi Pratama, for this follow up comment that ‘the essence of ritual is in offerings, ceremony leader, and comfort, not the grandeur of a site’ bears all the marks of a theological reframing rooted in the Hindu ideal *desa, kala, patra* (place, time, circumstance). It makes economics

purely rational but without any feeling of failure in spirit. Aside from the clearly defined economic benefits, Yogi Pratama also expressed the deep essence of the ritual's reorientation:

'For me, the essence of carrying out *yadnya* is not about the grandeur of the ceremony venue, but the most important aspects in the implementation of *yadnya* are the ceremonial facilities (offerings), the ceremony leader, and the feeling of comfort, calm, and peace in carrying out *yadnya*. When we carry out *yadnya* with happiness, then through the symbolic medium of the offerings, we are connected to God, *Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*' (Interview, I Made Yogi Pratama Putra, 14 August 2025).

This statement reflects a theological hierarchy wherein theology of the heart (*bhakti*/devotion, comfort, happiness) supersedes a theology of display (venue/decorations). By prioritizing 'connection to God' through sincere offerings over material grandeur, the participant provides a lay theology that mirrors the priestly justifications discussed in Section 4.1.2. The latter identity shift, from being an expensive ritual performer to sincere devotee, is what Clear (2018) identifies as necessary for lasting behavioral change.

Across all participants, the psychological advantages of venue options were noted. Relieving social comparison concerns, particularly the worry that neighbors and community members critique the extent of home adornments, was a primary consideration for selecting venue options.

#### 4.1.2 Crematorium Utilization for Timing Efficiency

To ease constraints regarding the *pitra yadnya* (ancestral ceremony), the second finding involved the innovative use of crematoriums for the ritual gaps created by customarily restricted cremations, and during large-scale religious ceremonies at the Pura Besakih temples.

I Nyoman Karsana, Chair of the Sagraha Mandra Kantha Santhi Crematorium Foundation and also Bendesa Adat of Bebalang Village, Bangli Regency, elaborated on the crematorium services even during the prohibitions:

'We still carried out the *Ngaben* ceremony, even though there was a village ban and official circular, because at that time, there were many bodies in the hospital. So, several families chose the crematorium to make it more effective and efficient. Besides, waiting for the big ceremony would have added more costs. Another alternative, some families chose to hold the *mekinsan* ceremony at the crematorium. The point is, the time for implementation can be shortened to reduce the economic burden, and the community can return to work without any burden' (Interview, I Nyoman Karsana, 10 May 2025).

This statement shows the multiple factors that crematorium use addresses. First, for prohibitions, there is the issue of bodies piling up in the hospitals, which means the family is incurring costs and suffering from the emotional burden of having to wait for the ritual. Second, when there is no *ngaben*, the family members have to entertain the guests, and provide hospitality to the community participating in *magebagan*, which is the custom of coming to the house of mourning, and staying there all night. Finally, for the rituals that take a long time, they are also leaving the family members from their jobs, which creates an additional cost for the family that is already having to spend a lot for the rituals.

Adding to the context of the *Panca Wali Krama* ceremonies at Pura Besakih, Jro Mangku Alit, Manager of Santayana Crematorium in Denpasar, stated the following:

‘Many Hindu people see the crematorium as a solution to the *ngaben* during the *Panca Wali Krama* at Pura Besakih. The *Adat Village* does not provide *Ngaben* at the *setra* (grave). As for the people, they want to do it quickly, because the costs incurred are very high at the hospital as well as for the dead bodies. If the dead body is at the house, then the *krama adat magebagan*, that means a lot of money is spent. Moreover, the deposit of dead bodies at the hospital is overflowing so that the dead body rooms are full. So the existence of the crematorium is a solution, and an alternative, that helps the community, it is easier, more practical, economical, and does not take a long time’ (Interview, Jro Mangku Alit, 15 June 2025).

This account elucidates the ills that crematoriums remedy, cultural encumbrances that render relatives immobile, hospital capacity crises, and the cumulative material cost of protracted grieving. The overburdening of hospital mortuaries is a logistical issue and a spiritual calamity, families are left unable to carry out their religious duty to return the *Panca Maha Bhuta* (five elements) back to where it belongs. In doing so, the crematorium operates as a structural solution to spiritual and economic problems; what it can be considered an institutional innovation that eliminates systemic friction. Pitana (2020) also mentioned that the *ngaben* ritual at the crematorium is a form of religious social innovation in response to modern society. Modernization in this context does not eliminate tradition but rather updates ritual practices to be more efficient and affordable while remaining aligned with Hindu values. This phenomenon shows that tradition is dynamic and can adapt to social changes through a process of transformation that remains rooted in religious teachings.

The sheer scale and potential economic impact of the time the community members are required to wait is significant. The *magebagan* tradition, in which community members gather to wait at the house of the deceased, is a tradition that has existed in many cultures and is a representation of the community's recognition for a death that has recently occurred. From around 7pm to 5am WITA, and for a period of 2 days to 7 days of community members, it is expected that the family of the deceased provides food and light refreshment to all of the guests.

Ida Bhagawan Agra Segening, a priest, gave a religious rationale for completing the rituals on time:

'The implementation of the *Ngaben* ceremony, in accordance with the scriptures, is carried out quickly so that the deceased does not become a *buta cuil* (a wandering, unsettled spirit). The existence of a crematorium is a solution and an alternative for time management, facilitating the implementation of *Ngaben* due to village bans or situations and conditions that do not allow for a traditional ceremony. So, the faster the *Panca Maha Bhuta* are returned through the *Ngaben* ceremony, the sooner the child's duty of devotion is fulfilled. After that, they can return to work as usual to meet the needs of their families' (Interview, Ida Bhagawan Agra Segening, 18 June 2025).

The theological justification given by the priest itself serves a legitimisation. He bases being timely with cremation on scripture (so as to avoid the deceased becoming a *buta cuil*) which allows him to turn those who might see this as economic expedience into faith-obligated activity. The phrase 'as the sooner a child's devotion is earned' connects ancestral (filial) *bhakti* with profitmaking, since, having performed their ritual duty, the clan now returns to productivity.

The religious dimension is pertinent. The priest insists that as per the scriptures, *ngaben* should be performed, and done so without delay, lest the deceased become *buta cuil* (a restless, unanchored spirit). From this perspective, the *ngaben* is a religiously sanctioned economic activity and, for the family, the crematorium is a structural solution to their spiritual and economic dilemmas. I Gede Tilem's father, a noted artist from Bali, was cremated at the Dharma Kusuma Foundation Crematorium in Punduk Dawa, Klungkung. This example shows that even a family of great social standing, still uses crematorium services.

'My father has left us due to illness. Therefore, the agreement with my siblings and mother, father will be cremated from *ngaben* to *ngelinggihang dewa hyang* at the crematorium at Punduk Dawa, Klungkung. Considering the time, energy and cost. Thankful, all family members have been supportive, even the artistic community performed at the *ngaben* ceremony, as a form of loyalty and last tribute to our father' (Interview, I Gede Tilem, 18 Januari 2026).

This example helps to look at crematorium services as a social practice spanning all social classes and not a practice of only the economically disadvantaged. Tilem was faced with social expectations of elaborate ceremonies for the economically and socially prominent, but he, like others, rationally opted for a socially acceptable cost, time, and energy measures that in his case, it is rationally backed by the family and the artistic community.

#### 4.1.3 Use of Digital Technologies in Crisis Contexts

The third finding explores the ways in which Balinese communities employed digital technologies, particularly the use of Zoom Meeting and WhatsApp applications, to sustain *yadnya* practices during the pandemic, which, due to gathering restrictions and health practices, prevented the traditional participation in rituals. The adaptations to these crises have continued beyond the immediate pandemic context, resulting in new and lasting opportunities for digitally mediated access and social involvement in religious rituals.

I Wayan Agus Adi Chandra family case highlights the use of digital technology during the pandemic. When family members pass away and the traditions of *ngaben* and ceremonial gatherings are not possible due to health protocols, the family set up a Zoom Meeting link so extended family could participate:

‘As a form of social support and participation from the family, we provided a Zoom Meeting link so that relatives and the community could still witness the *Ngaben* procession online. Through this digital media, family members and relatives in different locations could interact and offer their support virtually’ (Interview, I Wayan Agus Adi Chandra, 18 September 2025).

The family also organized multiple Zoom sessions for each ceremony, like ‘*Ngaben* Alm. I Gusti Ngurah Bagus Tejabhuwana’ and ‘*Kremasi* in Krematorium by the family of Alm. I Putu Nuratama.’ Meeting links were sent one day in advance so participants would have time to be ready. These links were also shared in family WhatsApp chat groups, specifically in the extended family group called ‘*Laskar Nang Latri*,’ so many relatives could participate, even those who were not able to be there in person.

The application Zoom, specifically its interactive elements, helped sustain the social aspect of the ritual. During the livestream, some relatives were able to connect with each other, while others were able to type their condolences or prayers, for example, ‘*turut berduka cita, amor ring acintya*’ (which means, condolences, may you unite with the divine), and these messages were displayed to all participants. Because of the great utility of the recording feature, families

were able to sustain their memorial documentation by sharing the unedited recording of the memorial ritual that occurred live, with those that were unable to live stream their memorial ritual. The recording of the memorial ritual, links to the recording, and documentation of the memorial ritual were also shared.

Aside from the adaptations made due to crises, the use of digital technology has also become a part of everyday formal practices, especially in the case of wedding invitations. Regarding the wedding invitation practice, Ni Putu Ayu Fitri Aristiani has this to say about her decision to use WhatsApp:

‘I use digital media because it is more efficient, saves on transportation costs, as well as the cost of printing invitations, so I can save 1-3 million rupiah. For me, technological advancements are very helpful; they make life easier and more practical, and the message can be conveyed properly. So, there is no reason to choose a more complicated method’ (Interview, Ni Putu Ayu Fitri Aristiani, 12 January 2026).

The economic benefits of not having to print invitations (saving transport and printing costs), which can be in the range of 1-3 million rupiah, can be a small yet significant wedding cost. More importantly, this practice signals a significant cultural change in the way ceremonies are organized, focusing more on practicality and efficiency. Informants have mentioned that printed invites that were left on their desks or at home never made it to the target invitees, while digital invites go to the personal devices of the invitees and can even allow for interactions and confirmations, in ways that printed invites simply cannot.

#### 4.1.4 Collective Yadnya Implementation

The fourth finding shows that community groups and religious organizations organize collective *yadnya* as a means to create a repetitive process that both allows participants to ritualize their religion and strengthen their religious social support network and minimize the financial stress of individual participants (Figure 1).

Paguyuban Dharma Yadnya, represented by Jro Mangku I Wayan Dharma, provided insights on the implementation of their collective ceremonies:

‘We, from the Paguyuban Dharma Yadnya, organize *Pitra Yadnya* and *Manusa Yadnya* ceremonies at affordable costs. The tooth-filing ceremony (*Metatah/Mepandes*) is Rp300.000 per person, the *Ngaben* ceremony is Rp2.000.000 per deceased, and the *Memukur* ceremony is Rp3.000.000 per deceased. This collective *Pitra Yadnya* was followed by members consisting of 30 family groups (*dadia*) originating from Muncan Village, Karangasem, and there were also participants from outside the association’ (Interview, Jro Mangku I Wayan Dharma, 5 October 2025).



Figure 1. Collective *Pitra Yadnya* ceremony by Paguyuban Dharma Yadnya in Muncan Village, Karangasem (Photo: Researchers, 2025)

When looking at the economic side of collective and individual implementations, the difference is significant. Individual *metatah* ceremonies can cost millions of rupiah if conducted independently as this requires offerings, entertainment, and catering if needed. This is why the collective cost of Rp300.000 per person is a reduction of 90% or more. Individual *ngaben* ceremonies are on the other side of the spectrum, costing above Rp50.000.000. This is why the collective rate of Rp2.000.000 per *sawa* (corpse) makes it possible for families to perform *ngaben* ceremonies who would otherwise delay or go into debt to do so.

In the case of the *manusa yadnya* ceremony in Desa Adat Guwang, Gianyar, the participants take part in the mass *sapuleger* ceremony, which occurs every 6 months during the *wuku wayang* period of the Balinese calendar. One of the participants, Wayan Balik Anto, comments on this event:

‘The cost of attending a collective *sapuleger* ceremony is quite affordable, namely Rp. 300.000. All ceremony supplies are complete and in accordance with the *sastra*, the people who follow/attend the ceremony just participate in the *yadnya* as directed by the committee. In case of the collective *sapuleger* ceremony, cost required for the ceremony to be held at one’s home is at a minimum Rp10.000.000, not including the cost of food and other invitations’ (Interview, Wayan Balik Anto, 12 November 2025).

Therefore, *yadnya* ceremonies are held every 6 months during the *wuku wayang* period. The cost difference of Rp300.000 compared to Rp10.000.000 is a cost saving of 97%. Collective rituals that allow for community members to participate in rituals that can be overlooked or too financially burdensome for individual families, have been organized by Jro Mangku Dodi Ariyanta, leader of Pinandita Sanggraha Nusantara (PSN), along with the Atma Widya Community, for community members participating in.

Jro Mangku Dodi Ariyanta, leader of Pinandita Sanggraha Nusantara (PSN) in collaboration with the Atma Widya Community, has organized collective ceremonies for three specific rites: *warak karuron*, *ngelanglir*, and *ngelungah*. The first ritual, *warak karuron*, is performed for couples who have experienced a miscarriage. The second, *ngelanglir*, is for infants who have died. The third, *ngelungah*, is for children who die before their teeth emerge (approximately before the age of six months). These rituals are particularly significant because they address pregnancy loss and early childhood death—experiences that are often stigmatized or silently endured in many societies. He explained the rationale and structure of the program:

‘We implement a collective ceremony scheme so that the implementation costs are affordable for the community. For the *Warak Karuron* and *Ngelangkir* ceremonies, the fee charged is Rp650,000, while the *Ngelungah* ceremony is also Rp650,000. These costs are considered very reasonable compared to carrying out the ceremonies independently at home, which requires preparing ceremonial facilities, offerings (*banten*), a venue, and various other technical needs that can cost much more’ (Interview, Jro Mangku Dodi Ariyanta, 5 November 2025).

These ceremonies include rituals that are *warak karuron*, *ngelanglir*, and *ngelungah*. The first ritual, *warak karuron*, is performed for couples who have experienced a miscarriage. The second, *ngelanglir*, is for infants who have died. The third, *ngelungah*, is for children who die before their teeth emerge (approximately before the age of six months). These rituals are particularly significant because they address pregnancy loss and early childhood death, experiences that are often stigmatized / silently endured in many societies. Based on the interviews with informants and facility managers, the following is comparative cost breakdown:

Table 1. Comparative Cost of *Warak Karuron*, *Ngelanglir*, and *Ngelungah* Ceremonies

| Ceremony Type        | Individual/Family Cost (at home) | Collective Cost (via PSN/Atma Widya) | Savings |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|
| <i>Warak Karuron</i> | Rp3,000,000 - 5,000,000+         | Rp650,000                            | 80-87%  |
| <i>Ngelanglir</i>    | Rp3,000,000 - 5,000,000+         | Rp650,000                            | 80-87%  |
| <i>Ngelungah</i>     | Rp3,000,000 - 5,000,000+         | Rp650,000                            | 80-87%  |

If performed alone in the house, a family must prepare (1) *banten* (complete ceremonial offerings), costs around Rp1,500,000 - Rp3,000,000; (2) ritual tools and materials about Rp500,000 - 1,000,000; (3) food and hospitality for guests and family members who attended around Rp. 1,000,000 - Rp2,000,000+, (4) transportation and coordination fees approximately Rp500,000, (5) priest honorarium (*daksina*), approximately Rp300,000 - 500,000. The total amount can be above Rp5,000,000 depending on how many guests are invited and what type of offerings will be provided for the community during this ritual. In contrast, the community-based program managed by Pinandita Sanggraha Nusantara (PSN) and Atma Widya Community only costs Rp650,000 per family but already covers ceremonial facilities, offerings, priest service and ritual coordination. This is approximately 80-87% cheaper than building their own. Aside from the benefits in the economic side of view, Jro Mangku Dodi also emphasized the more valuable aspects of this program.

‘The program is a ritual activity and socio-religious movement to help Balinese do the *yadnya* without having economic burden on them. Thus, this program comes in the guise of spiritual service and social solidarity, in order for the communities to still uphold their *dharma* in peace and profound meaning’ (Interview Jro Mangku Dodi Ariyanta 5 November 2023).

This comment captures the fusion of social and theological elements that defines collective approaches to *yadnya*. The focus on sincerity, and precision as the essence of *yadnya*, quite apart from extravagance and big spending, anchors ritual practice theologically and economically. The characterisation of collective *yadnya* as both spiritual service and social solidarity constitutes it as a form of community mutual support instead of merely a cost-sharing initiative.



Figure 2. Collective *sapuleger* ceremony in Guwang Village, Sukawati, Gianyar (Photo: Researchers, 2025)

The frames of reference for this text are based on the practice of effecting action change through the behavioral mechanisms of collective practice in the context of yagna. According to Clear (2018), a person developing a habit is in part influenced by the person's cultural environment as a result of an overwhelming desire to belong. The most suitable climates for habit formation are those in which the person is surrounded by a culture of the behavioral ecosystem intended. In this case, the practice of collective yagna provides a culturally behavioral ecosystem of ritual practice that is both economically and socially supported. Far from going against the expectancy of the community, the participants have shifted into a new community, the Collective Community Ceremonial Organizer (CCCO), which allows and reinforces their new practices and behavioral ecosystem.

#### 4.1.5 Comparative Cost Analysis for Middle-Income Households

This section presents a comparative cost analysis of three ceremonies (*Ngaben* / cremation, *Nganten* / wedding, and *Metatah* / tooth-filing) experienced by middle-income Balinese Hindu households in order to better understand the economic impact of alternative *yadnya* practices. Cost estimates are collected from interviews with practitioners, facility administrators, and community organizers and verified with participant-reported costs.

Table 2. Comparative Cost of *Yadnya* Ceremonies: Individual vs. Alternative Implementation for Middle-Income Households

| Ceremony Type                          | Individual/Family Cost (Traditional Home-Based) | Alternative Collective Cost | Estimated Savings    | Savings % | Cost Components (Individual)                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Cost Components (Alternative)                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Ngaben</i> (Cremation)              | Rp50-100 million+                               | Rp2-5 million               | Rp48-95 million+     | 90-97%    | <i>Banten</i> (offerings): Rp10-20 million; <i>Bade/wadah</i> (cremation tower): Rp15-30 million; <i>Megebagan</i> hospitality: Rp10-25 million; Priest honorarium: Rp1-5 million; Family coordination & logistics: Rp5-10 million | Collective <i>ngaben</i> : Rp2 million (Paguyuban Dharma Yadnya); Crematorium service: Rp15-20 million (all inclusive); No <i>megebagan</i> obligation           |
| <i>Nganten</i> (Wedding)               | Rp50-150 million+                               | Rp10-25 million             | Rp40-125 million+    | 80-90%    | Venue & decoration: Rp15-40 million; Catering (100-500 guests): Rp20-60 million; Entertainment: Rp5-15 million; Offerings & ritual equipment: Rp5-10 million; Family hospitality: Rp5-15 million                                   | Gria/venue package: Rp10-25 million (includes offerings, priest, venue, basic decorations); Digital invitations: savings Rp1-3 million; No post-ceremony cleanup |
| <i>Metatah/Mepandes</i> (Tooth-filing) | Rp5-15 million+                                 | Rp300-650 thousand          | Rp4.7-14.35 million+ | 90-97%    | Offerings ( <i>banten</i> ): Rp2-5 million; Priest honorarium: Rp1-3 million; Venue preparation: Rp1-3 million; Family hospitality: Rp1-4 million                                                                                  | Collective <i>metatah</i> : Rp300 thousand (Paguyuban Dharma Yadnya); Includes offerings, priest, and coordination                                               |

For *Ngaben* / cremation ceremonies, if carried out traditionally at home / in a village cemetery (*setra*), families bear many cost items that together add up to a large sum so that they can be said to have tremendous financial pressure. One significant expense is the *banten* (offerings), which in high season average between Rp10,000,000 and Rp20,000,000; these are nuanced *banten pejati*, *banten pengulapan*, *banten saiban* and other, complete with specialists who will need to be contracted to prepare difficult rituals like *calukans* / itemized animal sacrifices. Another expense is the bade or *wadah* (cremation tower/sarcophagus) amounting to around Rp15,000,000-Rp30,000,000 as these structures are large wooden elaborate works of art that symbolize a death person's social status and their prices vary greatly based on size wood used in the hand-craft craftsman fees. Mourning hospitality, called *magebagan*, contributes another Rp10,000,000 to Rp25,000,000, depending on the amount of people that come and stay home for two up to seven nights, feeding anywhere from 50 to up to 200 people per night. The *daksina* (honorarium) for the *sulinggih* (high priest)/ *pinandita* (ritual priest) is Rp1,000,000 – Rp5,000,000 for ceremonial fees and transportation. Family coordination and logistics (including transportation for family members, coordination with village customary institutions (*desa adat*), and rental of equipment such as tents, chairs, and sound systems) are Rp5,000,000 - Rp10,000,000. On the other hand a collective *ngaben* which is provided by Paguyuban Dharma Yadnya theme will cost just Rp2,000,000 for each corpse, complete with all offerings prepared in collective, shared priests services, logistics and scheduling have to be coordinated together and this solution allows to avoid individual *magebagan*. Another alternative is the services at a crematorium costing Rp3,000,000 to Rp5,000,000 and including the cremation process, basic offerings and priest services, but without the costly bade (cremation tower) and substantially cutting down / cutting out *magebagan* altogether. As a result, families can save Rp48,000,000 to Rp95,000,000 / more (90-97%) by opting for group or crematorium-based *ngaben*. The largest savings come from skipping / downsizing *magebagan* hospitality, which can be Rp 10-25 million over several days.

For *Nganten* / wedding ceremony, the financial challenge for Balinese families is much greater in the context of traditional home-based marriages. The prices of the venue and decorating alone are Rp15,000,000 to Rp40,000,000, including home repair / decoration, tent rental, seats, tables, stages, floral arrangements, and traditional decorations such as *penjor* and *umbul-umbul*. The biggest price is catering and hospitality, from Rp20,000,000 to Rp60,000,000.

Weddings usually attract 100 to 500 guests, frequently the whole village, so they have to provide traditional Balinese feasts (*megibung* / *ngejot*) and drinks and snacks. Entertainment costs Rp5,000,000 to Rp15,000,000 for traditional

music (gamelan), dance performances (tari), and sound system rental Offerings and ritual equipment Rp5,000,000 to Rp10,000,000 including *banten* for the wedding ceremony, ritual items and traditional apparel. Besides, the family hospitality, including additional meals for family members and assistance, as well as thank-you gifts for community volunteers (*ngayah*), ranging from Rp5,000,000 to Rp15,000,000. Venue-based alternatives provide cost savings.

The venue package / *gria* starts at Rp 10.000.000 and up to Rp25,000,000 includes the rental of the venue, minimal decor, amenities for the ceremony (*banten*, services of a priest), and no need to clean up after the wedding. For example, the three month ceremony of Yogi Pratama in Gria Gianyar cost Rp 10.000.000 compared to Rp50,000,000 / more at home. Moreover, digital invitations can save Rp1,000,000 to Rp3,000,000 by removing the need for printing and distributing invitations, and enabling more effective RSVP monitoring. Therefore, families can save Rp40,000,000 to Rp125,000,000 / more (80-90%) by choosing venue-based ceremonies. Most of the savings are in the lack of house preparation, decor, catering, and cleanup of the wedding, and less psychological load of social comparison and 'outdoing' neighbors.

For *Metatah/Mepandes* (Tooth-filing Ceremony), it is a heavy expense for middle-income households but less expensive than weddings / cremations. The offerings (*banten*) for the tooth-filing ritual itself are between Rp2,000,000 and Rp5,000,000, as they include special materials and preparation. The honorarium for the priest/ *sulinggih* who conducts the rite varies from Rp1,000,000 to Rp3,000,000; this includes the ceremonial instructions and blessings. The costs of venue preparation (home preparation for the ritual space, decoration and seating for family members) range from Rp1,000,000 to Rp3,000,000. The costs of family hospitality (food for family members and close relatives and refreshments during the ceremony) range from Rp1,000,000 to Rp4,000,000. The entire cost for each individual is between Rp5,000,000 to Rp15,000,000 / more. It costs a lot less if people do it together. Paguyuban Dharma Yadnya provides *metatah* in a group for Rp300,000 per person, which covers all offerings, shared priest services, organized logistics and ceremonial facilities.

The costs of the Pinandita Sanggraha Nusantara (PSN) program for very delicate ceremonies, such as *warak karuron* (miscarriage), *ngelanglir* (baby death), and *ngelungah* (child death before teething) are Rp650,000, including full offerings, priest services, and coordination. Families can save Rp4,700,000 to Rp14,350,000 or more (90-97%) by using communal implementation. For the middle-income group, the average monthly household income is around Rp5,000,000 to Rp15,000,000, and the cost for individual *metatah* could be equivalent to one to three months of household income. Hence, collective

ceremonies are a financially transformative option, allowing participation in the rituals without hurting household welfare.

#### 4.1.6 *Alternative Yadnya as Adaptive Response*

Across venue alternatives, use of crematoria, digital adaptations, and collective implementations, there is growing recognition of the alternative *yadnya* practices as an adaptive response to ease the mental load and economic impact. The economic impact is significant. Case reports show savings of tens of millions of rupiah by families due to venue alternatives (savings of Rp40,000,000 on a three-month ceremony), use of crematoria (savings on *magebagan* and hospital storage fee costs), digital invitations (savings of Rp1-3 million on wedding invitations), and collective (compared to individual, 90-97% cost savings) ceremonies. The psychological advantages are equally vital. Comfort, peace, and anxiety-free ceremonial alternatives have been reported by all informants. The absence of social pressure, particularly the concern about being judged for lack of elaborate rituals, was a contributing factor for improved psychological state when performing rituals. The psychological and economic needs of families in particularly sensitive situations (such as miscarriage or the death of an infant) were specifically met by collective ceremonies.

Behavioral changes in individual practitioners of *yadnya* and subsequent social changes can be described using the atomic habits framework. Every new alternative practice begins from a micro decision from an individual or a family who is working with a set of constraints. These can be a small set of financially limited, time constrained, work obligations, or crisis situations. If the practice is successful in obtaining the desired goals (ritual validity, economic savings, psychological ease) for the individual with little effort and stress, this practice will be repeated. As new adopters of the practice help it to diffuse across social networks, community organizations that incorporate the practice into new, regulated activities (collective ceremonies) and structures (crematoriums, *gria* venues), transactional ease, and a similar practice to a larger audience begins to be a practice of social expectation. As time progresses, structures that are designed with the intention of accommodating new social expectations are also a facility for the practice, and these facilities will also be structures of social expectation. Temporarily, the shifts of cultural social expectations will act upon the framework of community social contact to determine what is adequate and fitting for the community social practice of *yadnya*.

#### 4.2 *Discussion*

The primary finding shows a change in the ritualistic use of space by utilizing new sites like Taman Prakerti Bhuwana and *gria* (priests' compounds).

This practice explicitly defies the perception of ritual space as domestic and a space for the exhibition of social class. Participants, such as I Gusti Ngurah Andika and Yogi Pratama, state that selecting an offsite location is a way of intentionally choosing to simplify both the logistic and emotional challenges of having a ceremony at their residence.

This finding furthers the work of Wahyuni & Lumanauw (2024) on the wedding tradition literature by showing the empirical evidence for the relational and practical gains of this practice. This is a reframing of the classical Hindu doctrine, as supported by Hooykaas (2013) and Donder et al. (2025), which advocates for the removal of ostentation and the promotion of sincere (*bhakti*) intention along with the precise rituals, as a stark contrast to what Reztrianti et al. (2025) describe as ‘ritual consumption’. Using the lens of atomic habits, this is an example of a ‘make it easy’ choice (Clear, 2018). By contracting the more complicated aspects of decoration and hospitality, the family removes a lot of friction from the ritual process. The savings reported for Rp40,000,000 on a three-month ceremony are not just economic. They are savings that have moved from visible spending to necessities in the household and, as such, help relieve the ‘ritual-induced-poverty-traps’ that Aldashev (2024) speaks of.

The placement of crematoriums for *pitra yadnya* is pioneering in the realm of time, religion, and economics. It has been recorded, for example, by managers I Nyoman Karsana and Jro Mangku Alit, that the crematoriums solve the problem of delayed funerals due to ceremonial prohibitions and pandemics. They help avoid the logistical problem of deceased patients in hospitals and the huge economic burden of prolonged *magebagan*. This is a very innovative solution that goes beyond the fragmented approach to crisis adaptation during the pandemic (Huang & Rockwell, 2023).

The priest, Ida Bhagawan Agra Segening, has provided the theological justification for this ‘economically’ positive change. He cites some scriptures concerning the return of the *Panca Maha Bhuta* (five elements) to the earthly plane to ensure that the deceased does not become a *buta cuil* (restless spirit). This sort of theological backing, especially from the inner movement (Suara et al., 2018; Maulana et al., 2022), remains a strong facilitator of social transformation. The crematorium also, following the path of least resistance, obviates social burdens by avoiding the drawn-out negotiations with customary gatekeepers, the social obligation of multi-day hospitality, and the intricacies of community work. The example of I Gede Tilem’s family, despite their high social rank, illustrates clearly that, across the social spectrum, people are starting to accept the rationality of this choice.

A range of digital technologies, from Zoom to WhatsApp, are changing the way social obligation and ritual participation are conceptualized. The use of

Zoom by I Wayan Agus Adi Chandra's family to facilitate real-time participation of extended family members in the *ngaben* ritual when physical participation was restricted due to the pandemic is a classic example of how social rituals are sustained through technology. Campbell (2020) argues for a framework of 'digital religion' that allows us to see Zoom *ngaben* as a re-mediation of presence, rather than a degraded alternative. Participants type their condolences, watch the cremation procession on their screens and share recorded rites with family unable to attend.

The digital invitation delivered by Ni Putu Ayu Fitri Aristiani in the post-pandemic environment is evidence that social obligations are being rethought through innovation that is a permanent addition to social ritual, satisfying the basic human need to save time and money. Such a technique digitally facilitates the ritual impositions and alleviates the ritualized psychosocial loads as outlined by Megatsari et al. (2020) and Meidayanti Mustika et al. (2021).

The collective *yadnya* (mass *metatah*, *ngaben*, *sapuleger* and miscarriage/infant death ceremonies) show how communities have been the engines of creativity in creating sustainability in religious practice. The Atma Widya Community and Paguyuban Dharma Yadnya are constructing a ritual paradigm in which members practice social cooperation and economic mutual aid. Religious leaders such as Jro Mangku Dodi have proposed a 'socio-religious movement' that needs 'sincere' and 'precise' ritual engagement, without any emphasis on unneeded luxury or monetary display (Oka Widana, 2025). But what are these collective actions that generate a new 'behavioral ecosystem'?

The processes work at three levels. The first is structural: by preparing communal rituals every six months during the *wuku wayang* period, the community is creating regular, repetitive chances for participation, easing the cognitive load of planning individual ceremonies. Second, social: others in the group are making the same choice, normalized by community leaders, reinforced through regular ritual calendars. Third, theological: Leaders argue that ritual is about sincerity and precision, not luxury, thereby giving religious cover for economically smart choices. Together, all of these factors create a climate in which the new habit of group engagement is simpler to develop than old, costly individual practices. This redefines the identity of a practitioner from a solitary individual carrying a burden to a member of a caring community. Bourdieu's (1977) notion of *habitus*, the deeply ingrained dispositions, habits, and schemes of perception that determine social practice, can further illuminate this process of collective ritual change. Atomic Habits discusses the changes in individual behaviors through reduced friction and environmental design, while *habitus* shows how these changes are integrated as enduring, taken-for-granted dispositions throughout the community.

In the context of Balinese families, frequent choices to use community *yadnya* / cremation services are not simply isolated individual decisions. Rather, these choices cumulatively reshape the communal habitus, changing what constitutes ‘normal’ ritual practice. Adaptation, then, is not a top-down command but a gentle reweaving of community religious practice through quotidian negotiations of structure and agency. The importance of including rituals for miscarriage and child loss is especially important as they provide a psychosocially and spiritually safe space for needs that are often disregarded. They offer means of psychosocial healing and social recognition in grieving when deep wounds are exposed.

It is not to be inferred from the above that other practices of *yadnya* are universally accepted and unchallenged. There are substantial counter-narratives and cultural pushback in Balinese Hindu society. This sub-section acknowledges the conflicts created by ritual change and offers expression to traditionalist views. Certain religious figures and community elders have expressed worries that the reduction of *yadnya* rituals, notwithstanding theological validation through *desa, kala, patra*, would lead to the loss of the precise ritual knowledge handed down through generations. One elder (who wished to remain anonymous) put it this way during fieldwork: *‘If we always take the easy way out, who will remember the full ceremonies? Our ancestors did not suffer to keep these ceremonies for us to leave them behind for convenience’* (Interview, Anonymous Community Elder, 20 June 2025). This attitude is that ritual complexity has cosmological meaning that cannot be reduced without loss.

The priests contacted for this study offered theological justification for alternatives, however they are a progressive faction and more conservative voices may not agree. Even with the economic and psychological advantages of alternative methods, some families report facing societal stigma for choosing crematoriums over traditional *ngaben* or digital invitations over printed ones. As one participant explained, *‘My neighbors didn’t say anything directly, but I could see from their faces that they thought we were being stingy. They still came to the ceremony, but the atmosphere was different’* (Interview, Anonymous Participant, 25 July 2025). This informal social sanctioning shows that community norms around ritual spending are shifting unevenly, with early adopters paying the price for challenging established expectations.

Not all age groups are equally resistant to alternative *yadnya* practices. Younger Balinese Hindus are more receptive to alternate venues, digital invitations and group ceremonies, particularly those who have migrated to urban centers for work. Alternatives, especially those who have put many resources in traditional rites throughout a lifetime, may be seen as a rejection of the principles they have espoused by older generations. *‘We saved for years to do*

*my father's ngaben properly. Now young people want to do it for two million rupiah. It feels like they don't respect what we sacrificed'* (Interview, Senior Community Leader, 28 July 2025).

This generational tension suggests that ritual change involves renegotiation of intergenerational memory and moral economy. Digital technology enabled ritual continuity during the pandemic, although some participants voiced difficulty with participating virtually. As one informant explained, *'Watching the ngaben on my phone was better than nothing, but I could not smell the incense, I could not feel the presence of the other mourners, I could not offer my prayers in the same way. It felt like watching a ceremony'* (Interview, I Wayan Suardana, 22 August 2025). This resonates with discussions in digital religion scholarship about what is lost when rituals are mediated through screens (Campbell, 2020). For certain Balinese Hindus, physical, co-present participation is essential. This study did not systematically sample traditionalist opinions; rather, the sampling was purposive, targeting practitioners of alternative *yadnya*. Future research should specifically explore the perspectives of community members who reject / resist these choices. The counter-narratives do not undermine the advantages of alternative methods described in this study, but they do challenge any narrative of seamless, widely supported transition. Change in ritual in Bali, as elsewhere, is negotiated, contested and unequal.

## 5. Conclusion

This research shows that the four alternative *yadnya* practices in Bali, including different locations, crematorium use, digital technology, and collaborative rituals, are a transient crisis response and a grassroots reorientation of ritual practice toward long-term theological and social sustainability, enabled by everyday behavioral shifts (analyzed through the lens of Atomic Habits theory) and grounded in religious legitimization (articulated through social theology and the Hindu principles of *desa, kala, patra*).

The economic consequences are high, where families lowered the costs of venue-based ceremonies up to Rp40,000,000, Rp1-3 million savings were gained from digital invites, and collective implementations resulted in 90-97% savings. Psychologically, participants experienced freedom from social comparison anxiety and ability to focus on spiritual aim (*bhakti*), rather than material show. Religious leaders have provided a theological justification for these innovations by emphasizing that ritual efficacy is an authentic intent and ritual accuracy. Future research must include: (1) quantitative surveys in representative Balinese communities to establish prevalence and welfare indicators; (2) interfaith comparative studies of similar ritual adaptations; (3) economic analysis at the household level of long-term welfare impacts; (4)

ethnographic study of cultural resistance and limits to normative change; (5) gender analysis of the distribution of ritual labor; and (6) environmental impact studies of changed patterns of material consumption associated with collective ceremonies. These questions would illuminate how religious groups may adjust to economic challenges without sacrificing spiritual integrity, with lessons for far beyond Bali.

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### Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors confirm that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used in the research process, including study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or manuscript drafting. All interviews, observations, transcriptions, coding, and thematic analyses were conducted manually by the research team. Standard spelling and grammar checking features were the extent of any AI-based tool usage. The authors assume full responsibility for the originality and integrity of this work.

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## Author Profiles

**I Made Adi Surya Pradnya** is a lecturer at Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar. He completed his doctorate in Religious Studies at IHDN Denpasar in 2015. His notable books include *Religious Reconversion* (Pustaka Ekspresi, 2019) and studies on multicultural shrines at Pura Gambur Anglayang and Pura Batu Maringggit (2019, 2020). He has also published on ritual adaptations in *Jurnal Kajian Bali* (2020). His research interests center on religion, society, and culture. Email: suryapradnya.edu@gmail.com ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6113-1326>

**I Putu Andre Suhardiana** serves as a lecturer at the English Language Education Department, Dharma Acarya Faculty, Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar. His primary research specialization covers English language teaching, with particular emphasis on assessment and evaluation in EFL instruction. Among his scholarly publications is the study 'Critical Literacy in an EFL Setting: Lecturers' Perspectives,' which appears in the *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. Email: putuandresuhardiana@gmail.com ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9186-9718>

**I Made Danu Tirta** was born in Tabanan, Bali, in 1995. He completed his undergraduate studies in Hindu Propagation at IHDN Denpasar (2017), where he also earned his master's degree in Brahma Widya (2019). In 2024, he completed his doctorate in Religious Studies at Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar. He currently serves as a Hindu Religious Instructor for the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Tabanan Regency, focusing his research and publications on socio-cultural and ecological Hinduism. Email: madedanutirta@gmail.com

**Thanakorn Choosukhserm** is a faculty member in the Faculty of Religion and Philosophy at Mahamakut Buddhist University, Isan Campus. He earned an M.A. in Sanskrit from Silpakorn University (1999) and a Ph.D. in Eastern Philosophy and Religion from Khon Kaen University (2019), alongside degrees in English and Non-formal Education. Based in Khon Kaen, Thailand, his expertise spans religion, philosophy, and languages. He can be contacted via email at [thanakorn.cho@mbu.ac.th](mailto:thanakorn.cho@mbu.ac.th) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3368-9599>

# The Symbolic Cremation of Agricultural Pests: Traditional Ecological Knowledge for Sustainable Agriculture in the *Subak* System of Bali

Pande Wayan Renawati<sup>1\*</sup> , Eny Dyah Yuniwati<sup>2</sup> ,  
Mhd. Rafi'i Ma'arif Tarigan<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Hindu Negeri I GB Sugriwa Denpasar, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Wisnu Wardana Malang, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Hamzah Al-Fansuri Sibolga Barus, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** The symbolic cremation ritual for agricultural pests (*Mrateka Sarwa Marana*), constitutes an important component of Bali's *Subak* system for sustaining agriculture through indigenous knowledge and collective ritual practices. This study examines the ritual process and the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) embedded in the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual. Employing a qualitative religio-cultural ethnographic approach, the research was conducted in Bedha Village, Tabanan, Bali. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and library research. The findings show that the *Mrateka* ritual functions as a collective mechanism integrating ritual purification, ethical pest management, symbolic cremation, and community participation to strengthen ecological balance and social cohesion within the *Subak* system. The tradition also preserves TEK through irrigation management, synchronized planting, environmental sanitation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and the complementary use of modern agricultural technology. The study proposes an integrative framework demonstrating how ritual, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and the *Subak* institution collectively contribute to sustainable agriculture and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Keywords:** ritual *mrateka sarwa marana*; *subak*; traditional ecological knowledge; sustainable agriculture

## 1. Introduction

Bali's agrarian system is fundamentally grounded in a worldview that promotes harmonious relationships among humans and the divine (*parahyangan*), among members of society (*pawongan*), and between humans

\* Corresponding author's email: [pandewayanrenawati@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:pandewayanrenawati@uhnsugriwa.ac.id)

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and the natural environment (*palemahan*), collectively known as *Tri Hita Karana* (Astuti, 2018; Roth, 2014; Wirawan & Rosalina, 2024; Wiryawan, 2024). In 2012, UNESCO inscribed the *Cultural Landscape of Bali Province: the Subak System as a Manifestation of the Tri Hita Karana Philosophy* on the World Heritage List, recognising this indigenous knowledge system as the foundation of Bali's traditional irrigation and agricultural governance. Beyond acknowledging its cultural significance, the inscription affirms the continuing relevance of this system for sustainable agriculture, environmental stewardship, and global sustainable development goals (SDGs).

This philosophical framework is institutionally embodied in the subak, an indigenous agrarian institution that integrates irrigation management, customary law, religious authority, and collective decision-making in rice cultivation (Roth & Sedana, 2015). More than a hydraulic irrigation network, subak functions as a socio-ecological institution in which agricultural production is inseparable from religious obligations, communal cooperation, and ecological responsibility. By sustaining agricultural productivity, strengthening community resilience, and ensuring equitable access to water resources, the subak system contributes directly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) through the protection of rural livelihoods and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) through the promotion of sustainable food production and food security. Within this institutional framework, ecological sustainability is reinforced not only through the technical management of water and agricultural resources but also through ritual practices that maintain the moral and cosmological relationships among humans, nature, and the divine.

One ritual tradition embedded within the *subak* system is *Mrateka Sarwa Marana*, the symbolic cremation ritual for agricultural pests, the term used throughout this study according to local usage in Bedha Village. Literally, *Mrateka* means “cremation” or “ritual burning,” *Sarwa* means “all,” and *Marana* refers to organisms that damage agricultural crops. Thus, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* can be understood as the symbolic cremation of agricultural pests. Unlike conventional pest-control practices that aim to eradicate pests, the ritual seeks to restore harmony among humans, nature, and the spiritual world through symbolic offerings and collective religious ceremonies. Although its procession resembles the *ngaben* cremation ritual, its purpose is not to symbolize destruction but to restore ecological balance through spiritual and ethical reconciliation. As part of the *subak* system, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* represents a culturally embedded mechanism for addressing ecological disturbances while reinforcing the philosophical values of Balinese agrarian life.

The continuing relevance of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* is closely linked to the ecological transformations affecting Bali's agricultural landscapes. Agricultural modernization, tourism-driven land conversion, climate variability, biodiversity loss, and the intensive use of chemical pesticides have altered the ecological dynamics of rice-field ecosystems, reducing resilience and increasing the frequency of rodent outbreaks (Ardana et al., 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2023). Farmers in Bedha Village, Tabanan Regency, report that these outbreaks recur approximately every decade and pose serious threats to rice production and local food security. Although communities initially relied on technical interventions, such as chemical pesticides and other pest-control measures, these approaches are increasingly perceived as ineffective, costly, and environmentally harmful. This situation highlights the limitations of technical solutions alone in addressing the complex socio-ecological challenges facing the Balinese agrarian system.

Within the Balinese Hindu worldview, environmental and agrarian disturbances are understood through the complementary concepts of *sakala* and *niskala*, which integrate material and spiritual dimensions in maintaining harmony among humans, nature, and the divine. Accordingly, recurrent rodent outbreaks are viewed not only as biological problems but also as signs of cosmological imbalance. This perspective explains the continuing relevance of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* in contemporary Balinese agriculture. When technical interventions in the *sakala* realm, such as pest-control measures, are considered insufficient, communities complement them through the *niskala* realm by performing *Mrateka Sarwa Marana*. Rather than focusing solely on pest eradication, the ritual seeks to restore ecological harmony through symbolic, ethical, and spiritual practice (Jin, 2022; Scobie et al., 2023). By integrating material and spiritual approaches, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* strengthens socio-ecological resilience while reflecting the Balinese cosmological understanding of environmental management.

Beyond its role as a ritual response to agrarian disturbances, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* functions as a socio-ecological institution that strengthens collective governance within the *subak* system. Farmers, *pamangku* (temple priests), and *desa adat* (customary authorities) actively participate in the ritual, reinforcing cooperation, shared responsibility, and coordinated responses to ecological challenges, particularly recurrent rodent outbreaks (Balan, 2025; Putra et al., 2025; Sedana et al., 2021). The ritual also preserves and transmits Traditional Ecological Knowledge through collective memory and ceremonial practices, including knowledge of seasonal cycles, climate variability, water management, and pest dynamics (Ardana et al., 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2023). Consequently, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* strengthens social cohesion, supports community-based environmental governance, and enhances socio-ecological resilience within the Balinese agricultural system.

Despite its continuing ecological and cultural significance, the sustainability of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* in Bedha Village is increasingly challenged by socio-economic change. Field observations indicate that the ritual is performed less frequently, and participation among younger generations has steadily declined. As younger community members become less involved in traditional farming, the intergenerational transmission of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) has weakened. This trend is driven by agricultural modernization, market-oriented production, rural demographic change, expanding non-agricultural employment, and formal education that places greater emphasis on scientific and technical knowledge than on local cultural traditions (Dewi et al., 2018; Santoso et al., 2023). Consequently, the declining practice of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* threatens not only the preservation of TEK but also the community's capacity to maintain collective environmental stewardship and socio-ecological resilience.

Previous studies have examined the *subak* system, Balinese environmental philosophy, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). However, these studies have paid limited attention to *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* as an integrated socio-ecological institution that connects ritual practices, traditional ecological knowledge, and community-based environmental governance. Most existing research has focused either on the religious symbolism of Balinese rituals or on the institutional functions of the *subak* system. As a result, the contribution of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* to strengthening socio-ecological resilience has not been adequately explained. To address this gap, the present study investigates how the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition in Bedha Village preserves Traditional Ecological Knowledge and enhances socio-ecological resilience. By clarifying this relationship, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the role of indigenous knowledge in supporting sustainable agricultural governance under contemporary ecological change.

## 2. Literature Review

Previous studies have examined the *subak* system as an indigenous agrarian institution that integrates irrigation management, religious authority, and collective governance among farmers. Lansing (2006), describes *subak* as a self-organizing socio-ecological system in which coordinated planting schedules, water distribution, and synchronized cropping support both agricultural productivity and pest management. Accordingly, *subak* has been widely recognized as a model of sustainable common-pool resource management and an important example of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and community-based environmental governance (Dewi et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2019; Ramstedt, 2014; Roth & Sedana, 2015).

Beyond its technical functions, *subak* is embedded in Balinese Hindu cosmology, where agricultural activities are integrated with ritual practices that strengthen harmony among humans, nature, and the divine. As a result, agriculture is understood not only as an economic activity but also as a cultural and spiritual practice that reinforces social cohesion and environmental stewardship (Dewi et al., 2018; Roth & Sedana, 2015). This limitation is particularly evident in studies of agricultural pest management. Most previous research has examined pest control from technical and agronomic perspectives, such as integrated pest management, biological control, synchronized planting, habitat management, and the use of chemical pesticides (Ma et al., 2019). Although these approaches effectively reduce crop losses, they generally treat pest outbreaks as biological problems requiring technical solutions. By contrast, relatively few studies have explored how Balinese farming communities interpret ecological disturbances through cultural and cosmological perspectives. In this worldview, pest outbreaks are understood not only as ecological events but also as signs of disrupted relationships among humans, nature, and spiritual forces. Consequently, communities complement technical interventions with ritual practices that restore ecological harmony, strengthen social cohesion, and reinforce collective environmental responsibility (Roth & Sedana, 2015; Surata et al., 2025)

One ritual that reflects this ecological perspective is *Mrateka Sarwa Marana*, a ceremonial tradition practiced by several Balinese *subak* communities in response to pest outbreaks. The ritual serves as a collective mechanism for restoring harmony among agricultural land, the natural environment, and spiritual forces while strengthening cooperation among farmers. Beyond its religious significance, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* integrates indigenous ecological knowledge with collective agricultural action to address ecological disturbances. Despite its continued practice, however, the tradition has received far less scholarly attention than the broader *subak* system, and its ecological functions, social significance, and contribution to community-based pest management remain insufficiently understood.

Although previous studies have advanced understanding of the *subak* system and its ritual traditions, an important research gap remains. Most studies explain ecological resilience through irrigation governance and institutional management, while research on ritual practices mainly emphasizes their religious and cultural significance. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how agricultural rituals function as ecological mechanisms for responding to pest outbreaks and strengthening socio-ecological resilience. This gap is particularly evident in studies of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana*, which rarely examine how the ritual integrates cosmological beliefs, indigenous ecological knowledge, and collective

agricultural action into community-based pest management. To address this gap, the present study investigates the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition in Bedha Village as an integrated ecological practice within the *subak* system. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how Traditional Ecological Knowledge supports community-based environmental governance and strengthens socio-ecological resilience in contemporary Balinese agriculture.

### 3. Method and Theory

#### 3.1 Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using a religio-cultural ethnographic research design grounded in the paradigms of cultural studies and the anthropology of religion (Gertner et al., 2021). This approach is considered appropriate because the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition constitutes an agrarian ritual practice rich in symbolic, cosmological, and socio-religious meanings that articulate the relationship between humans, nature, and the Divine. As such, the tradition cannot be adequately understood through quantitative measurement, but rather through lived experience, interpretation, and the perspectives of the ritual actors themselves.

The research was conducted in the *Subak* of Bedha Village, Tabanan Regency, Bali. This site was selected because the *subak* community consistently performs the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* Tradition as an integral part of its agrarian belief system, the ritual framework of *panca yadnya*, and a cultural mechanism for responding to ecological disturbances, particularly agricultural pests. The fieldwork was carried out over a five-month period, from June to October 2025, encompassing the pre-ritual, ritual, and post-ritual phases. Participatory field observations were conducted throughout the implementation of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* Tradition in the *Subak* area of Bedha Village. The observations indicate that this tradition constitutes an integral part of the agricultural ritual cycle, deeply rooted in the *subak* system and the rice-farming activities of the local community.

Research participants were selected purposively based on their level of knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the ritual. The key informants comprised 15 individuals, including one *pakaseh* of *Subak* Bedha, four *subak* administrators, four *pamangku* and *sulinggih* directly involved in officiating the ritual, and six farmers who actively participated in the ritual processions. In addition, five supporting informants—consisting of traditional leaders and community figures with an in-depth understanding of the history, transformation, and meanings of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition were included.

The study used both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through participatory observation of the entire *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual process—from preparation to post-ritual activities—and through in-depth interviews with *pamangku*, *bendesa adat*, *pakaseh*, and community elders to explore the ritual's meanings, functions, and objectives. Secondary data were obtained from documentation and a literature review, including published editions and documented transliterations of Balinese *lontar* texts, namely *Sri Purana Tattwa*, *Kuttara Dewa Tattwa*, *Usada Sawah*, *Babad Dewa*, *Sila Gama Catur Pataka*, and *Purwana Yama Tattwa*, as well as relevant scholarly publications. These *lontar* texts served as contextual documentary sources to support the interpretation of ethnographic findings rather than as objects of philological analysis. Accordingly, the study did not examine original manuscripts or conduct codicological analysis, critical editing, or new transliterations. Instead, information from the published *lontar* texts was triangulated with field observations and interview data to examine its consistency with contemporary ritual practices.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation was employed to examine ritual practices, the structure of the procession, the use of ritual offerings (*upakara*), and the social roles of ritual actors. In addition, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants involved in the tradition, each lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. Nine interviews were conducted in Indonesian and six in Balinese, depending on the communicative context and language preference of the informants. The interviews explored historical narratives, theological perspectives, and social experiences related to the implementation of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition. Documentation, including photographs, field notes, and customary archives, was also collected to complement and triangulate the data obtained from observation and interviews.

Data analysis was carried out qualitatively through continuous processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were categorized into major thematic areas, including the definition of the ritual, stages of implementation, ritual functions, and its religious, socio-cultural, and ecological meanings. The analysis employed hermeneutic and contextual approaches, particularly in interpreting ritual symbols, *lontar* texts, and the mythology underlying the tradition (Toye et al., 2021). To deepen the analysis, functional–structural and symbolic theories were applied, alongside the concept of *Tri Hita Karana* as the principal philosophical framework for understanding the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the Divine as embodied in the practice of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition. Data validity was ensured through source, method, and theoretical triangulation by

comparing findings from observation, interviews, and documentation, as well as by conducting member checks with key informants.

### 3.2 Theory

Ritual is widely recognized as a fundamental component of social and cultural life that extends beyond religious ceremonies. Anthropological studies describe ritual as a socio-cultural institution through which communities construct and transmit shared meanings, collective values, and social identity (Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1969). From a phenomenological perspective, these meanings emerge through lived experience and intersubjective interaction rather than from ritual performance alone (Husserl, 1970; Schutz, 1967). Therefore, understanding ritual requires examining both its observable practices and the meanings that participants attribute to them.

This perspective is particularly relevant to traditional agricultural communities, where ritual plays an important role in environmental governance and collective resource management. Previous studies show that agricultural rituals transmit local ecological knowledge, strengthen ethical responsibility toward nature, and reinforce collective cooperation in managing natural resources (Berkas, 2012). Within the Balinese *Subak* system, ritual is integrated with irrigation management, agricultural decision-making, and community organization, enabling *Subak* to function as a socio-ecological system that supports agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability (Lansing, 2006; Lansing & Fox, 2011). Therefore, rituals in *Subak* should be understood not only as religious practices but also as mechanisms for maintaining ecological values and collective responsibility.

Within Geertz's Interpretative Theory, culture is understood as a system of meanings expressed through symbols that can be interpreted as a "text" (Geertz, 1973; Cai, 2024). From this perspective, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* represents a cultural text that expresses the relationship among humans, nature, and the divine. Using Geertz's *thick description* approach, the ritual is interpreted not merely as a ceremonial practice but as a symbolic expression of religious values, ecological knowledge, and social norms embedded in community life (Geertz, 1973). Accordingly, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* functions not only as a response to agricultural pest disturbances but also as a symbolic mechanism for strengthening social solidarity, maintaining ecological balance, and sustaining community well-being (Geertz, 1973).

From the phenomenological perspective of Husserl (1970) and Schutz (1967) social reality is not seen as objective and separate from humans, but as a construction of meaning rooted in subjective everyday experience. Husserl's concept of the lifeworld (*lebenswelt*) refers to the world of lived experience prior

to scientific interpretation, and in this context, the practice of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* can be understood as a manifestation of farmers' empirical experiences with recurring natural phenomena, particularly pest cycles (Husserl, 1970). Husserl's concept of intentionality further explains that consciousness actively constructs meaning from experience, so farmers' encounters with pests develop into symbolic and religious interpretations expressed through ritual practices (Husserl, 1983). Schutz (1967) later extended this idea into the social realm, arguing that social action is shaped by subjective meanings formed through experience and interaction, and introducing the concept of stock of knowledge, or accumulated knowledge passed down across generations. Therefore, through a phenomenological lens, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* is not merely a religious ritual, but a meaningful social action rooted in lived experience, intentional consciousness, and the intergenerational transmission of collective knowledge, reflecting an ongoing interaction between subjective experience and social reality.

From an ecological perspective, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) refers to knowledge developed through long-term interactions between communities and their environment and embedded in cultural practices and belief systems (Berkes, 2012). TEK encompasses practical ecological knowledge as well as the values that guide sustainable human–nature relationships. From this perspective, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* represents a local ecological knowledge system through which communities respond to recurring pest outbreaks and changing agricultural conditions. Likewise, the *Subak* system demonstrates the adaptive capacity of local institutions by integrating collective water management, social coordination, and shared rules for sustainable resource governance (Ostrom, 1990). Accordingly, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* should be understood not only as a symbolic ritual but also as a culturally grounded ecological strategy that integrates spiritual values, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and community-based resource management (Berkes, 2012; Ostrom, 1990).

From an ethical perspective, Aristotle's Theory of Eudaimonism explains that the ultimate goal of human action is *eudaimonia*, or holistic well-being achieved through virtuous living (Aristotle, 2009). In this context, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* seeks not only agricultural success but also collective well-being by promoting values such as togetherness, self-restraint, and harmony between humans, nature, and the spiritual world (Annas, 1993). Thus, the ritual functions as an ethical practice that integrates material and spiritual dimensions through shared moral values. From a structural-functional perspective, rituals strengthen social solidarity, maintain social order, and reproduce collective values within society, including the *Subak* system (Durkheim, 1995). At the

same time, Symbolic Interactionism views ritual meanings as products of social interaction that are continuously interpreted and transmitted across generations (Blumer, 1969). Accordingly, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* functions not only to reinforce social cohesion but also to preserve and reproduce cultural meanings within the community.

In the local context, the concept of *Tri Hita Karana* provides a philosophical framework for understanding *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* as a practice that maintains harmony between humans and God, among humans, and with the environment, as well as balance between the microcosm and macrocosm. From the perspective of Religious Ecology Theory, cultural practices also contain ecological values rooted in belief systems (Berkes, 2012). In this framework, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* is not merely symbolic but reflects environmental ethics based on religious values and functions as a cultural mechanism that supports agricultural sustainability, pest control, and environmental conservation. Thus, the ritual represents the integration of symbolic, social, ecological, and spiritual dimensions and serves as an adaptive strategy to maintain sustainable balance between humans and nature (Berkes, 2012).

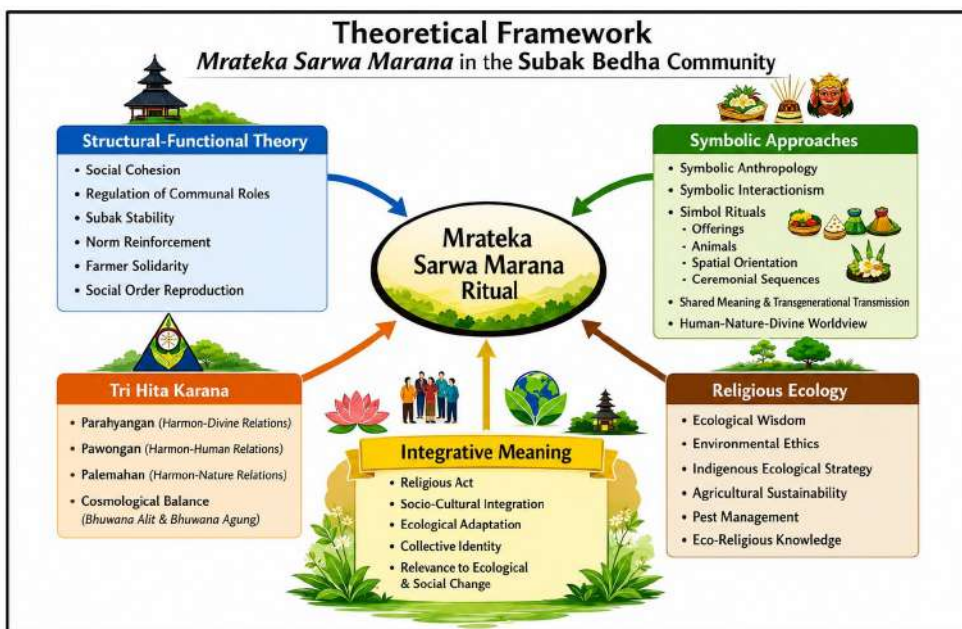


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* in the Subak Bedha Community (Adapted by the authors from Berkes [2012], with AI assistance)

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Field Observation Data

Bedha Traditional Village is a customary village with strong socio-cultural and religious traditions rooted in Balinese Hinduism. Beyond serving as a residential settlement, the village functions as a socio-cultural institution that preserves customary law, local wisdom, and religious practices. Community life reflects a close relationship among humans, nature, and the spiritual world through cultural activities, religious ceremonies, and community-based natural resource management. Agriculture and plantations form the village's main economic sectors, strengthening the integration of cultural values, environmental stewardship, and local livelihoods.

Historically, Bedha Traditional Village is believed to have existed since the pre-Bedahulu period, before the thirteenth century, based on local oral traditions. The village name is associated with “*Daha*” in East Java, indicating early cultural connections between Bali and Java. Local historical accounts also mention *Patih Kebo Iwa*, who is believed to have built a *Bale Agung* in the area. Over time, Bedha developed through the *Kaba-Kaba* kingdom, the Dutch colonial period, Indonesia's early independence, and the modern era, shaping its present customary governance and social institutions that continue to preserve cultural heritage and community cohesion.

During the preparatory stage, *pakaseh*, *subak* administrators, *pamangku*, *sulinggih*, and members of the farming community (*krama petani*) jointly prepared ritual offerings (*banten*), ceremonial equipment, and ritual sites, including temples, irrigation channels, and rice fields. These activities were carried out through *ngayah* (voluntary communal service), reflecting shared responsibility and mutual cooperation, although participation was dominated by older community members, with limited involvement from younger generations. The observations also showed that ritual symbols were treated as sacred. Rats, representing *marana* (agricultural pests), were purified, wrapped, and presented as ritual offerings rather than treated as objects of destruction. This practice reflects the belief that pests are part of the cosmic order and should be ritually reconciled to restore ecological balance.

### 4.2 Ritual Process of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana*

Field observations indicate that the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual is implemented through a structured sequence comprising ritual preparation, purification, symbolic cremation, and closing ceremonies, forming an integral component of the agricultural cycle within the *Subak* system of Bedha Village. The entire procession involves the active participation of the *pakaseh*, *pamangku*, *sulinggih*, *subak* administrators, and members of the farming community, each

performing specific responsibilities according to customary regulations, thereby demonstrating the close integration of agricultural management, religious obligations, and communal cooperation within the institutional structure of *Subak*.

This observation was consistently supported by interview findings. I Wayan Suriana, a customary priest (*pemangku adat*), explained that every stage of the ritual represents a sacred process intended to restore harmony between humans, nature, and the divine, while I Nyoman Swadra, a customary leader, emphasized that the ritual functions not merely as a response to agricultural pests but as a mechanism for maintaining the cosmological principles that sustain the *Subak* system. Likewise, I Gde Andika Yudha Pradana, I Ketut Merta Suteja, and I Ketut Mertayasa, a village official, highlighted that the ritual embodies educational and ecological values by strengthening collective responsibility, preserving indigenous knowledge, and encouraging younger generations to respect nature. This interpretation was further reinforced by I Nyoman Arnaya, who explained that the ritual should not be understood as an effort to eradicate pests but rather as a symbolic practice that teaches respect for all living beings and promotes ecological balance. These interview findings are consistent with documentary evidence from *Sri Purana Tattwa*, *Usada Sawah*, and *Kuttara Dewa Tattwa*, which collectively portray the ritual as a cosmological mechanism for restoring harmony before the implementation of *penangluk marana*.

Taken together, the convergence of observational evidence, interview data, and documentary sources demonstrates that the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual functions simultaneously as a religious practice, an ecological strategy, and an institutional mechanism through which the *Subak* community preserves environmental sustainability, reinforces social cohesion, and maintains harmonious relationships between humans, nature, and the divine.

Table 1 summarizes the main stages of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual in Bedha Village. The table presents the sequence of ritual processions, key ritual actions, offerings, and their primary significance in a concise format, allowing readers to easily understand the overall structure of the ceremony. More detailed explanations of the theological, ethical, and ecological meanings of each stage are discussed in the subsequent analysis.

Table 1. The Procession of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* Tradition in Bedha Village

| Stage | Name of Procession                       | Key Ritual Action                             | Offerings                                                | Main Significance                     |
|-------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1     | <i>Mabanten Pakeling</i>                 | Ritual notification to temple deities         | <i>Banten Pejati</i> , conch shell                       | Initiates sacred ritual sequence      |
| 2     | Ethical Treatment of Rats                | Shift from killing to ritual respect for rats | Prayers, symbolic rites                                  | Ahimsa and ecological awareness       |
| 3     | <i>Ngeringkes</i>                        | Purification and shrouding of rat bodies      | <i>Eteh-eteh</i> , white cloth                           | Spiritual purification of beings      |
| 4     | <i>Pabersihan lan Tarpana</i>            | Prayers for the souls of rats                 | Tarpana offerings                                        | Spiritual release of atma             |
| 5     | <i>Banten Mamanah Toya</i>               | Night ritual dedicated to Dewa Wisnu          | Mamanah Toya offerings                                   | Inner purification                    |
| 6     | <i>Nunas Toya Panembak</i>               | Retrieval of holy water                       | Holy water ( <i>tirta</i> )                              | Collective spiritual cleansing        |
| 7     | <i>Nyukat Genah Ngeseng</i>              | Preparing cremation site                      | Measuring tools, offerings                               | Ritual purification of space          |
| 8     | <i>Melaspas Wadah lan Patulang</i>       | Purification of cremation structures          | <i>Banten Melaspas</i>                                   | Sanctification of ritual media        |
| 9     | <i>Mamargi Ka Segara</i>                 | Procession to the sea                         | Procession offerings                                     | Journey toward cosmic realm           |
| 10    | <i>Ngeseng lan Nganyut ka Segara</i>     | Cremation and ash dispersal                   | Fire ritual, <i>jukung</i> , offerings                   | Return to cosmic elements             |
| 11    | <i>Caru Panca Sanak</i>                  | Ritual to neutralize negative forces          | <i>Caru</i> offerings                                    | Cosmic balance restoration            |
| 12    | <i>Mabumi Sudha &amp; Masapuh Wighna</i> | Land purification rituals                     | <i>Pecaruan</i> offerings                                | Environmental and spiritual cleansing |
| 13    | <i>Penyejeg and Closing Rituals</i>      | Final ritual consolidation                    | <i>Bade tumpang tujuh, sasari</i> , concluding offerings | Ritual closure and harmony            |

Source: Authors, 2025

The ritual stages presented in Table 1 indicate that *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* is not merely a ceremonial practice but an integrated system that connects religious beliefs, ethical values, and ecological awareness. The ritual sequence reflects a cosmological perspective in which humans, animals, and nature are understood as interconnected elements within a balanced cosmic order. A significant aspect of the ritual is the symbolic transformation of rats from agricultural pests into living beings recognized as possessing *atma* (souls). This interpretation reflects the ethical principle of *ahimsa*, which emphasizes respect for all forms of life. Therefore, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* frames pest management not only as a practical activity but also as a moral and spiritual practice aimed at maintaining ecological harmony.



Figure 2. The *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual, led by a Hindu priest and followed by communal prayers by the local community in Bedha Village, Tabanan, 2021. (Photo: Renawati, 2025)

#### 4.3 Traditional Ecological Knowledge Embedded in the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* Ritual

The findings indicate that the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual embodies a living system of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that has been developed, practiced, and transmitted across generations within the *Subak* community of Bedha Village. Participatory observations revealed that ritual implementation is consistently integrated with ecological management activities, including cleaning irrigation canals, preparing rice-field environments, coordinating synchronized planting schedules, and organizing communal work (*ngayah*). These collective practices demonstrate that environmental management is inseparable from ritual performance and reflects the community's understanding that agricultural sustainability depends upon the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the divine. This interpretation was consistently supported by interview findings. I Nyoman Arnaya explained that the ritual should not be understood merely as a ceremonial response to agricultural pests but as a moral guide that teaches respect for nature and encourages the restoration of ecological balance rather than the eradication of pests.

Likewise, I Wayan Suriana, a customary priest, emphasized that ecological disturbances are interpreted not only as biological phenomena but also as indications that harmony between humans, the environment,

and spiritual obligations has been disrupted. He further explained that increasingly unpredictable seasonal patterns and more severe rat infestations are closely associated with the declining implementation of synchronized planting within the *Subak* system, noting that “*Seasonal changes are increasingly unpredictable, and rat infestations are becoming more difficult to control. In the past, rituals such as Mrateka Sarwa Marana were effective because farmers planted their rice simultaneously*”. This perspective was reinforced by I Ketut Mertayasa and I Gde Andika Yudha Pradana, who explained that modern agricultural technologies, including tractors and environmentally friendly pesticides, complement rather than replace the ritual because technological innovation addresses practical farming needs, whereas ritual maintains cosmological harmony and collective responsibility toward nature.

Furthermore, I Gde Andika Yudha Pradana and I Ketut Merta Suteja highlighted that the continuity of this ecological knowledge depends on intergenerational transmission through ritual participation, temple ceremonies, and community-based environmental programs that encourage younger generations to remain engaged with *Subak* traditions. These interview findings are consistent with documentary evidence from *Sri Purana Tattwa* and *Usada Sawah*, which describe agricultural rituals as mechanisms for maintaining balance among humans, nature, and the cosmic order while positioning agricultural pests within a broader cosmological framework rather than solely as destructive organisms.

#### ***4.4 An Integrative Model of Mrateka Sarwa Marana: Linking Ritual, Cosmology, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and the Subak System***

The findings of this study demonstrate that the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition cannot be adequately understood as an isolated ritual practice or merely as a religious response to agricultural pest outbreaks. Participatory observations revealed that every stage of the ritual—from collective preparation (*ngayah*), ritual purification, symbolic cremation, and the procession to the sea—is closely integrated with agricultural management, environmental stewardship, and the institutional governance of the *Subak* system. Throughout the ritual process, the *pakaseh*, *pamangku*, *sulinggih*, *subak* administrators, and farming community perform complementary roles that collectively maintain both ecological and social balance.

This observation was consistently supported by interview findings. I Wayan Suriana, a customary priest (*pemangku adat*), explained that the ritual functions as a sacred process for restoring harmony between humans, nature, and the divine rather than merely controlling agricultural pests. Similarly, I Nyoman Swadra emphasized that ecological disturbances are interpreted

through Balinese cosmology as indications of disrupted harmony within the relationships among humans, the environment, and spiritual forces. This interpretation was reinforced by I Nyoman Arnaya, who explained that the ritual teaches respect for all living beings and encourages the restoration of ecological balance instead of emphasizing pest eradication. Furthermore, I Gde Andika Yudha Pradana, I Ketut Merta Suteja, and I Ketut Mertayasa highlighted that the continuity of the tradition depends upon the integration of ritual practice, environmental ethics, indigenous knowledge, and collective participation, including the transmission of ecological values to younger generations and the complementary use of modern agricultural technologies alongside customary practices.

These interview findings correspond with documentary evidence from *Sri Purana Tattwa*, *Usada Sawah*, and *Kuttara Dewa Tattwa*, which collectively describe agricultural rituals as mechanisms for restoring harmony between *bhuwana alit* (the microcosm) and *bhuwana agung* (the macrocosm), while emphasizing that environmental balance is achieved through the interaction of spiritual, ecological, and social responsibilities. The convergence of observational evidence, community narratives, and documentary sources therefore demonstrates that the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition operates through four interrelated dimensions.

Ritual functions as the operational mechanism through which collective actions are performed, Balinese cosmology provides the philosophical framework for interpreting ecological disturbances, Traditional Ecological Knowledge supplies adaptive environmental knowledge developed through generations of farming experience, and the *Subak* system serves as the institutional platform that integrates these components into a coherent system of agricultural governance. The continuous interaction among these four dimensions enables farming communities to respond adaptively to environmental change while simultaneously preserving cultural identity, strengthening social cohesion, and maintaining agricultural sustainability. Accordingly, this study proposes an integrative socio-ecological model in which ritual, cosmology, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and the *Subak* system function as mutually reinforcing components rather than independent elements. This integrative relationship constitutes the principal novelty of the present study by demonstrating that the long-term resilience of the *Subak* system depends not on a single cultural or ecological factor but on the dynamic interaction among spiritual beliefs, indigenous knowledge, collective institutions, and adaptive environmental management.



Figure 3. Photographs of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual in Bedha Village, Tabanan, Bali, 2021. Top left: rats placed in an iron cage awaiting the ritual and the ritual event banner. Bottom: the ritual procession. (Banner photograph reproduced from the Bedha Traditional Village Facebook page; all other photographs were taken with permission from the Instagram account @krisna\_widarma.)

#### 4.5 Discussion

This study demonstrates that the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition within the Subak of Bedha Village represents a socio-religious knowledge system that enables Balinese agrarian communities to adapt to ecological disturbances, climate change, and social transformation. The tradition functions not merely as a religious ritual or pest-control practice but as a cosmological framework that integrates relationships among humans, nature, and transcendental forces within a moral and spiritual order. These findings align with Danugroho et al., (2025) and Geria et al., (2023) perspective, which situates ritual as a symbolic system that imparts meaning to ecological and social realities while simultaneously shaping collective patterns of action within the community.

Participatory observations indicate that *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* is embedded within the *Subak* system as a socio-religious institution that integrates agricultural practices, ritual activities, and community organization. The involvement of *pakaseh* (*Subak* leaders), *Subak* administrators, *pamangku* (temple custodians), *sulinggih* (priests), and farming communities in all ritual stages demonstrates its role in strengthening social cohesion and spiritual integration. The practice

of *ngayah* (unpaid communal service) reflects values of cooperation, solidarity, and shared responsibility in responding to *marana* (agricultural disturbances). However, the study also identifies declining participation among younger generations, indicating challenges in the intergenerational transmission and sustainability of the tradition. This finding is consistent with Wijayanti et al., (2025) and Rusadi et al., (2024), who highlighted the impact of social change and modernization on the continuity of cultural practices within the *subak* system.

The *Subak* community of Bedha Village understands *marana* as an agrarian disturbance with both ecological and cosmological dimensions. Rather than viewing *marana* solely as a biological pest problem, the community interprets it as an indication of imbalance between microcosm (*bhuwana alit*) and macrocosm (*bhuwana agung*). Seasonal uncertainty, irrigation damage, rice-field conversion, and increasing ecological pressures are perceived as signs of disrupted harmony between humans and the environment. This perspective reflects local ecological awareness that corresponds with cultural ecology, which views ritual as a cultural adaptation strategy for responding to environmental change (Citra et al., 2025; Danugroho et al., 2025; Zhu, 2025; Zen et al., 2024).

The integration of empirical findings with classical *lontar* texts, including *Sri Purana Tattwa*, *Kuttara Dewa Tattwa*, and *Usada Sawah*, indicates that *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* is grounded in strong theological and cosmological principles. These texts describe *marana* within the concept of *Tri Grubug* as a manifestation of cosmic imbalance resulting from disrupted relationships among humans, nature, and the spiritual realm. Therefore, the ritual functions as an effort to restore cosmic harmony and support agricultural sustainability. The study also reveals that rats, as symbols of *marana*, are not perceived merely as pests but as beings with spiritual significance within the concept of *Catur Sanak* in *Usada Sawah*. This aligns with Gould et al., (2023) and Muller et al., (2019) concept of relational ontology, which emphasizes that human–nonhuman relations in indigenous societies are ethical and interconnected.

The ritual treatment of rats aims to neutralize destructive energies and restore cosmic balance rather than to eliminate living beings. Changes in ritual practices that prohibit direct killing reflect adaptations to ethical and ecological values, particularly the principle of *ahimsa* and growing awareness of ecosystem sustainability, which in the anthropology of religion are understood as symbolic adjustments that preserve the essence of the ritual (Arshiniwati & Peradantha, 2025; De Haas et al., 2011). Interviews with informants indicate that the *Subak* community of Bedha Village does not perceive ritual practices and modern agricultural technologies as mutually exclusive approaches. The use of tractors, natural pesticides, and modern farming techniques is understood as complementary, not as replacements for ritual functions. For farmers,

successful harvests are determined not only by technical factors but also by the spiritual harmony cultivated through collective ritual. These findings reinforce Ardana et al., (2024) argument that the effectiveness of the *Subak* system lies in the integration of technical management, social structure, and religious belief.

From a moral and ethical perspective, this study emphasizes that *marana* is understood because of human behavior that deviates from cosmological and social norms. Teachings in the *lontar* manuscripts *Sila Gama Catur Pataka* and *Purwana Yama Tattwa* portray *marana* as the consequence of violating *apah krama* and *papa krama* thus requiring a collective purification process (*prayascitta*) for resolution. Consequently, the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual functions as a pedagogical and reflective instrument, instilling human moral responsibility toward nature and fellow beings. This perspective aligns with Yulisinta et al., (2024) concept of sacred ecology, which emphasizes that environmental sustainability depends largely on the values and ethics embedded within communities.

The findings of this study also reveal that the sustainability of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition cannot be separated from the dynamics of symbolic power and the legitimacy of knowledge within the *Subak* community of Bedha Village. The authority of *pemangku*, *sulinggih*, and *pakaseh* functions not only as technical executors of the ritual but also as custodians of collective memory and interpreters of the tradition's cosmological meaning. Through sacred narratives, mantras, and references to *lontar* manuscripts, they construct symbolic legitimacy that ensures the tradition remains recognized as relevant by the community. From Ardana et al., (2024) perspective, this practice can be understood as a form of symbolic capital that reinforces social cohesion while maintaining value systems within Balinese agrarian society. However, the study also identifies subtle negotiations of meaning at the community level. Some younger farmers interpret the ritual primarily as a customary obligation and a marker of cultural identity, rather than as a spiritual necessity with transcendental significance. This phenomenon indicates a shift toward cultural religiosity, where rituals are preserved as symbols of collective identity continuity, even if their metaphysical meanings are not fully internalized. This aligns with Suyitno et al., (2023) notion of reflexive modernity, in which individuals actively negotiate traditions within an increasingly rational and pragmatic modern context.

From a political ecology perspective, the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* tradition functions as cultural resistance to the homogenization of modern agriculture. By framing *marana* as a cosmological and moral issue, the ritual affirms ethical limits in human–nature relations and symbolically challenges exploitative, industrial approaches to nature (Boelens et al., 2023). The *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual has a latent pedagogical function by transmitting values of discipline,

communal responsibility, and ecological awareness through participation. As informal experiential learning, it enhances ecological and spiritual literacy, especially among younger generations. These findings resonate with Djufri (2025) perspective, which emphasizes that the most effective learning occurs through meaningful social experiences. Furthermore, this study reveals that symbolic practices in the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* ritual reflect environmental ethical principles that are both preventive and restorative. Efforts to neutralize *marana* through ritual are aimed not only at the physical restoration of rice fields but also at repairing social relations that may have been disrupted due to internal conflicts, inequitable water distribution, or violations of *Subak* agreements. In this sense, the ritual functions as a mechanism of symbolic conflict resolution that strengthens social solidarity. The findings indicate that the presence of this ritual also contributes to the social-ecological resilience of the *Subak* system. The ritual serves as a shared space for reflecting on human–nature relationships while reinforcing collective commitment to sustainable agriculture. This concept aligns with the resilience thinking framework developed by Mekonnen et al., (2021), which emphasizes the importance of local institutions and traditional knowledge in responding to environmental change.

This study shows that the aesthetic and performative elements of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* procession, including offerings, ritual music, chants, and spatial arrangements, play an important role in strengthening emotional and spiritual engagement among participants. These ritual components function not only as symbolic expressions but also as affective media for internalizing spiritual and ecological values while reinforcing collective memory and shared cultural meaning. This finding is consistent with the study by Vipriyanti et al., (2025), who demonstrated that ritualized experiences in intangible cultural heritage create emotional attachment, strengthen collective identity, and facilitate the intergenerational transmission of cultural values through symbolic and performative practices.

Likewise, Xie et al. (2026) argued that collective ritual performances generate emotional synchrony among participants, thereby reinforcing shared memory, social cohesion, and the continuity of cultural traditions. These findings suggest that the performative dimensions of *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* extend beyond ceremonial aesthetics, serving as mechanisms through which ecological ethics and spiritual values are collectively experienced and reproduced within the *Subak* community. However, this study also reveals that the continuity of the tradition is increasingly challenged by agricultural land conversion, tourism expansion, and socio-economic transformation.

This observation supports the findings of Jung (2025) who reported that land-use change and tourism development in Bali have reduced the ecological

integrity of *Subak* landscapes while simultaneously increasing the risk of ritual commodification. Similarly, Ghazi et al., (2025) emphasized that when sacred rituals are increasingly presented as tourism attractions, their spiritual meaning may gradually shift toward performative spectacle, potentially weakening their cultural authenticity. Therefore, adaptive conservation strategies integrating community participation, cultural governance, and sustainable environmental management are essential to ensure that *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* remains a living cultural tradition rather than becoming merely a commodified cultural performance.

The theoretical implications of this study reinforce perspectives within the anthropology of religion and ethno-ecology that conceptualize ritual as a form of adaptive knowledge rather than as an irrational or purely symbolic practice. The findings contribute to scholarly discussions on the *Subak* system by foregrounding its moral, spiritual, and cosmological dimensions of agricultural management—dimensions that are frequently overlooked in technocratic and policy-driven approaches. From a practical standpoint, this study demonstrates that the preservation of the *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* education, particularly in fostering values of environmental stewardship and ecological responsibility among younger generations. The integration of ritual practices with conservation initiatives, irrigation management, and environmental education programs may enhance the long-term sustainability of the *Subak* system in the face of ongoing modernization pressures. Furthermore, the policy implications of this study underscore the need for institutional recognition and support for *Subak* traditions as living cultural heritage. Village governments and customary institutions are encouraged to regard rituals such as *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* not merely as ceremonial events, but as integral components of local environmental governance and food security strategies. The incorporation of local wisdom into cultural, educational, and environmental policy frameworks can further strengthen the *Subak* system's role as a globally recognised model of sustainable agriculture, contributing to the achievement of the SDGs, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) through resilient rural livelihoods and enhanced food security.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* is not merely a religious ceremony for addressing agricultural pests but an integrated socio-ecological system that supports the sustainability of the *Subak* system. The findings show that the ritual connects spiritual beliefs, ecological knowledge, and collective action to maintain harmony among humans, nature, and the divine. The first finding indicates that the ritual process functions beyond ceremonial practice.

Through stages of preparation, purification, symbolic cremation of rats, and ritual procession, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* strengthens social solidarity, reinforces environmental ethics, and promotes collective responsibility in managing agricultural disturbances. The second finding reveals that the ritual is rooted in the Balinese cosmological worldview, where *marana* is interpreted not only as a biological problem but also as a sign of disrupted harmony between *bhuwana alit* (microcosm), *bhuwana agung* (macrocosm), and the divine. Accordingly, the ritual represents an effort to restore ecological and spiritual balance while reflecting respect for all forms of life. The third finding demonstrates that *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* represents a living system of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). This knowledge is transmitted through ritual participation, collective farming practices, irrigation management, and environmental stewardship. The coexistence of traditional practices and modern agricultural technologies further indicates that indigenous knowledge and scientific approaches can complement each other in supporting sustainable agriculture.

The main contribution of this study is the development of an integrative model linking ritual, TEK, and the *Subak* system. In this model, ritual serves as a practical mechanism, cosmology provides the philosophical foundation, TEK contributes adaptive ecological knowledge, and *Subak* functions as the institutional framework that integrates these elements. This model extends previous studies by demonstrating that socio-ecological resilience emerges from the continuous interaction among cultural values, ecological knowledge, and community institutions.

Comparable agricultural rituals are practiced in several *Subak* communities across Bali, including *Nangluk Merana*, *Ngusaba Nini*, and *Mapag Toya*. These rituals share the same philosophical foundation, namely *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasizes harmony among humans, nature, and the divine. They also involve collective participation, ritual offerings (*banten*), and prayers to protect agricultural ecosystems, maintain crop fertility, and support the sustainability of the *Subak* system. However, *Mrateka Sarwa Marana* differs from these rituals in its symbolic cremation of rats as representations of *marana* (agricultural pests) and in its explicit integration of ritual practices with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) for community-based pest management. These similarities indicate that agricultural rituals across Bali perform a common socio-ecological function. At the same time, these differences reflect the diversity of local cultural expressions that strengthen environmental stewardship, collective responsibility, and the resilience of the *Subak* system.

This study was conducted in a single *Subak* community and focused primarily on cultural and ecological dimensions. Future research should examine the applicability of this model across different *Subak* communities and other

indigenous agricultural systems through comparative and interdisciplinary approaches involving ecological, agricultural, and social perspectives. Such studies may provide further insights into the role of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in climate adaptation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and sustainable environmental governance.

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## Author Profiles

**Pande Wayan Renawati** is a lecturer at the Faculty of Brahma Widya, Department of Hindu Theology, State Hindu University I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Bali. She earned her Doctoral degree in Cultural Studies from the Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Denpasar, Bali. Her research has been presented at seminars and published in several journals, including an article on “The Role of Women with Character as Human Capital in Strengthening Family Resilience Based on the Vedas”. Her concentration on Hindu Customs and Traditions. Her published book is titled *The Tradition of Mrateka Marana (Ngaben Tikus) as a Socio-Cultural Practice of Farmers in Bedha Village, Kediri, Tabanan*. Email: [pandewayanrenawati@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:pandewayanrenawati@uhnsugriwa.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1662-9503>

**Eny Dyah Yuniwati** is a Professor in the Department of Agrotechnology, Faculty of Agriculture, Universitas Wisnuwardhana Malang, Indonesia. Her research focuses on green technology, circular economy, sustainable agriculture, environmental technology, organic waste management, waste-to-value systems, Internet of Things (IoT) for environmental monitoring, and artificial intelligence applications in smart farming. Her work has significantly contributed to advancing sustainable development, circular economy practices, and environmentally friendly technological innovations in Indonesia. Email: [nieyuniwati@wisnuwardhana.ac.id](mailto:nieyuniwati@wisnuwardhana.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8134-5841>

**Mhd. Rafi'i Ma'arif Tarigan** is a lecturer at STIT Hamzah Al-Fansuri Sibolga Barus, actively engaged in the three pillars of higher education: teaching, research, and community service. His research primarily focuses on education, innovative teaching and learning, 21st-century learning, and the development of 4C skills (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, and Communication). His academic interests also encompass curriculum development, instructional design, the integration of educational technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in learning, numeracy literacy, and culture-based education through the incorporation of local wisdom. Email: [rafiimagister8@gmail.com](mailto:rafiimagister8@gmail.com) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9691-9817>

# Bridging Culture and Sustainability: Implementing *Tri Hita Karana* through Participatory Action Research in Community-Based Waste Management in Besakih Village, Bali

Nadia Atika Amrin<sup>1\*</sup> , Muhammad Al Giffari<sup>2</sup> , Ranitya Nurlita<sup>3</sup> ,  
Olivia Anastasia Padang<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

<sup>1,3</sup> Wastehub Alam Lestari, South Tangerang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Andalas, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Bali Waste Cycle, Bali, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Besakih Village, home to Bali's most sacred temple complex, generates 7.23 tons of waste per day, of which only 6.78 percent is processed due to limited capacity, leaving the remainder unmanaged. This study develops a sustainable waste management model by integrating the Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* (THK): spiritual balance (*parahyangan*), social (*pawongan*), and ecological (*palemahan*). Using Participatory Action Research, data were collected through focus group discussions, interviews, and stakeholder-led waste audits. The findings indicate that integrating THK enhances waste governance. The *parahyangan* dimension restructures ritual waste management, while *pawongan* strengthens community participation through banjar-level waste banks and the creation of 24 green jobs. The *palemahan* dimension promotes circular practices by converting organic waste into compost and Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF). Household participation reached 89 percent, diverting 125.57 tons of waste during the program period and increasing workers' monthly income by IDR 1.5 million. Overall, integrating cultural values with Circular Economy (CE) principles enhances resilience in community-based waste management systems

**Keywords:** *Tri Hita Karana*; circular economy; participatory action research; green product development; ritual waste management; SDGs

## 1. Introduction

Waste management is a global environmental issue of urgent concern. According to UNEP (2024), the tourism sector generated around 1.7 billion tons of waste in 2023, while marine plastic pollution from tourism

\* Corresponding author's email: [nadiaamrin01@gmail.com](mailto:nadiaamrin01@gmail.com)

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activities has increased by 40 percent since 2018. Indonesia produces 72 million tons of waste per year, with Bali Province contributing around 4,200 tons per day, which increased by 10 percent following the recovery of tourism after the pandemic (Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2025). Although the Bali Provincial Government has allocated IDR 76 billion in 2021 for the construction of Reduce–Reuse–Recycle Waste Management Facilities (TPS3R), the effectiveness of waste management remains low: only 35 percent of villages have optimally functioning TPS3R, and 45 percent of villages have active waste banks (Bali Provincial Environmental Agency, 2025). This indicates that waste management in Bali Province still faces structural and institutional challenges, especially in sacred areas and major tourist destinations, where the high intensity of cultural and tourism activities demands a more integrated, participatory, and adaptive system that responds to local dynamics and global pressures on environmental sustainability (Koski-Karell, 2019).

Besakih Temple, the spiritual center of Balinese Hindus and the largest religious tourist destination, faces serious waste management problems stemming from ritual activities and tourist visits. The Besakih Temple area produces an average of 7.23 tons of waste per day, of which 77.24 percent consists of organic materials such as flowers, coconut leaves, and ritual offerings, indicating that ritual activities are the primary source of waste, especially during major ceremonies when the volume of waste increases three to five times. On the other hand, 14.09 percent of the total waste is inorganic, dominated by plastic packaging and bottled drinks associated with tourism activities and food stalls. In comparison, only 6.78 percent ( $\pm 490$  kg) of the total waste is formally managed (Karangasem Regency Environmental Agency, 2023). Although waste management in Besakih has been regulated normatively through Bali Governor Regulation No. 97 of 2018, which limits the use of single-use plastics, Besakih Village Regulation No. 4 of 2023, which requires waste sorting and management based on source, and Besakih Village *Pararem* (customary regulation) No. 3 of 2021, which emphasizes the obligation of traditional villagers to maintain environmental cleanliness and sanctity through customary rules and sanctions. Implementation has not been optimal due to weak law enforcement, overlapping authorities, low community participation, social stigma against waste management work, minimal economic incentives, and weak political support (Suasih et al., 2024).

Balinese society possesses substantial cultural capital through the Tri Hita Karana (THK) philosophy, which emphasizes spiritual balance (*parahyangan*), social (*pawongan*), and ecological (*palemahan*) (Kristinayanti et al., 2020; Pitana, 2010). The integration of THK with formal regulations has even increased community participation, linking environmental cleanliness with religious

values, thereby increasing waste sorting rates by up to 40 percent (Suasih et al., 2024). On the other hand, the Circular Economy (CE) approach offers significant opportunities through the principles of reduce, reuse, recycle, redesign, and regenerate, which view waste as an economic resource (Carpenter et al., 2018; Gura et al., 2023). A study by Mazzoli et al. (2024) emphasizes that applying CE in the urban context in India provides a holistic solution by integrating technology-based circular management approaches, policies, and community participation. This approach reduces waste generation and creates economic and social added value through the transition from a linear to a circular system.

In Bali Province, there has been an initiative to utilize waste from ceremonies as Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF), as has been trialed by the Local Waste Processing Facility (TOSS) in Klungkung Regency since 2022 which processes organic and inorganic waste, including ceremonial waste and mixed waste, into fuel pellets or RDF as an alternative energy source to replace fossil fuels from waste, while reducing dependence on landfills (Suariyanti et al., 2025). A study by Law et al. (2016) demonstrates that ceremonial temple waste can be processed into RDF pellets as an alternative fuel, enabling previously discarded waste to provide energy benefits and economic value to the community.

To address the multi-actor complexity in Besakih, a collaborative approach such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) is needed, with a plan, act, observe, reflect cycle that places the community as active subjects in formulating joint solutions. The synergy between THK values and CE principles has the potential to create a waste management model that is ecologically sustainable, socially and culturally legitimate, and economically impactful.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a THK-based sustainable waste management model in Besakih Village through a PAR approach that integrates the principles of the CE. This model is expected to address institutional issues, increase community participation, and generate economic value from waste, while maintaining cultural and ecological balance in Bali's sacred area. Given this complexity, a theoretical framework is needed that prioritizes technical solutions and integrates cultural values, institutional governance, and participatory approaches.

## 2. Literature Review

Waste management is a multidimensional issue that requires an integrated approach to address the complexity of technical, institutional, economic, and socio-cultural issues (Pitakaso et al., 2024; Suryawan & Lee, 2023). Previous literature emphasizes that there is no single effective approach, but rather a combination of strategies tailored to a community's characteristics and local institutional capacity. One dominant framework is Integrated Sustainable Waste Management (ISWM), which emphasizes integrating technical aspects

(technology and logistics systems), institutional aspects (the roles of government, the private sector, and the community), and social aspects (community participation and behavior) (UNEP, 2024). The 3R approach (reduce, reuse, recycle) and zero-waste strategies are also widely adopted, though their effectiveness depends heavily on public compliance and the availability of infrastructure (Sutriyanti et al., 2025).

Over the past two decades, CE has developed as a new paradigm that views waste as a resource. Through the strategies of reduce, reuse, recycle, redesign, and regenerate, CE not only has technical value but also creates green economic opportunities (Murray et al., 2017). Globally, the European Commission (2015) is promoting the circular economy action plan as the primary strategy for achieving the green deal and the 2050 carbon neutrality target. However, studies in developing countries confirm that the obstacles to CE implementation are not only technical in nature, but also related to governance, coordination across stakeholders, and socio-cultural legitimacy (Fernando et al., 2023; Meyer, 2025; Murray et al., 2017; Waluyo & Kharisma, 2023). In other words, the success of CE largely depends on how its practices are rooted in the local context through regulations, market incentives, and the reinforcement of cultural norms.

The community-based waste management (CBWM) approach has been widely implemented in developing countries, such as Indonesia, involving cooperatives, community groups, and religious organizations. CBWM has been shown to improve management effectiveness by empowering communities. Studies in Indonesia, including in West Nusa Tenggara, show that this model can strengthen local capacity, while market-based approaches such as the polluter pays scheme or waste bank incentives encourage behavioral change, although they require strong regulations to ensure equitable access (Ramadhanti, 2022). Various studies in Indonesia emphasize the importance of a combination of approaches: national regulations such as restrictions on single-use plastics, technological innovations such as RDF, and the integration of socio-cultural values into governance (Suasih et al., 2024; Waluyo & Kharisma, 2023; Wiratama & Wijaya, 2024).

In the context of Bali, socio-cultural integration in waste management is relevant to the THK philosophy (Gusti et al., 2019; Pitana, 2010). As a cosmological foundation, THK has long supported the sustainability of Balinese society and has proven to be strategic in supporting sustainable tourism in various tourist villages (Rosalina et al., 2023; Sanjaya et al., 2023). However, research on the role of THK in waste management is still limited. A study by Mudana et al. (2023) shows that THK can strengthen social legitimacy in community-based conservation (Mayun, 2024). A study by Suryawan & Lee (2023) shows that a cultural-religious approach can strengthen social legitimacy when cleanliness is framed as part of religious practice, thereby increasing community participation in waste sorting.

Overall, the literature confirms that successful waste management stems from integrating multiple approaches: technical, institutional, economic, and socio-cultural. Thus, research has a significant scope in developing a waste management model that integrates CE with the local THK philosophy. These approaches can improve technical effectiveness and strengthen social legitimacy and ecological sustainability. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by offering a THK-based waste management model that synergizes technical, institutional, economic, and cultural aspects within a single operational framework at the community level.

### 3. Method and Theory

#### 3.1 Method

##### 3.1.1 Study Location and Subject

This study was conducted in Besakih Village, Rendang District, Karangasem Regency, Bali (Figure 1), which is the location of Pura Agung Besakih, the largest Hindu ritual center and international tourist destination, with one main temple, Pura Penataran Agung Besakih, and 45 Pura Pakideh (supporting temples).

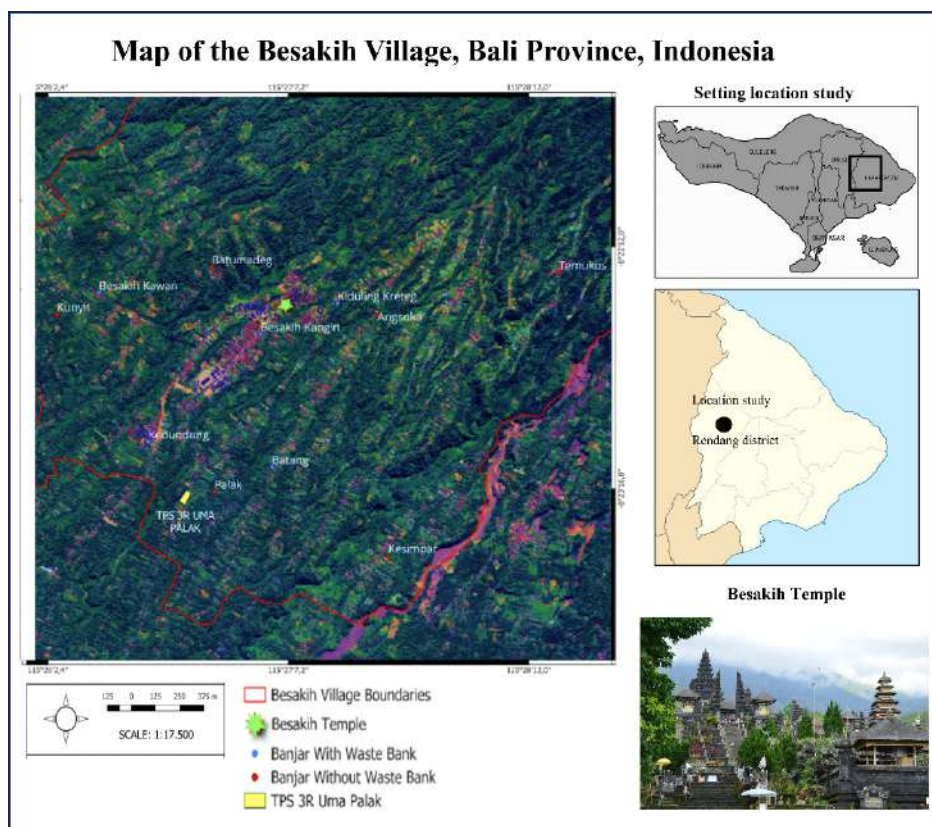


Figure 1. Study location: Besakih Village (Source: Author, 2025)

This area, covering approximately 15.36 km<sup>2</sup>, is inhabited by around 2,264 households (approximately 7,816 people) whose main livelihoods are agriculture, trade, and ritual and tourism services (Besakih Village Profile, 2024). The intensity of religious ceremonies and tourist visits generates substantial waste volumes, while institutional management continues to face significant constraints. This study focuses on the Palak TPS3R facility, located approximately 1 km from the temple complex and formally designated as a 3R Waste Management Site owned by the Karangasem Regency Government. Operational responsibility has been delegated to the Traditional Village through the Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes). However, limitations in human resources, collection fleets, and an effective waste-sorting system have hindered optimal operations, resulting in the facility functioning primarily as an open waste accumulation site rather than an integrated processing center.

The study subjects included customary institutions (customary villages, temple administrators and customary law enforcers/*pecalang*), formal institutions (village offices, village-owned enterprises, waste management units (UPS)/TPS3R, Karangasem Regency Environmental Agency), Temple Area Management Agency, local communities (*banjar*, waste bank cadres, women's groups, traders, and volunteers), as well as the private sector and social organizations (recycling craftsmen, RDF offtaker partners, Wastehub® (Wastehub Alam Lestari)", Bali Waste Cycle, Rebricks, and GoTo Impact Foundation). This configuration indicates that waste management in Besakih is not solely a technical issue but also closely linked to socio-cultural dimensions, spirituality, and the image of Bali tourism.

### 3.1.2 Study Design

This study uses a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach and a mixed-methods triangulation, in which quantitative and qualitative data complement each other (Creswell, 2018). This approach was chosen because the waste problem in Besakih Village is not only technical, but also has social, cultural, spiritual, and institutional dimensions. PAR provides a platform for indigenous communities, temple priests, and formal institutions to become active subjects in formulating, implementing, and evaluating solutions (Kemmis et al., 2014). Unlike conventional technical studies, this research emphasizes integrating local values, such as THK, *ngayah* (volunteer work), and *pararem* (customary rules), into the study process. This approach produces both academic knowledge and practical outcomes.

### 3.1.3 Stages of Participatory Action Research

This study uses a PAR with the plan–act–observe–reflect cycle, chosen because it can produce data while encouraging community involvement in social change (Goodman et al., 2020; Kemmis et al., 2014). This approach is highly relevant to Balinese traditions of participation through *sangkep* (deliberation) and *ngayah*, which enable the internalization of THK values in waste management practices. The PAR matrix is shown in Table 1.

Data was collected quantitatively through a survey of 1,717 respondents from eleven *banjars*, as well as qualitatively through focus group discussions (FGD) with 59 participants, in-depth interviews with village, customary, and government institutions, participatory observation at the Palak TPS3R and waste bank, and a review of Law No. 18/2008, Bali Provincial Governor Regulation No. 97/2018, Village Regulation 4/2023, and Customary law (*Pararem*) No. 3/2021.

The next stage is formulating solutions and intervention actions. This process involves 10 UPS/TPS3R administrators as the lead actors, trained to manage waste at the TPS3R facility, and 70 residents who receive training in making environmentally friendly products (green products). Furthermore, ongoing education is provided to all 2,281 households in Besakih Village, focusing on source sorting of waste, the use of inorganic waste, and the TPS3R transportation system. At this stage, local values such as THK, *ngayah*, and *pararem* were also integrated as a foundation to strengthen legitimacy and social involvement.

After implementation, an observation phase is conducted to monitor the results through quantitative data (volume of waste managed, level of community participation, amount of fees collected, creation of green jobs) and qualitative data (narratives of experiences, community perceptions, and records of behavioral changes). This observation was also used to assess the effectiveness of applicable regulations, including *pararem*, village regulations, and provincial government regulations.

Table 1. Participatory Action Research Matrix

| Stages                                          | Group Target                                                                                                                                        | Method                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Action Date                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Problem Identification                          | a. Besakih Village Community<br>b. Village and Temple Stakeholder<br>c. TPS3R                                                                       | a. Identify key waste management issues through initial focus group discussions, stakeholder mapping, and waste sampling.<br>b. Explore local values (THK, <i>ngayah</i> , <i>pararem</i> ) as a basis for strategy development.                                                                                                 | Week of 1 June 2023<br>- Week of 4 January 2024                                                |
| Action Study (Problem Solving)                  | a. Waste Management Unit<br>b. Besakih Village Community                                                                                            | a. Implementation of pilot programs: Training in waste management at TPS3R, household education, establishment of waste banks, RDF, and roster production.<br>b. Involvement of traditional institutions (Traditional Villages, Besakih Temple Managers) in supporting collective action.                                        | Week of 1 February 2024<br>- Week of 4 October 2024 (with periodic evaluations every 3 months) |
| Observation                                     | a. Waste Management Unit<br>b. Besakih Village Community                                                                                            | a. Monitoring of implementation results through quantitative data (volume of waste, participation rate, amount of levies, green jobs) and qualitative data (citizen narratives, perceptions, participant experiences).<br>b. Analysis of the effectiveness of regulations ( <i>pararem</i> , village, district, and provincial). | Week of 1 November 2024 - Week of 3 December 2024                                              |
| Reflection (Green Economy Development Planning) | a. Waste Management Unit Group<br>b. Village and Temple Stakeholders<br>c. Karangasem Regency Environmental Agency TPS3R and Waste Bank Management. | a. Focus Group Discussion on Evaluation<br>b. Discussion with participants on successes, obstacles, and potential for sustainability.<br>c. Identification of adaptation strategies for the next cycle.                                                                                                                          | Week of 4 December 2024 - Week of 2 January 2025                                               |

Source: Author (2025)

The final stage is reflection, which is carried out through panel discussions with community leaders, traditional institutions, village governments, and supporting organizations. The reflection forum evaluates achievements, identifies obstacles, and develops adaptation strategies for the next cycle. At this stage, the potential for green economic development through waste management is also mapped, including business opportunities from recycled products and the use of residues for RDF production. All stages of the research are carried out in a repeating plan–act–observe–reflect cycle. This cycle produces empirical data and strengthens institutional synergy, deepens community participation, and ensures that the solutions formulated are truly contextual to the socio-cultural dynamics of the Besakih community.

### 3.1.4 Data Analysis Techniques

This study used a mixed-methods triangulation, combining quantitative and qualitative data to obtain comprehensive results (Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel, covering public perceptions of waste, indicators of managed waste volume, the number of households paying levies, the creation of green jobs, and the use of recycled products. Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), transcribed into Microsoft Word files within one to three days. The transcription process produced textual data and generated initial ideas for follow-up interviews, participant observation, and additional literature searches (Taylor et al., 2016; Yin, 2016).

Qualitative analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach in accordance with the guidelines provided by Braun & Clarke (2006), which allows researchers to explore transcripts in depth, develop codes, and group them into themes and sub-themes that focus on THK values, institutional governance, community participation levels, and circular economic opportunities. These themes form the basis for interpreting the research results. This analysis process is integrated with the PAR (plan–act–observe–reflect) cycle to assess change dynamics at each stage of program implementation. This study also utilizes secondary data from relevant formal and customary regulations.

### 3.2 Theory

This study is based on an integrative theoretical framework that links cultural, economic, participatory, and governance dimensions (see Figure 2). First, THK serves as a socio-cultural theory that emphasizes harmony in human relations with God (*parahyangan*), social relations (*parwongan*), and the environment (*palemahan*) (Gusti et al., 2019; Tripayana et al., 2024). In the context

of waste management, THK provides spiritual and social legitimacy, so that sustainable practices are not only viewed as an administrative obligation, but also as a manifestation of Balinese society's religious and moral values.

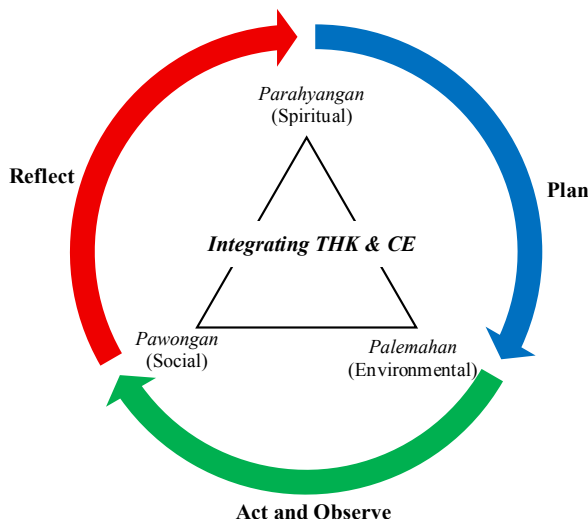


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework (Source: Author, 2025)

Second, the CE is a theory of sustainable development that rejects the linear “take-make-dispose” paradigm. CE views waste as a valuable resource that can be reprocessed into compost, RDF, or green products, while also opening opportunities for a circular economy and the creation of green jobs (European Commission, 2015; Gura et al., 2023; Meyer, 2025).

Third, the theoretical framework of this study is based on the theory of participation and empowerment through the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. Research participants’ participation is evident in the community’s active involvement at each stage of the plan–do–observe–reflect cycle. Empowerment is apparent in the process and in transformational outcomes, including increased critical awareness, capacity, and a sense of community ownership of resource management and decision-making (Kemmis et al., 2014; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

In the context of Besakih, PAR not only produces measurable technical data such as the volume and composition of waste produced and managed, but also serves as a mechanism for empowerment through improved participation, collective awareness, and social control of indigenous peoples (Baum et al., 2006). Therefore, this study uses an integrative theoretical framework, with THK as the basis for cultural values, circular economy as the basis for economics and ecology, and PAR as a participatory methodology that bridges participation towards empowerment, to formulate a sustainable waste management model in Besakih Village.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

#### 4.1.1 Plan Phase: Identification of Waste Management Issues in Besakih Village

The planning phase, which involves identifying problems at an early stage, is carried out in a participatory manner by involving the community, village officials, the Besakih Temple Management Agency, and the Waste Management Unit under BUMDes Besakih. This approach aligns with the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) principle, which emphasizes the active involvement of the community in identifying problems and formulating priorities (Brown, 2006; Chambers, 1994; Thampi et al., 2024). Problem identification in the early stages was carried out participatively by involving the community, village officials, the Besakih Temple Management Agency, and the Waste Management Unit (UPS) under BUMDes Besakih. The THK approach serves as the basis for the analysis, in which the *parahyangan* aspect is realized through the field team's participation in religious activities and through formal legitimacy through a memorandum of understanding (BAK) between the Dharma Artha Basuki Village-Owned Enterprise and the Sukla Project consortium, the program implementation team. The *pawongan* aspect is reflected in the team's involvement in village meetings (*sangkep*), social activities such as mutual assistance, and informal communication that builds community trust in the program. Meanwhile, the *palemahan* aspect is evident from a comparative study of the TPS3R Tanjung Benoa, which indicates a capacity gap, because even though the TPS3R Palak has an experienced team, its operations are still constrained by limitations in human resources, fleet, and suboptimal governance.

Based on the characteristics of municipal solid waste (MSW) in Indonesia, the average calorific value of mixed waste is reported to be around 9.5 MJ/kg due to the dominance of organic fractions and high moisture content (Qonitan et al., 2021). According to data from the Karangasem Regency Environmental Agency (2023), Besakih Village generates an average of 7.23 tons of waste per day from approximately 2,281 households and 600 daily pilgrims, indicating a theoretical energy potential of roughly 68.7 GJ per day ( $\pm 19$  MWh). Of this amount, only 6.78 percent (approximately 490.2 kg) is managed. At the same time, most of the remains are still dumped directly into open land near the Palak TPS3R, burned in garden areas (*teba*), or carried away by river currents. Community participation in waste management services remains relatively low, as only 215 households are registered as users of waste transportation services, despite the much larger number of households. UPS has only eight employees and limited facilities, such as one operational vehicle and a damaged processing machine. At the same time, the unclear legal status of the Palak TPS3R land and buildings further hinders operational optimization. The implementation

of Village Regulation No. 4 of 2023 on waste management has also been inconsistent, as community understanding remains weak and enforcement of the regulations has not been effective.

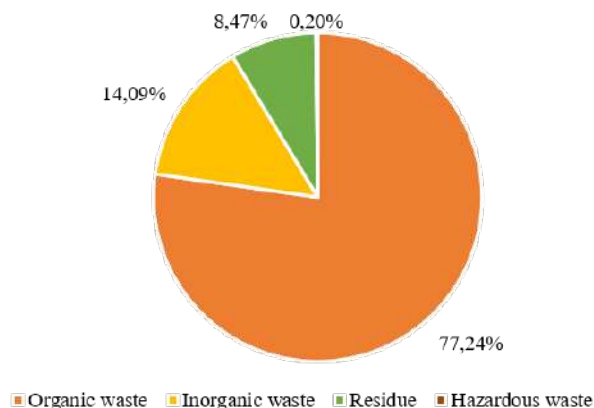


Figure 3. Composition of waste samples in Besakih Village (Source: Waste composition sampling, 2024).

The results of waste composition sampling in Besakih Village, shown in Figure 3, indicate that organic waste accounted for 77.24 percent, inorganic waste 14.09 percent, residue 8.47 percent, and hazardous waste 0.20 percent. This category of hazardous waste mainly consists of household hazardous waste, such as used batteries, lamps, aerosols, and expired medicines, that require special handling because they have the potential to pollute the environment if mixed with general waste (Letcher & Slack, 2019). This composition indicates that management of organic waste through composting or similar technologies is highly relevant, while also opening up opportunities for the circular economy in agriculture and renewable energy. Quantitatively, the average per capita waste generation is 0.14 kilograms per day, or about 0.65 liters per day, which is relatively low compared to the national average. However, the volume of waste still piles up significantly, especially during major traditional ceremonies at Pura Agung Besakih, resulting in a three- to five-fold increase in waste generation. The waste problem in Besakih Village is shown in Figure 4.

Based on the FGD results, waste management in Besakih Village still relies on the Palak TPS3R. Still, its capacity is limited by a lack of equipment, including RDF machines and organic shredders. Initiatives to provide new equipment can be an essential entry point for strengthening local capacity, both in the production of building materials (roster) and in the use of residues as alternative energy sources. The waste generation profile also demonstrates striking differences: in the temple area, 65–75 percent consists of low-density organic material from flowers and offerings, with a spike of up to one ton per

day during major ceremonies; while in residential areas, waste generation is more stable (500–600 kg/day) with plastic dominating 25–35 percent of total household waste.

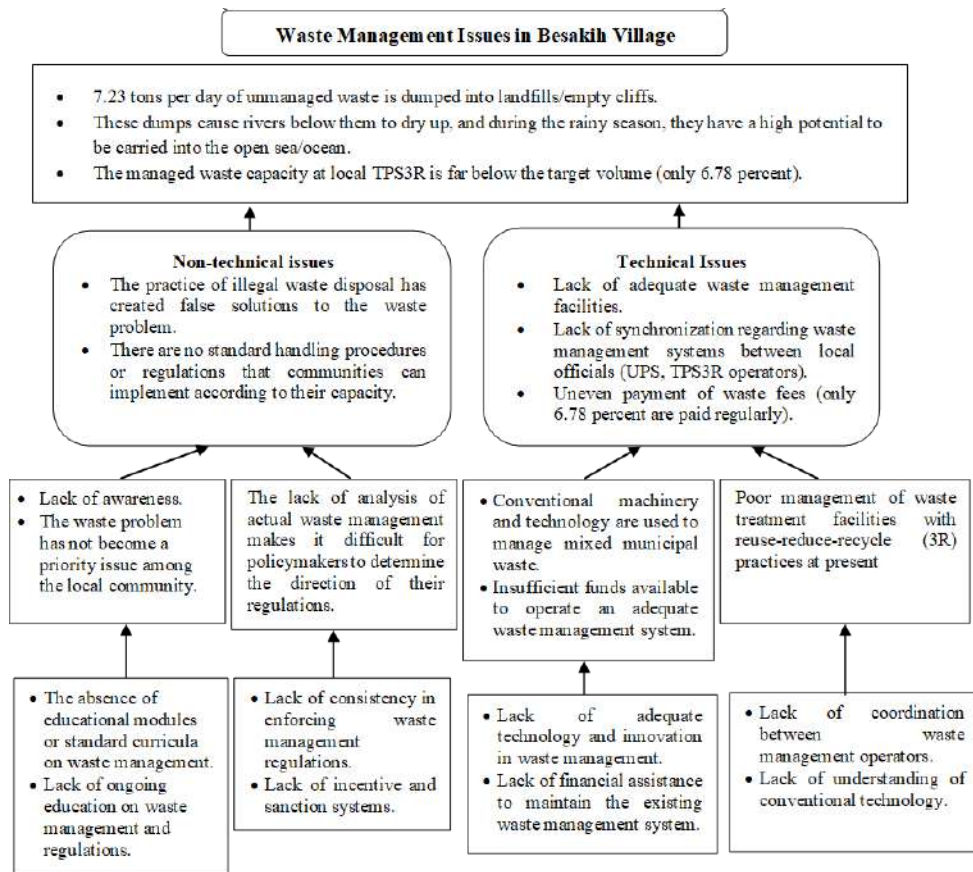


Figure 4. Problem tree in waste management in Besakih Village (Source: Focus group discussion results, 2024).

The main management challenges are multidimensional. Structurally, institutional fragmentation across traditional villages, administrative villages, village-owned enterprises, UPS, local governments, and temple management agencies results in overlapping roles. Operational constraints include limited human resources, fleets, and equipment. At the same time, socio-cultural aspects are reflected in low community participation, gender bias in public forums, and stigma attached to waste management work. Limited village budgets and weak enforcement of regulations further exacerbate the situation.

These findings are consistent with previous studies in Bali that highlight the dominance of organic waste from ritual activities and the limited capacity of TPS3R (Suasih et al., 2024; Wiratama & Wijaya, 2024). In terms of governance, institutional fragmentation has long been identified as an obstacle to waste

management systems in Indonesia. Thus, waste management in religious areas such as Besakih cannot be viewed solely as a technical issue but requires a multidimensional approach that simultaneously integrates structural, operational, social, and cultural aspects.

Table 2 demonstrates that the Besakih Village community perceives various waste management solutions positively. The majority of respondents emphasized the importance of establishing a cleanliness community (93.19 percent), training and education (≥96 percent), and seeing economic opportunities from waste management, both as a source of family income (95.69 percent) and as a commodity that can be sold (81.83 percent). However, participation is still lower at the practical level, such as in waste separation (63.48 percent) and collective cleanliness activities (57.95 percent).

Table 2. Community perceptions regarding solutions to waste problems in Besakih Village

| Solution formulation                                                                                             | Agree (%) | Disagree (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1. A clean community is needed in my neighborhood.                                                               | 93.19     | 6.81         |
| 2. I will participate if there is an educational program/training on turning waste into compost or other things. | 96.16     | 3.84         |
| 3. Education on how to process waste is needed.                                                                  | 96.39     | 3.61         |
| 4. Waste can cause harm to the community.                                                                        | 98.30     | 1.70         |
| 5. If managed properly, waste can bring benefits.                                                                | 97.90     | 2.10         |
| 6. Waste can be sold to stalls, collectors, scavengers, recycling units, and 3R disposal sites.                  | 81.83     | 18.17        |
| 7. Waste can be a source of income for families because it has monetary value.                                   | 95.69     | 4.31         |
| 8. Waste bins should be separated into organic, inorganic, and residual waste.                                   | 95.81     | 4.19         |
| 9. Collected waste can be burned without disturbing cleanliness.                                                 | 85.85     | 14.15        |
| 10. I separate organic and inorganic waste before sanitation workers transport it.                               | 63.48     | 36.52        |
| 11. I always dispose of waste in trash bins.                                                                     | 73.97     | 26.03        |
| 12. I am involved in environmental cleanliness activities with the surrounding community.                        | 57.95     | 42.05        |

Source: Survey result (2024)

This complexity indicates that waste management solutions in Besakih cannot rely solely on technical aspects; they must also integrate regulations, funding, and local value transformation through the THK framework, as shown in Table 3. The formulation of solutions in Besakih is rooted in integrating

THK, which bridges the spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions. From the *parahyangan* perspective, participation in religious ceremonies confirms that ritual waste requires specialized management.

Table 3. Formulation of solutions

| Dimensions of THK                      | Field Activities                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Findings Implications                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Parahyangan</i> (Spiritual)         | Participation in religious ceremonies and waste sampling during rituals.                                                                                                                                                 | Waste from religious activities requires exceptional management.                                                                                            |
| <i>Pawongan</i> (Social Relationships) | Attending village meetings ( <i>sangkep</i> ) (4 times), participating in community discussions, and door-to-door socialization,                                                                                         | Community support is increasing, but a change in mindset is still needed.                                                                                   |
| <i>Palemahan</i> (Environment)         | Cleaning the village and temple, sampling at the Palak TPS3R, visiting the Tanjung Benoa TPS3R, and Klungkung TOSS as best practices. In addition, providing RDF processing machines and crushers for roster production. | Highlighting the need for stronger technology, funding, and regulation. Additional equipment shows the potential for waste innovation to become a resource. |

Source: Author (2025)

The *pawongan* dimension is reflected in community cooperation and socialization, which increases social support but still faces resistance due to the mindset. A similar phenomenon is shown in a study by Sembiring & Nitivattananon (2010) on the importance of socio-cultural legitimacy in waste management. Meanwhile, the environmental dimension (*palemahan*) highlights village cleaning practices, comparative studies of TPS3R, and RDF innovations that demonstrate the need for infrastructure, regulations, and financing to realize the potential of CE. Thus, the complexity of waste management in Besakih cannot be reduced to a purely technical issue; instead, it requires a multidimensional approach that integrates spirituality, social solidarity, and ecological innovation within the THK framework.

4.1.2 Act and Observe Phases: Community-Based Waste Management Transformation in Besakih Village

The THK is a philosophy of life that integrates spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions in a balanced way, providing a moral basis for environmental sustainability and demonstrating that internalizing THK values strengthens social legitimacy in community-based ecological programs. The act

and observe phases focus on collective actions that emphasize integrating THK values, particularly the dimensions of *parahyangan*, *pawongan*, and *palemahan*, into participation and innovation in waste management, as shown in Figures 5 and 6.

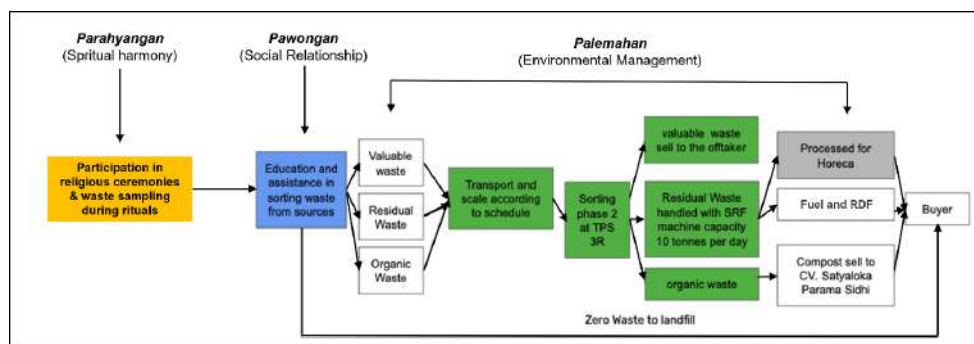


Figure 5. Waste Management with Tri Hita Karana Model in Besakih Village (Source: Author, 2025)

The initial stage involved direct participation in religious ceremonies and waste sampling during rituals at Besakih Temple and residents' homes. This activity was intended to obtain quantitative data on the composition and volume of ceremonial waste and served as a cultural strategy to build social and spiritual closeness with the indigenous community and temple authorities. The researchers' involvement in religious activities reflected the application of the *parahyangan* dimension, namely, the harmonious relationship between humans and God (Kristinayanti et al., 2020). Furthermore, this participation opens up a space for dialogue with cultural stakeholders, such as temple officials, *pecalang*, and village *krama*, who have moral authority over environmental management in sacred areas. These results reinforce the argument that waste management in sacred areas cannot be separated from *Parahyangan* values, because every activity related to ceremonies must be in harmony with religious norms and respect for the sanctity of temples.

From the *pawongan* perspective, the primary strategy focuses on strengthening community participation through education and community empowerment (Sutriyanti et al., 2025). Education was conducted door-to-door, reaching nearly 90 percent of households, or around 2,000 families. In addition, monthly community consultation forums (*sangkep banjar*) were held. However, only two of the seven *banjars* were active, and only men fulfilled their tax payment responsibilities.



Figure 6. Collective waste management actions in Besakih Village: (a) cleaning up waste from religious ceremonies at Besakih Temple; (b) door-to-door socialization on the importance of waste management; (c) sorting waste to be used as green organic fertilizer (Source: Photo by Nadia Atika Amrin, 2024).

This indicates a gender bias in public forums that weakens the effectiveness of education. Capacity-building efforts through the establishment of five waste banks, of which only one worked consistently, align with the findings of Sembiring and Nitivattananon (2010), which emphasize weak institutions as a barrier to sustainability. Another initiative, namely socialization in schools, successfully involved more than 500 students. However, behavioral change at the household level has not been entirely significant, as the community still faces resistance from some residents to the obligation to pay monthly fees. Even households that pay fees decreased from 185 to 179 (-3.24 percent) during the one-year program. Field findings indicate that this resistance is related to willingness-to-pay (WTP). Some residents consider the IDR 30,000 fee disproportionate to the volume of waste they generate, especially households that produce mostly organic waste and choose to burn their plastic waste. However, it was still a challenge to change the long-standing habit/culture of throwing waste into the garden/yard (*teba* or *tegalan*) or into the nearby river.

There is also the practice of placing waste in Environmental Agency waste collection vehicles (which are supposed to be used only for waste from public areas such as temples and parks) without paying, creating a free-rider effect. This obstacle is also influenced by the limited geographic access to four of the eleven banjars, which are located quite far away and require passing through valleys, so the limited TPS3R operational vehicles cannot optimally reach the entire area. WTP studies show that payment compliance is more influenced by perceptions of service benefits, governance consistency, and accessibility than by income factors alone (Afroz et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2011). In this context, strengthening the Hindu-Balinese value of *menyama braya*, which emphasizes brotherhood and collective responsibility, is essential for fostering social solidarity in support of a sustainable waste management system (Suryawan & Lee, 2023).

Resistance from residents to monthly fees also highlights the lack of implementation of *pawongan* values, consistent with policy literature showing that low financial support weakens the effectiveness of waste management (Sembiring & Nitivattananon, 2010). Regarding waste reduction (*palemahan*), processing 42.5 tons of waste at the Palak TPS3R, with compost, RDF, and recycling achievements, remains limited due to technical and human resource constraints. Meyer (2025) emphasizes increasing RDF technology capacity to optimize the potential of the circular economy.

Regarding waste management (*palemahan*), technical innovation is the primary focus in Besakih. The Palak TPS3R processed 42.5 tons of waste during the trial period. Of this amount, approximately 16 percent was processed into compost, 14 percent into RDF, 3 percent entered the recycling stream, and 21 percent remained as unmanaged residue. The average processing capacity at TPS3R reached 443 kilograms per hour, but limitations in human and machine resources meant that its utilization was not yet optimal. This can be seen in the RDF production, which reached only 1.5 tons in eight months because the machines operated on a limited basis, averaging only 1-2 hours per day, far below the ideal requirement. These findings are in line with previous studies that emphasize the limited capacity of TPS3R as a constraint to sustainability, as well as research showing low RDF production due to limited machine operating hours (Suryawan & Lee, 2023; Wiratama & Wijaya, 2024). Other literature confirms that without community participation and increased technical capacity, TPS3R infrastructure will struggle to achieve ideal performance (Sembiring & Nitivattananon, 2010). In CE, technical innovations at the Palak TPS3R can potentially strengthen the transition to a circular economy. Still, their effectiveness remains highly dependent on resource availability and institutional governance.

The processing begins with collection and sorting at the TPS3R facility. Waste is separated into two main categories: clean waste and mixed waste. Clean waste refers to relatively uncontaminated materials, such as plastic bottles, paper, cardboard, and metal, which can be sold directly as raw materials for recycling or reused. Meanwhile, mixed waste consists of a mixture of organic waste, including food scraps and garden waste, and contaminated inorganic residues. The organic fraction is composted to produce fertilizer, while inorganic residues that cannot be recycled are processed into Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF). Technically, these residues are filtered based on size using a trommel screen, then shredded to produce homogeneous material that is formed into Solid Recovered Fuel (SRF) as an alternative fuel to replace fossil fuels (Qonitan et al., 2021; Suryawan & Lee, 2023). In Besakih, the RDF produced is still in SRF form and is marketed to industries that need energy substitution (Figure 7).



Figure 7. (a) management of alternative fuels (RDF) and (b) green product compost fertilizers (Source: Bali Waste Cycle document, 2024)

More prominent innovations emerged from green workshops, creative units that process plastic waste into roster products (Figure 8). During one production period, 3,357 small rosters and 45 large rosters were produced, with at least 1,000 rosters absorbed by the market through local sales and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) schemes. These products are not only a symbol of local circular-economy innovation but also provide real economic value to the surrounding community.



Figure 8. Green product (interior) (Source: Rebrick document, 2024)

This effort created 24 green jobs, though still below the target of 38, with an average increase in worker income of around IDR 1.5 million per month. Testimonials from green product workers confirm the socio-economic changes they have experienced. As expressed by a production roster staff member:

*"It was difficult at first, but now I am used to it. I did not realize I had produced thousands of rosters, and from this I learned the importance of managing waste while also gaining economic benefits."*

This perspective demonstrates that innovations in waste management produce products and raise community awareness of its importance as a resource. Meanwhile, resistance to waste management jobs is still evident from a socio-economic perspective. As stated by one of the traders around Besakih:

*"I do not mind paying the fee as long as the trash is collected on time. If trash piles up, it not only pollutes the environment, but also disrupts my business."*

This excerpt emphasizes that public trust in the waste management system depends heavily on service consistency and inter-agency coordination. Thus, this implementation phase has achieved significant outcomes in educational outreach, innovation in processing, and the creation of green jobs. However, these results are still limited by low compliance levels and operational capacity constraints. These findings align with a study by Sembiring & Nitivattananon (2010), which confirms that weak community financial commitment and limited technical capacity are the main factors behind the failure of community-based waste management programs in Indonesia. Meyer (2025) shows that the

operational limitations of the RDF machine at the temple reduce the potential for optimal waste processing.

The international perspective also confirms this, where technical innovation in the CE framework faces obstacles when not supported by adequate technological capacity. The transformation of community-based waste management in Besakih is shaped by the interaction of technical, socio-cultural, and institutional factors, which must be integrated within the THK framework to ensure sustainability, while religious and local cultural values strengthen its social legitimacy. Tripayana et al. (2024) found that the THK principle in the *awig-awig* of Balinese society is an essential instrument in building ecological citizenship and the sustainability of environmental programs.

#### *4.1.3 Reflect Phase: Evaluation to Diagnose Structural Barriers and Design a Green Economy Roadmap in Besakih Village*

The reflection stage emphasizes cross-actor institutional alignment and verification of field achievements as the basis for developing a THK-based green economy roadmap. The evaluation indicates fragmentation, such as the role of UPS under BUMDes in managing household waste, Traditional Village handling temple areas, and the Temple Management Agency being responsible for internal facilities. In contrast, the Karangasem Regency Environmental Agency manages public infrastructure. As a result, there are overlapping management processes. For example, traders have paid levies to UPS, but waste collection is only carried out twice a week, so the Temple Management Agency must collect waste daily. This situation has led to misunderstandings between institutions. This reflection reinforces the importance of a joint agreement to clarify the workflow, roles, and service standards. The evaluation of participatory actions in waste management in Besakih Village is presented in Table 4.

Regarding institutional aspects, obstacles arise due to UPS's status as a profit-oriented BUMDes unit. There is also a lack of guidance on business strategies in waste management. The Karangasem Regency Environmental Agency has proposed designating UPS as a Regional Technical Implementation Unit (UPTD) to expand its coverage to surrounding villages. Still, regulations only allow full support for non-profit entities such as KSM (*Kelompok Swadaya Masyarakat/Community Self-Help Group*) and KPP (*Kelompok Pemeliharaan dan Pemanfaat/Maintenance and Utilization Group*). Therefore, institutional transition to KSM/KPP is a prerequisite for UPS to access public support in human resources, fleet, operational costs, technical training, and advocacy to the central government. Previous studies have shown that non-profit institutional forms are better able to ensure the sustainability of environmental services because of their broader access to government resources (Purnamawati et al., 2023).

Table 4. Evaluation of participatory actions in waste management in Besakih Village

| Aspects       | Key Findings (Problems)                                                                                                                                                      | Implications                                                                                                | Opportunities / Solution Directions                                                                                |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Institutional | Fragmentation of roles between BUMDes (UPS), traditional villages, temple management bodies, and the Environmental Agency; minimal coordination.                             | Overlapping responsibilities, suboptimal services, and incomplete public education.                         | Institutional synergy through multi-stakeholder forums; integration of roles into a single roadmap.                |
| Regulatory    | Formal regulations (village & customary) exist, but enforcement is weak.                                                                                                     | Old community behaviors remain dominant (littering, burning plastic, etc.).                                 | Revitalization of village regulations and rules with progressive sanctions + traditional-based campaigns.          |
| Operational   | Limited human resources, low interest in work because it lacks prestige, low salaries, a limited fleet, and 30 percent of the area is not served by transportation services. | Suboptimal RDF & roster production, high worker turnover, and limited transportation services.              | Increased worker incentives, occupational safety and health training, machine optimization, and CSR/grant schemes. |
| Participation | Socialization is dominated by men, with low involvement of women in public forums, and old customs are still strong.                                                         | Waste banks are not functioning consistently, and door-to-door education has not led to behavioral change.  | Family-based education, women's empowerment, and collective participation incentives.                              |
| Funding       | The village budget is minimal (IDR 10-50 million per year), RDF income is low, and levies are challenging to collect.                                                        | UPS operations are in deficit, worker salaries are unstable, and the sustainability of TPS3R is threatened. | Diversification of funding sources (CSR, spiritual tourism, green products), adaptive retribution models.          |

Source: Author (2025)

From a regulatory perspective, village regulations and customary laws are already in place. Still, weak enforcement means old practices like burning plastic or dumping waste in fields continue. Therefore, the reflection recommends enforcement based on customary law with a clear mandate for *pecalang* and a system of incentives and disincentives: rewards for innovation and compliance, progressive sanctions for violations. This study suggests that a culture-based, social-incentive approach is more effective at changing behavior than a regulatory approach alone.

Technically, management capacity is still limited. Of the projected waste, only 18.43 percent (125.57 tons) was collected, and only 13.2 percent (16.63 tons) was managed. RDF production totaled only 1.5 tons over eight months due to limitations in machinery and human resources. These obstacles are consistent with the findings of Mazzoli et al. (2024), who found that weak infrastructure and operator skills are significant barriers to TPS3R in tourist areas. Regarding labor, the daily wage system (IDR 65,000–75,000) has increased the number of temporary workers, but the stigma of “working in the waste sector” has kept interest low. The income structure is hierarchical: core administrators such as the UPS Chairperson, division heads, and administrative staff receive approximately IDR 2.5 million per month, while the operational team (sorting, driver) receives variable income based on sorting results, averaging approximately IDR 1.5 million per month. Although this figure is still below the Karangasem Regency Minimum Wage (approximately IDR 3 million), the program has created 24 green jobs and increased workers’ incomes compared to previous levels. Consistent with Tripayana et al. (2024), the stability of this sector still requires a guarantee of a living wage and social protection to strengthen workforce sustainability.

Community participation also faces challenges. Education reaches approximately 89 percent of households and schools, but the number of fee-paying households has decreased from 185 to 179 (-3.24 percent). Resistance is triggered by the IDR 30,000 fee, which is considered expensive, the dominance of men in *banjar* meetings (*sangkep*), and the lack of channels for women to discuss waste issues, where, in fact, more intensive household waste management is still minimally accommodated, given that women play a central role in household waste management. Reflections suggest adaptive fees based on a survey of payment capacity, strengthening the role of local educators, and adopting alternative forums, such as *sangkep merajèn*, that are more gender-inclusive. Research by Pakasi et al., (2024) emphasizes the importance of women-friendly participation spaces to encourage sustainable behavioral change.

In terms of funding, village allocations remain minimal: IDR 10 million per year, rising to IDR 50 million in 2025. Significant funds from the Temple

Management Agency have not been earmarked for waste management. Research by Mazzoli et al. (2024) shows that weaknesses in financial management are often more related to budget distribution and priorities than the nominal amount. Therefore, the reflection recommends diversifying funding through CSR, spiritual tourism, and circular economy products (compost, roster, RDF). In the future, multi-stakeholder synergies that open the door to investor/grantor support must secure joint contribution commitments and diversify income from the circular economy (compost, roster, RDF) and spiritual tourism, so that basic services and labor wages have certainty.

All the above findings confirm that the reflection phase is not just about compiling a list of problems but about formulating a measurable, contextually relevant architecture for change. In essence, the roadmap includes the drafting of a joint agreement that defines roles, procedures, and standards; the transition of entities to a community-based organization (KSM) so that the Environmental Agency can provide full support; enforcement of regulations with customary mandates (including *pecalang*) and incentive-disincentive schemes; strengthening of operational capacity (fleet, equipment maintenance, operator training); service accessibility to remote areas; and a gender-sensitive participatory approach through family and *sangkep merajèn* channels (Pakasi et al., 2024). With the THK framework as the basis for legitimacy, the circular economy principle as the engine for added value, and the PAR method as the mechanism for collective learning, this reflection phase lays the institutional and social foundations for the transition to sustainable waste management in Besakih.

The results of the PAR implementation in Besakih Village reveal a significant gap between the program targets and on-the-ground achievements. This finding is consistent with the literature, which emphasizes that the sustainability of community-based management depends on integrating technical, institutional, and socio-cultural factors (Purnamawati et al., 2023; Meyer, 2025; Suryawan & Lee, 2023). Education has successfully reached almost all households, but operational sustainability, retribution participation, and the creation of green jobs are still far from the set targets. A summary of the comparison between targets and achievements is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of Targets and Achievements in Waste Management in Besakih Village

| Steps     | Target                                                                        | Actual Achievements                                                                                                  | Implications                                                                                                |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Plan      | 7 tons/day of managed waste                                                   | Only 6.78 percent (490 kg/day) of waste is managed.                                                                  | The majority of waste still ends up in landfills/private land.                                              |
| Implement | 90 percent of households are educated, five active waste banks, 38 green jobs | Approximately 89 percent of households are educated, five waste banks (1 active), and 24 green jobs are established. | Education has been successful, but the achievements of waste banks and green jobs are not yet optimal.      |
| Observe   | 70 percent of waste managed, 300 percent increase in revenue                  | Only 13.24 percent of waste is managed, while revenue has decreased by 3.24 percent.                                 | Far below the target, resistance to high levels.                                                            |
| Reflect   | Development of a green economy roadmap                                        | Identification of institutional fragmentation, weak regulations, and minimal funding.                                | A roadmap is needed: joint agreement, entity transition, customary incentives, and diversification funding. |

Source: Author (2025)

Table 5 confirms the fundamental gap between the plan and the realization of the waste management program in Besakih Village. Although education has reached almost all households and green product innovations have begun to take off, technical achievements, such as the volume of waste managed, the level of compliance with levies, and the number of green jobs, remain far below target. This indicates that the success of waste management cannot be supported solely by technical interventions but requires stronger institutional support, regulatory frameworks, and social participation. These findings reveal a significant gap between targets and achievements, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive transformation strategy. Previous literature confirms that the sustainability of community-based management can only be achieved through the integration of technical, institutional, and socio-cultural factors (Kristinayanti et al., 2020; Law et al., 2016; Wiratama & Wijaya, 2024). Based on collective reflection, this study formulates a green economy roadmap integrated with a circular flow framework based on THK.

#### **4.2 Discussion: Green Economy Roadmap and Tri Hita Karana – Based Circular Flow Waste Management Model in Besakih Village**

Field reflections confirm that waste management transformation in Besakih cannot stop at problem analysis; it must be followed by an integrated strategy that combines technical, social, institutional, and philosophical aspects (Sembiring & Nitivattananon, 2010; Wilson et al., 2009). A key finding of this study is the need for a joint agreement involving all stakeholders, including the Traditional Village, the Administrative Village, the Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) or Waste Management Unit (UPS), the Environmental Agency, and the Temple Management Agency, as a formal instrument that defines service flows, role sharing, operational standards, and coordination and evaluation mechanisms. The integrated sustainable waste management study also confirmed that fragmentation of authority and unclear responsibilities between institutions were the main factors in implementation failure (Wilson et al., 2009). In this context, transforming the Waste Management Unit from a semi-commercial entity under the BUMDes into a Community Self-Help Group (KSM) or Management and Utilization Group (KPP) can strengthen social legitimacy while enabling full structural support from the Environmental Agency in the form of technical personnel, fleet, operational funding, and training. Community-based institutional models supported by the government have been shown to improve system sustainability and operational stability in local waste management.

The effectiveness of waste management also depends heavily on strengthening customary and village regulations, which can be achieved through the role of *pecalang* and the implementation of incentive-disincentive schemes (Jenkins et al., 2003; Kinnaman, 2006). Innovation and compliance should be rewarded, while violations such as illegal dumping or burning waste should be subject to progressive sanctions. Furthermore, the technical capacity of the Palak TPS3R must be improved through maintenance and modernization of machinery, addition of vehicles, implementation of occupational safety and health standards, and operator training, while expanding services to remote areas that are not yet covered (Wilson et al., 2009). The financial dimension also requires attention through adaptive financing mechanisms based on willingness to pay, so that retribution rates are more proportional, with additional support from diversified funding sources such as green products (compost, roster, RDF), CSR programs, and spiritual tourism (Massarutto, 2007; Shah et al., 2025).

In addition, the results of this study show the importance of expanding community participation through family and school-based education and more

inclusive sangkep merajèn forums. This overall strategy finds its philosophical basis in THK. In the *parahyangan* aspect, waste management is understood as *yadnya*, a form of spiritual devotion to God that maintains the sanctity of temples and the environment (Sembiring & Nitivattananon, 2010). From a *pawongan* perspective, the value of *menyama braya* embodies cooperation, togetherness, and inclusiveness in social participation. Meanwhile, in the *palemahan* aspect, CE innovations such as compost, RDF, and roster represent a harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

The findings of this study indicate that the THK circular flow model, when integrated with a green economy roadmap, can serve as an innovative alternative for community-based waste management. These results enrich the literature synthesized by Al Giffari et al. (2025a), which identified a gap: the need for a balance among economic growth, environmental conservation, and community involvement in creative economic development. By positioning THK as a source of social and spiritual legitimacy, this study offers a model that balances these three dimensions in sustainability practices in Bali.

Pitana (2010) asserts that THK is the foundation of socio-ecological sustainability. Meanwhile, Rosalina et al. (2023) and Al Giffari et al. (2025b) highlight the role of culture in strengthening collective behavior in the sustainable tourism sector. Given the dominance of ceremonial waste, the study emphasizes the urgency of a *parahyangan*-based approach. Thus, the results of this study not only present practical strategies to address structural, social, and technical issues but also make a theoretical contribution by showing that THK can be operationalized as an epistemic framework that unifies the spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions. The circular flow model of waste management in Besakih Village was initially formulated in three dimensions of THK, which became a follow-up to this program, as shown in Figure 9.

In the *parahyangan* dimension, cleanliness is understood as *yadnya* or sacred offering, so waste management is interpreted as part of the spiritual responsibility to maintain the sanctity of Pura Agung Besakih. This practice encourages collective awareness of not littering, making it part of daily religious practice.

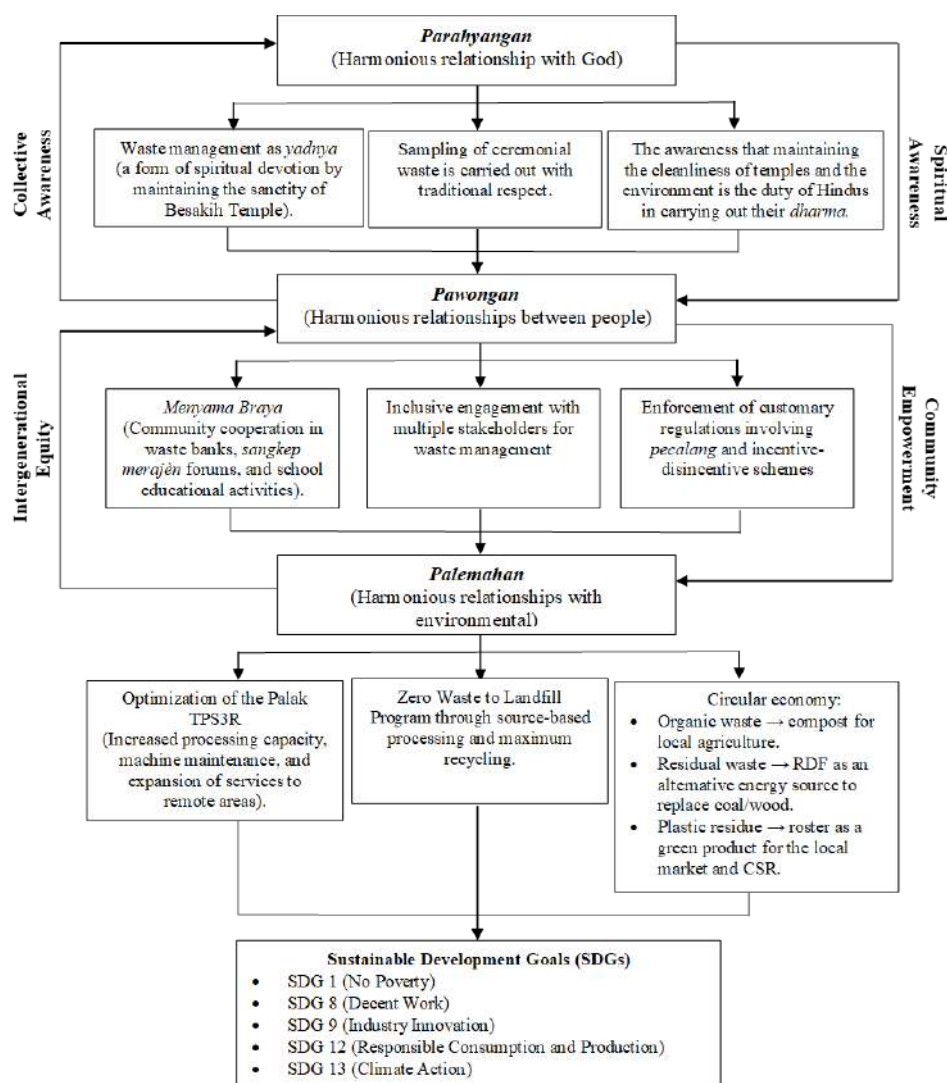


Figure 9. Sustainable Waste Management Model Integrating THK Values (Source: Author, 2025).

In the *pawongan* dimension, waste management is a social responsibility that binds all levels of society. Collaboration is evident in the participation of residents, *sangkep banjar*, traditional villages, administrative villages, and UPS. This participatory mechanism means that the community is not merely a recipient of services, but also an actor in management and supervision. A study by Waluyo & Kharisma (2023) demonstrates that community-based management systems in Indonesia are often built on collective work and social solidarity. However, they are prone to gender bias and unequal participation. This is consistent with findings from Besakih, where male dominance in public

forums and resistance to retribution remain obstacles, while women's role in household waste management is central.

In terms of waste management/*palemahan* dimension, the ecological aspect is realized through waste processing based on the principles of reduce, reuse, recycle, and further utilization, such as RDF and compost. The Palak TPS3R system, for example, has processed some of the waste into compost, RDF, and roster products. Although this achievement is still limited to 13.24 percent of total waste managed, this innovative effort demonstrates that waste can be considered a resource that supports green economic development at the village level. Wiratama & Wijaya (2024) emphasize that technical innovations in community-level waste management can create opportunities for alternative energy, though limitations in machine capacity and human resources remain significant challenges.

Integrating these three dimensions into the circular flow makes waste management in Besakih holistic, uniting spirituality, social aspects, and ecology. However, the research reflection confirms that, for this model to function effectively, it must be supported by a Green Economy Roadmap. The Roadmap outlines six key strategies: (a) a multi-stakeholder agreement to clarify institutional roles; (b) transitioning UPS entities to KSM/KPP so that the Environmental Agency can provide optimal support; (c) enforcing customary regulations by involving *pecalang* and incentive-disincentive schemes; (d) increasing the operational capacity of TPS3R Palak through the modernization of machinery, fleets, and technical training; (e) adaptive financing based on residents' ability to pay and diversification through green products, CSR, and spiritual tourism; and (f) expanding more inclusive community participation for women and the younger generation.

By integrating the roadmap into the circular flow, this model becomes a philosophical concept and a practical framework that can be implemented. The *Tri Hita Karana* circular flow provides value legitimacy, while the green economy roadmap provides operational direction. Together, they form a waste management system that solves technical problems and strengthens social participation, enforces customary regulations, ensures financial sustainability, and revives Balinese cultural values. With this format, the waste management model in Besakih can be seen as an innovative and contextually relevant alternative with the potential to be replicated in other areas by adapting to local wisdom. This finding is supported by a study by Mazzoli et al. (2024) that the effectiveness of CE requires social legitimacy and local governance. The internality of THK values also strengthens ecological and social legitimacy, as shown by Tripayana et al. (2024). Furthermore, the findings on gender inclusivity are in line with Pakasi et al. (2024) who emphasize the importance of

equitable community participation. Thus, this model can be seen as a contextual strategy that integrates spirituality, social solidarity, and technical innovation towards sustainability.

Furthermore, the achievements and challenges of waste management in Besakih can be linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 9 (Industry Innovation), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Table 6 presents the relationship between key research indicators and relevant SDGs.

The relevance of the research results to the SDGs indicates that waste management efforts in Besakih Village contribute to global goals, although achievements remain limited. The low percentage of managed waste and declining participation in retribution confirm the challenges in achieving SDGs 11 and 12. At the same time, the creation of green jobs and green product innovation has had a positive impact on SDG 8. Thus, this study highlights the importance of integrating local cultural values such as THK into the sustainable development framework, so that Besakih can serve as an example of how local wisdom supports achieving the global agenda.

Table 6. Linkage of Besakih Waste Management Achievements to SDGs

| Indicators                                        | Achievement                                     | Relevant SDGs                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Managed waste: 13.24 percent.                     | Still far from the target                       | SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production)<br>(Implementing 12.1, 12.5, 12.7) |
| Household fee payments decreased by 3.24 percent. | Still facing financial challenges.              | SDG 1 (No Poverty)                                                               |
| Creation of 24 green jobs                         | +IDR 1.5 million income/month                   | SDG 8 (Decent Work)<br>(Implementing 8.4)                                        |
| Green products (Roster, RDF, Compost)             | Still in the early stage, with limited capacity | SDG 9 (Industry Innovation) and SDG 13 (Climate Action, Implementing 13.3)       |

Source: Author (2025)

This study makes an original academic contribution by integrating the cultural values of THK, the PAR approach, and circular-economy practices into a single community-based waste-management model. While previous studies in Bali have primarily focused on tourism or technical aspects of waste management, limited attention has been given to integrating cultural, institutional, and economic dimensions within a green economy framework, particularly in sacred areas such as Besakih. Thus, this study contributes to the

literature on waste governance by demonstrating how local wisdom can be operationalized as a strategic instrument for sustainable development.

## 5. Conclusion

Throughout the PAR cycle, this study identified multidimensional problems, including fragmented institutions, limited technical capacity, and low community participation. It implemented collective actions, including household education, waste banks, Palak TPS3R innovations, and green product workshops. The results show partial success: approximately 90 percent of households received education, 24 green jobs were created, and incomes increased, and waste management innovations such as composting, RDF, and roster production were introduced. However, structural barriers such as weak compliance with incentives, gender bias, and operational constraints limited the achievement of initial targets. Integrating CE with local governance is key to sustainable transition. THK can serve as both an ecological and social instrument in Balinese communities. The success of community-based systems requires gender-inclusive participation, indicating that internalizing THK can strengthen cultural legitimacy in sustainable development practices.

These findings show that cultural legitimacy through THK can bridge social trust and environmental responsibility, but institutional reform and adaptive financing must be effective. The discussion highlights the need for multi-stakeholder agreements, the transformation of UPS into a non-profit entity (KSM/KPP), the enforcement of customary regulations with incentive-disincentive mechanisms, technical improvements to the Palak TPS3R, and gender-inclusive participation channels. These recommendations, outlined in the Green Economy Roadmap, indicate that waste management in Besakih can evolve from a symbolic philosophy into a practical governance model contributing to community development and global sustainability targets.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the field intervention lasted only a relatively short period, so changes in community behavior could not be continuously observed. Second, although the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach involved various stakeholders, participation remained gender-biased, with male dominance in public forums resulting in the underrepresentation of women's voices. Third, financial data on operational costs and the market potential of green products (compost, RDF, roster) remain limited, so the economic sustainability analysis cannot yet be projected in greater detail.

For further research, several vital agendas can be developed. First, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of integrating THK values, the circular economy, and PAR on changes in community behavior. Second, comparative research between traditional villages or other spiritual tourism areas in Bali and Indonesia will provide insights into the potential to replicate the THK-based circular flow model. Third, a more in-depth political-economic study of village budget allocation and alternative funding mechanisms will strengthen the financial sustainability dimension. Thus, further research can enrich conceptual and practical contributions to the design of a fair, sustainable, and contextually appropriate waste management system grounded in local wisdom.

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## Author Profiles

**Nadia Atika Amrin** is Program Development at Bali Waste Cycle and Wastehub® (Wastehub Alam Lestari) Foundation. She completed her Bachelor's degree in Sociology at Universitas Sebelas Maret. Now, she is a master's student in Sociology at Universitas Gadjah Mada. Her book *Negara vs Masyarakat Adat* (2023) discusses state power and indigenous rights. She has led community-based waste management programs for more than 2,200 households in Bali and collaborated with BRIN on nature conservation in Besakih Village. Her research interests include indigenous community development, circular economy, and waste management. Email: [nadiaamrin01@gmail.com](mailto:nadiaamrin01@gmail.com) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4947-8408>

**Muhammad Al Giffari** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Development Studies, Graduate School, Universitas Andalas, Indonesia. He holds a Master of Science degree in Integrated Natural Resources Management (INRM) from Universitas Andalas, Indonesia, and a Bachelor's degree in Agribusiness from Universitas Lampung, Indonesia. His research interests include rural development, tourism, coastal management, natural resource management, and agricultural socio-economics. He has an extensive publication record as both first and co-author in several reputable Scopus-indexed journals, reflecting his active contribution to scholarly discourse in his expertise. Email: [muhammad.algiffari099@gmail.com](mailto:muhammad.algiffari099@gmail.com) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9078-6951>

**Ranitya Nurlita** is the Founder and Managing Director of Wastehub® (Wastehub Alam Lestari), a social enterprise innovating in the circular economy and waste management. She holds a Bachelor of Fisheries degree from IPB University and has previously worked as a Consultant for UNEP EmPower II, UNDP Movers Academy, YECAP, and UNESCAP Smart Cities. With over a decade of experience, she has led Wastehub® in delivering hundreds of sustainability projects, engaging thousands of participants, and responsibly managing more than a hundred tonnes of waste. She actively speaks at national and international forums on sustainability, sharing insights on the circular economy and climate action. Her professional interests focus on circular economy, ecopreneurship, and climate action. Her deep grassroots field experience, combined with high-level regional policy networks, enables her to translate on-the-ground realities into concrete, actionable policy recommendations for multi-stakeholder engagement. Email: ranitya.nurlita@gmail.com ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0061-550X>

**Olivia Anastasia Padang** is the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Bali Waste Cycle, where she has led community-based waste management initiatives across rural Bali since 2019. She holds a Master of Business Administration from the University of Technology Sydney and a Bachelor of Industrial Engineering from the University of Surabaya. Her work focuses on advancing circular-economy practices, reducing plastic waste, and community education. She has collaborated with local governments to develop regional-scale waste management models and actively speaks at national and international forums on sustainability. Email: opadang@gmail.com ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8664-9535>

# Symbolizing Desire: *Barong* and *Rangda* Performance in a Balinese Hindu Newborn Ritual

I Gede Suwantana<sup>1\*</sup> , I Made Girinata<sup>2</sup>,

I Putu Agus Aryatnaya Giri<sup>3</sup>, Sudip Chakravortti<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, India

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**Abstract:** Although *Barong–Rangda* is widely recognized today as a touristic performance linked to Bali’s cultural tourism, its sacred ritual functions continue in Bali, showing that commodification has not erased its religious significance. This article examines the *nyambutin* ritual, a Balinese Hindu ceremony welcoming newborn babies, focusing on the inclusion of *Barong–Rangda* performance in a traditional Balinese village. Using ethnographic observation, in-depth interviews, and textual analysis, the study applies semiotic perspectives from Barthes, Eco, and Peirce to interpret the ritual’s symbolic meanings. The findings show that *Barong* and *Rangda* represent disciplined and uncontrolled forms of desire, reflecting moral tensions within Balinese cosmology. The performance functions as embodied moral education, introducing ethical values through ritual experience rather than verbal instruction. Sustained by local ritual authority, the tradition continues as religious knowledge transmission while resisting full commodification despite the global circulation of *Barong* imagery through tourism.

**Keywords:** *barong*; *rangda*; male and female desires; *nyambutin* ritual

## 1. Introduction

In Balinese Hindu society, ritual is not merely a religious obligation but a central semiotic arena through which cosmological ideas, social values, and embodied experiences are communicated and reproduced. Ritual performances function simultaneously as symbolic representations and pedagogical instruments that shape collective understanding of life, morality, and the human body. As Clifford Geertz (1973, pp. 93–94) argues, ritual acts as both a “model of” reality and a “model for” reality, reflecting existing cultural conceptions while actively guiding social behavior. Within this framework, ritual symbols are not static;

\* Corresponding author’s email: [suwantana@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:suwantana@uhnsugriwa.ac.id)

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rather, they are continuously interpreted, negotiated, and recontextualized by the community that performs them.

One of the most prominent ritual-symbolic figures in Bali is *Barong*, often paired with *Rangda*. Throughout Bali, *Barong–Rangda* performances are widely recognized as representations of the cosmic tension between *dharma* and *adharma*, order and chaos, protection and destruction. These figures appear in various ritual contexts, temple festivals (*odalan*), purification rites, and communal exorcisms (*niskala* interventions), as well as in contemporary touristic performances staged for economic and cultural consumption (Picard, 1996; Bandem, 1976). This ubiquity raises an important question: if *Barong* exists everywhere in Bali, why does the *Barong–Rangda* performance associated with the *nyambutin* ritual appear to be localized and symbolically distinctive in Penarukan Village, Tabanan.

The *nyambutin* ritual, performed for infants at approximately 105 days after birth according to the Balinese calendar, marks the child's formal introduction into social, spiritual, and customary life. While *nyambutin* is practiced throughout Bali, the inclusion of a *Barong–Rangda* performance as an integral symbolic component is not universally found. In Penarukan, a traditional agrarian village in Tabanan, Bali, this performance occupies a specific ritual space and meaning that differs from *Barong* performances in other ceremonial or touristic settings. Rather than functioning primarily as a cosmic battle or protective spectacle, *Barong* and *Rangda* in the *nyambutin* context are interpreted locally as symbolic representations of masculine and feminine desire (*kāma*), which must be harmonized from the earliest stages of human life.

This localized interpretation reflects what semioticians describe as the contextual layering of meaning. According to Umberto Eco (1976), signs do not possess fixed meanings; instead, they generate meaning through culturally specific codes and interpretive frameworks. In Penarukan, *Barong* is symbolically associated with male desire, dynamic, outward-moving, and generative, while *Rangda* represents female desire, powerful, inward, and potentially destructive if uncontrolled. These symbolic associations do not imply moral hierarchy but emphasize the necessity of balance between complementary forces. *Barong* and *Rangda* can be interpreted as symbolizing a non-dual reality in relation to *Advaita Vedānta* (AV), a Hindu philosophical tradition that emphasizes the ultimate unity of all existence beyond apparent oppositions (Radhakrishnan, 1994; Śaṅkarācārya, 2006). Within this perspective, apparent dualities are understood as expressions of a single underlying truth. The performance thus functions as a form of ritual pedagogy, encoding ethical and psychological insights about desire, self-control, and harmony within a culturally intelligible form.

At the same time, contemporary transformations of *Barong–Rangda* performances complicate these meanings. Since the 1980s, *Barong* has become one of Bali's most recognizable cultural icons, frequently staged for tourism and global audiences. Scholars have noted that touristic performances often prioritize visual spectacle and narrative simplification, resulting in a partial detachment of symbols from their ritual and pedagogical functions (Barker, 2012; Eiseman, 1990). This raises a further analytical question: how does the ritual performance of *Barong–Rangda* in the *nyambutin* ceremony relate to, resist, or coexist with the touristic *Barong* performances that dominate popular representations of Balinese culture?

By focusing on the *nyambutin* ritual in Penarukan Village, this study narrows its analytical scope while simultaneously engaging broader debates on ritual meaning, localization, and cultural commodification. The *Barong–Rangda* performance examined here is neither a generalized Balinese phenomenon nor a touristic spectacle; it is a situated semiotic practice embedded in a specific village tradition. Through a semiotic analysis of symbols, movements, narrative structures, and community interpretations, this research seeks to uncover how male and female desires are symbolically represented, disciplined, and transmitted as cultural knowledge. In doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Balinese ritual performance continues to function as a living system of meaning amid social change and cultural globalization.

## 2. Literatur Review

Etymologically, the word *Barong* derives from the Sanskrit *b(h)arwang*, meaning “bear”, a hairy animal also featured in *Tantri* stories. Another interpretation comes from the root *ba-ru-ang*, where *ru* and *ang* assimilate into *rang*, meaning “two spaces,” corresponding to the physical structure of *Barong*, which requires two dancers inside. The word *Rangda* comes from Old Javanese, meaning “widow.” In refined Balinese (*basa alus*), it refers to a widow from the *Tri Wangsa* class, while in common Balinese it is called *balu* (Boon, 1990).

From an ethnographic perspective, *Barong* represents protective masculine energy, while *Rangda* symbolizes feminine energy associated with mystical power and the control of desire. In Bali, both figures function in dual capacities, as profane entertainment and as sacred performances within religious contexts. This study focuses specifically on the symbolic representation of male and female desires in the performance of *Barong* and *Rangda*, analyzed through a cultural semiotic framework. The *nyambutin* ritual in Penarukan Village, Tabanan, is employed as the contextual setting in which these performances are examined in their sacred dimension.

Several previous studies have examined the *Barong* and *Rangda* performances from various perspectives, although none have specifically addressed the symbolic representation of male and female desires in the context of the *Nyambutin* ritual. Suta (2009) in his research found that the aesthetic aspect is inseparable from the implementation of rituals in Bali. The *Barong* and *Rangda* performances are always accompanied by artistic touches that enhance the procedures, processes, and outcomes of the ceremony. From the perspective of Hindu religious education, the performances emphasize the belief in *Pañca Śraddhā* (the five core tenets of Hindu faith), thereby containing theological-philosophical meanings that represent the relationship between positive and negative forces, right and wrong (Suta, 2009).

Suparman (2014) through his study revealed that religious values are manifested in the community's religious emotions, belief systems regarding the sacred powers of *Barong* and *Rangda*, as well as the performance of rites involving collective prayer and reverence toward *Ida Betara* (The Divine Lord) enthroned in those forms. Aesthetic values have undergone a transformation from mere entertainment to sacred expression in accordance with their original meanings. These findings are relevant to understanding how the *Barong* and *Rangda* performances serve a dual function: as profane entertainment and as a medium for the sacralization of values (Suparman, 2014).

Wirawan (2019) in his study emphasized that *Barong–Rangda* is not only present as a visual symbol but also as a manifestation of cosmic entities. *Barong* is depicted as the *murti* of Lord Śiva in the form of *Banaspati Raja*, while *Rangda* is associated with Goddess Durgā, wife of Lord Śiva, often linked to the *Calonarang* figure, Diah Natengdirah. *Barong–Rangda* is understood as a sacred symbol whose interpretation varies among communities, and its performance is carried out by specially appointed individuals known as *juru sunggi* (sacred object bearer) (Wirawan, 2019). In conclusion, Wirawan research finds that *Barong–Rangda* functions not only as a sacred symbol with diverse communal interpretations but also as a living tradition sustained by ritually authorized performers; therefore, it is suggested that future studies further explore its philosophical meanings and support the preservation of the *juru sunggi* tradition through community-based cultural programs.

Brahmandika's research (2024), describes the process of creating *Barong* and *Rangda* beginning with *matur piuning* (offering a prayer of notification to the deities) at the temple, accompanied by supernatural signs as divine approval. Before undergoing sacralization, *Barong* and *Rangda* are merely profane art objects devoid of religious meaning. Sacralization transforms them into *Pratima*, religious symbols endowed with spiritual power. These findings reinforce the view that the symbolic meaning of *Barong–Rangda* is constructed through a long cultural and religious process.

### 3. Method and Theory

#### 3.1 Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a semiotic theory to analyze the symbolic representation of male and female desires in the performance of *Barong* and *Rangda*. The *nyambutin* ritual in Penarukan Village, Tabanan Regency, Bali, was selected as the research setting because the village preserves a sacred performance context in which *Barong* and *Rangda* remain actively integrated into life-cycle rituals. In addition, the ritual tradition is still maintained through strong communal participation and localized religious authority, allowing symbolic meanings to be transmitted across generations. The village also represents a significant site for examining how sacred performances continue to function as religious pedagogy amid the increasing commercialization and touristic transformation of *Barong* performances in Bali. This setting provides a culturally authentic environment where symbolic expressions are maintained, allowing for a deeper semiotic interpretation of the meanings embedded in the performance. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through participants' perspectives and the local cultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The semiotic method is used to analyze the signs, icons, and symbols that emerge during the performance, considering the relationships between the signifier, the signified, and the culturally constructed meanings within the community (Barthes, 1977; Chandler, 2017).

Data collection was conducted through ethnographic observation during three *nyambutin* ceremonies in Penarukan Village, Tabanan Regency, Bali, between June and August 2025. The observations were carried out on 3 March, 7 July, and 9 August 2025, following the local Balinese calendrical determination of each child's life-cycle ritual. Each observation lasted approximately 6–8 hours, covering the preparatory stage, the ritual procession, the *Barong–Rangda* performance, and post-ceremonial communal interactions. The researcher directly engaged in the ceremonial environment to document ritual sequences, symbolic gestures, performance structures, and interactions among ritual participants, religious leaders, performers, and family members. This repeated observation enabled a deeper understanding of the consistency and variation of symbolic meanings embedded within the ritual context.

In-depth interviews were conducted using purposive sampling with traditional leaders, artists, parents of the infants, and community members to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the symbolic interpretations of male desire (*Barong*) and female desire (*Rangda*). In addition, documentation studies were carried out in the form of photographs, video recordings consisting of primary documentation produced by the researcher during fieldwork in those

dates, as well as supporting archival recordings obtained from local community members who have documented previous performances, and local texts such as *lontar* manuscripts or ritual notes. Data analysis was conducted thematically and contextually, combining interpretive approaches with semiotic analysis to reveal the interrelationships between symbolic meanings, social structures, and spiritual values embedded in the performances (Miles et al., 2014).

### 3.2 Theory

The study employs semiotic theory as its primary analytical framework, integrating the perspectives of Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Charles Sanders Peirce. Barthes' theory of myth is used to uncover how the *Barong-Rangda* performance operates beyond its immediate ritual function as a second-order signification system that naturalizes cultural understandings of desire and morality (Barthes, 1972). Eco's concept of semiotic codes provides a framework to interpret how ritual elements, costume, movement, spatial arrangement, and timing, function as culturally structured systems of meaning rather than isolated symbols (Eco, 1976). Meanwhile, Peirce's triadic model of sign (icon, index, symbol) enables a deeper reading of how *Barong* and *Rangda* simultaneously signify cosmological realities and ethical orientations through embodied representation (Peirce, 1958). This semiotic framework is further deepened through the lens of Advaita Vedanta, especially as articulated by Adi Shankaracharya, which posits that apparent dualities are ultimately expressions of a single non-dual reality (*Brahman*). From this perspective, *Barong* and *Rangda* are not merely binary oppositions but symbolic manifestations of *māyā*, the phenomenal differentiation that veils underlying unity. Thus, the semiotic reading expands from decoding cultural signs to recognizing how these signs participate in a metaphysical pedagogy that points beyond dualistic perception (Śaṅkarācārya, 2006).

This theoretical integration is particularly appropriate because the *Nyambutin* ritual does not transmit ethical knowledge discursively but performatively. The *Barong-Rangda* encounter functions as a mythic dramatization of *kāma* within the Balinese cosmological framework of *rwa bhineda* and *sakala-niskala*. Semiotics provides the necessary tools to interpret how meaning is constructed through ritual embodiment rather than textual doctrine, while *Advaita Vedanta* reframes this duality as provisional rather than ultimate. Barthes helps explain the normalization of moral cosmology through mythic imagery, Eco clarifies how local cultural codes sustain ritual intelligibility, and Peirce enables analysis of how signs mediate between visible performance and invisible metaphysical principles. Advaita Vedanta complements these by revealing that the tension between *Barong* and *Rangda*

is not a final ontological division but a didactic illusion guiding consciousness toward non-dual awareness. In this sense, the ritual encodes not only moral pedagogy but also an implicit metaphysical insight: that desire, conflict, and balance are stages within the realization of unity. Thus, semiotic theory, enriched by *Advaita Vedanta*, accommodates multilayered meaning-making, allowing the study to bridge symbolic anthropology, religious studies, and non-dual philosophy in explaining how cosmology and ethical consciousness are inscribed at the earliest stage of human life.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 *Barong* and *Rangda* in Balinese Ritual Cosmology

In scholarly and popular discourse, *Barong* is often perceived as a ubiquitous cultural icon in Bali, leading to the generalized assumption that “*Barong* exists everywhere in Bali” with a uniform meaning (Segara, 2000). However, within Balinese ritual cosmology, *Barong* and *Rangda* cannot be understood merely as aesthetic or performative figures. They are embedded in a complex theological, cosmological, and ritual system that governs the relationship between the seen (*sakala*) and unseen (*niskala*) worlds. Their presence and meaning are always context-dependent, determined by the type of ritual, spatial setting, and theological intention.

In general, *Barong* and *Rangda* function as symbolic embodiments of *rwa bhineda*, the Balinese principle of duality that emphasizes the coexistence of opposing yet complementary forces. This duality does not imply moral absolutism but rather cosmic balance, wherein *dharma* and *adharma*, order and chaos, purity and danger continuously interact to sustain universal harmony (Segara, 2000; Boon, 1990; Eiseman, 1990). The *Barong-Rangda* performance should also be understood within the broader framework of Balinese dance heritage, which has been internationally recognized by UNESCO. In 2015, UNESCO inscribed the “Three Genres of Traditional Dance in Bali” on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, encompassing nine representative dances across sacred (*wali*), semi-sacred (*bebali*), and entertainment (*balih-balihan*) categories. Within this classification, the *Barong Ket* dance, depicting the mythological struggle between *Barong* and *Rangda*, represents the *balih-balihan* genre, highlighting how cosmological dualism is embodied in performative practice (UNESCO, 2015).

Within Balinese Hindu ritual life, *Barong* primarily serves as a medium of cosmic protection and purification. During *odalan* (temple anniversary ceremonies), *Barong* is ritually summoned (*tedun*) and paraded around the temple complex or village territory (*ngelawang*) to neutralize negative forces and reaffirm the sanctity of sacred space. In this context, *Barong* operates as a

guardian figure (*pangraksa desa*), believed to embody divine protective energy that restores balance after periods of ritual vulnerability (Hobart, 2014).

In *niskala* cleansing rituals, such as post-epidemic rites, purification following social disturbances, or life-cycle ceremonies, *Barong* is invoked as a counterforce to *bhūta kala*, the chaotic energies associated with time, decay, and disorder. Rather than eradicating these forces, *Barong* symbolically contains and pacifies them, reflecting the Balinese cosmological understanding that destructive energies must be managed, not annihilated (Lansing, 2006).

*Rangda*, on the other hand, occupies a more ambivalent position within ritual cosmology. While often feared due to her terrifying appearance, *Rangda* represents destructive energy that is simultaneously regenerative. Identified with Goddess Durgā or the fierce aspect of Śiva's *śakti*, *Rangda* embodies the necessary power of dissolution that precedes renewal. In Balinese theology, destruction is never absolute; it is a prerequisite for transformation (*pralina* leading to *utpatti*) (Titib, 2003). Thus, *Rangda* is not merely an antagonist to *Barong* but an essential counterpart. Her appearance in ritual performances dramatizes the latent dangers of uncontrolled desire, ego, and spiritual ignorance, while also reaffirming the cosmic necessity of destruction within the cycle of creation and preservation.

It is crucial to emphasize that not all *Barong* performances carry identical meanings or ritual efficacy. A clear distinction must be made between *wali* (sacred), *bebali* (semi-sacred), and *balih-balihan* (entertainment) performances. Only *Barong* and *Rangda* that function as *pralingga*, ritually consecrated sacred embodiments, possess theological authority and cosmological function (Eiseman, 1990). Performances outside this ritual framework may reproduce symbolic forms without activating their religious potency.

In this sense, *Barong* and *Rangda* in Balinese ritual cosmology are not fixed symbols but dynamic agents whose meanings emerge through ritual context, theological intention, and communal belief. Their interaction represents an ongoing negotiation between cosmic order and disorder, protection and danger, discipline and desire. This reinforces the Balinese worldview that harmony is not achieved through the elimination of negative forces but through their ethical and spiritual regulation within a divinely ordered cosmos.

#### 4.2 The Nyambutin Ritual in Penarukan Village: Structure and Local Specificity

Desa Adat Penarukan is a traditional village situated in Kerambitan District, Tabanan Regency, Bali Province. It lies approximately 9 kilometers southwest of Tabanan City and about 29 kilometers from Denpasar. Covering

an area of around 111 hectares, Penarukan is home to approximately 3,214 residents living in 995 households. The entire population adheres to Hinduism and actively sustains Balinese customary traditions, particularly through the consistent performance of ritual obligations within the framework of *Panca Yadnya* (refers to the five sacred categories of sacrificial rituals in Balinese Hinduism) (Penarukan Village Office, 2024). Through these ongoing practices, Penarukan functions as a living repository of local religious knowledge, where cosmological ideas are embedded in everyday ceremonial life.

In Hindu doctrine, *Panca Yadnya* designates five categories of sacred offerings that actualize the concept of *Tri Rṇa*, the three existential debts inherent in human life. These consist of *Dewa Rṇa* (debt to the gods), fulfilled through *Dewa Yadnya* and *Bhūta Yadnya*; *Pitṛ Rṇa* (debt to ancestors), realized through *Pitṛ Yadnya* and *Manuṣa Yadnya*; and *Rṣi Rṇa* (debt to sages and spiritual teachers), expressed through *Rṣi Yadnya* (Titib, 2003). Within this system, *Manuṣa Yadnya* occupies a central position because it regulates ritual processes accompanying human existence from conception to marriage, ensuring that biological growth remains aligned with cosmic and spiritual order.

In the tradition of Desa Adat Penarukan, *Manuṣa Yadnya* is expressed through a structured sequence of life-cycle rituals (*samskāra*). These include *Pagedongan* (ritual at conception), *Dapetan* (birth ritual marked by the burial of the placenta), *Kepus Puser*, *Ngelepas Hawon* (twelfth day after birth), *Tutug Kambuhan* (forty-two days), *nyambutin* (three-month ceremony), *Satu Oton/Ngotonin* (210 days), *Ngempugin* (teething), *Makupak* (loss of baby teeth), *Munggah Deha/Raja Sewala* (coming of age), *Mapandes* (tooth filing), and *Wiwaha* (marriage) (Mantra, 1996). This sequence reflects a ritualized understanding of human development as a gradual integration into social, ancestral, and cosmic structures.

*Nyambutin*, the focus of this study, is a life-cycle ritual practiced widely across Bali, marking a baby's first formal introduction to the social and spiritual world. It is generally conducted when the child reaches 105 days (three *wuku* cycles) (as shown in Figure 1), signifying the transition from a liminal state into recognized human personhood (*manusa utuh*). At this stage, the baby undergoes ritual cleansing, receives a name, and is symbolically aligned with ancestral and divine forces believed to accompany the individual throughout life (Geertz, 1973; Eiseman, 1990). In most regions, *nyambutin* involves offerings (*banten*), mantras recited by a priest or *pemangku*, and domestic rites performed within the household compound.



Figure 1. The infant undergoing the *nyambutin* ritual (Source: Author's documentation, March 2025)

Despite this shared structure, *nyambutin* rituals display notable local variation shaped by village-level religious knowledge (*desa kala patra*). In regions such as Gianyar, Buleleng, and Karangasem, the ritual typically remains within the domestic sphere, emphasizing purification (*melukat*), ancestral acknowledgment, and the symbolic grounding of the child's soul (*atma*) without the inclusion of sacred performance elements. Ethnographic accounts from these areas consistently note the absence of *Barong* or *Rangda* as ritual agents, highlighting instead priestly mediation, prayers, and offerings (Covarrubias, 1937; Lansing, 2006).



Figure 2. Implementation of the Final Sequence of the *nyambutin* Ceremony with a *Barong* and *Rangda* Performance (Source: Author's documentation, July 2025)

In Penarukan Village, however, *nyambutin* takes on a distinct ritual configuration. The inclusion of a *Barong–Rangda* performance is not treated as an optional addition but forms part of the ceremony's concluding sequence (as shown in Figure 2). Rather than functioning as entertainment, the performance is understood as a *wali* (sacred) act embedded within the ritual logic of spiritual protection and ethical orientation. It takes place at a ritually determined moment following the core *nyambutin* rites, within a consecrated space, and involves specific ritual actors, including the baby's family, village *pemangku*, *tapakan* (sacred bearers), and community members responsible for maintaining ritual purity.

This inclusion reconfigures *nyambutin* in Penarukan from a primarily domestic rite into a communal cosmological event. *Barong* and *Rangda* act as *pralingga*, or sacred embodiments, believed to engage directly with unseen forces (*niskala*). Within Balinese mythology, *Barong* is commonly associated with *dharma* and *Rangda* with *adharma*. Local interpretations in Penarukan, however, move beyond a simple moral binary. Here, *Barong* and *Rangda* are also understood as symbolic representations of masculine and feminine libido inherent in human

beings, energies that must be balanced to sustain psychological and spiritual well-being (Eiseman, 1990; Hobart, 2014). Their interaction introduces the infant, at a symbolic level, to fundamental cosmological tensions, protection and danger, desire and restraint, creation and dissolution, while also situating these tensions within a broader framework of balance.

The *nyambutin* ritual in Penarukan Village generally lasts between four and six hours, depending on the ritual complexity, the number of family offerings, and the ceremonial preparations conducted by the household and ritual specialists. Within this sequence, the *barong-rangda* performance usually takes approximately 45–60 minutes and is performed after the main purification stage of the infant ritual. The performance is conducted collectively by a local *sekaa barong-rangda* and accompanied by live *gamelan batel* music rather than recorded audio, emphasizing the sacred and communal character of the ceremony. Families customarily provide *sesari* as a ritual offering and symbolic honorarium to the performers and musicians. In ethnographic observations conducted during three *nyambutin* ceremonies in 2025, the performance involved ritual dancing, protective gestures toward the infant, and the distribution of *tirta* associated with the *barong* as a medium of spiritual purification and protection. Such ritual use of Barong reflects its longstanding role as a sacred protector within Balinese Hindu cosmology (Bandem, 1976; Lansing, 2006).

In collective *nyambutin* ceremonies, several infants may undergo the ritual simultaneously while sharing one *barong-rangda* performance under the supervision of village ritual authorities. Community informants explained that the performance is ideally conducted within the customary and ritual space of the village because the sacred authority of the *barong* is tied to local temple networks and communal obligations. Although some residents may conduct *nyambutin* rituals in a *griya* or outside the village for practical reasons, these ceremonies do not always involve the *barong-rangda* performance. According to local belief, the absence of the performance does not invalidate the ritual entirely, but it reduces the symbolic and protective dimensions associated with the sacred balance of *rwa bhineda*. The relationship between the performance and the ritual is therefore not merely aesthetic but cosmological, functioning as a medium for spiritual equilibrium, ethical instruction, and ritual protection for the child and family (Boon, 1990; Howe, 1984).

From a semiotic perspective, the *Barong-Rangda* performance operates as a layered system of signs. Following Barthes' (1977) framework, meaning emerges not only from mythological narratives but also from choreography, costume, spatial arrangement, musical accompaniment, and communal reception. In the specific context of *nyambutin*, the performance marks ritual closure, indicating that the child has entered the social and cosmic order structured by *rwa bhineda*,

the dynamic interplay of opposing yet complementary forces. At the same time, a closer reading of the performance suggests that its meaning is not solely derived from abstract symbolic interpretation but is grounded in how participants experience and interpret the ritual in practice.

Importantly, available ethnographic records and local oral narratives indicate that the inclusion of a *Barong–Rangda* performance in the *nyambutin* ritual is not common in other regions of Bali. Neither classical ethnographies nor more recent ritual studies identify *Barong–Rangda* as constitutive elements of *nyambutin* outside Penarukan. Interviews with ritual specialists and village elders further confirm that this practice is regarded locally as a *warisan lokal* (local inheritance), transmitted primarily through oral tradition rather than formal textual prescription (Pinandita Tapakan, interview, March 3, 2025). However, the precise historical emergence of this configuration, including when and how it became established within the community, remains an area that would benefit from further investigation.

This local specificity highlights the dynamic character of Balinese Hindu ritual practice, in which broader theological concepts are articulated through localized forms of ritual creativity. The *nyambutin* ritual in Penarukan demonstrates how sacred performance may be integrated into life-cycle rites to address particular communal concerns, especially those related to the early management of spiritual potency (*śakti*) and desire (*kāma*). At the same time, it is important to distinguish between interpretations that arise from within the community and those developed through external analytical frameworks. Accordingly, this ritual should not be generalized as a Balinese norm but understood as a contextually grounded expression of local religious knowledge that contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Balinese ritual cosmology.

#### 4.3 Semiotic Interpretation of *Barong* and *Rangda* as Male and Female Desire

The *Barong–Rangda* performance in Bali is often framed as a traditional spectacle or as a mythological dramatization of the opposition between good and evil. Yet within particular ritual settings, including the *nyambutin* ceremony in Penarukan Village, the performance operates as a dense semiotic field through which ideas of desire (*kāma*), gendered energy, and moral discipline are conveyed. Rather than presenting a simple dualism, the interaction between *Barong* and *Rangda* reveals a more complex symbolic structure that resonates both with local cosmology and with broader philosophical reflections, including those found in *Advaita Vedānta* (the non-dualistic school of Vedānta philosophy), where apparent oppositions are understood as expressions of an underlying unity. In this sense, *Barong* and *Rangda* can be read as culturally encoded figures of male and female desire whose encounter stages not only tension but also

interdependence. Their presence within the ritual sequence thus enacts an early form of moral orientation, communicated through embodied symbols rather than through explicit instruction.

Drawing on semiotic approaches developed by Eco (1976), Peirce (1931–1958), and Barthes (1972), this analysis treats the *Barong–Rangda* performance as a layered system of signs mediating between *sakala* (the visible, material world) and *niskala* (the invisible, spiritual realm) in Balinese Hindu thought. At the same time, the interpretation is grounded in the specific ritual context observed in Penarukan, where the performance is carried out at the closing phase of *nyambutin*, following offerings, purification, and naming rites. *Barong* typically enters first, accompanied by *gamelan*, moving in controlled, rhythmic patterns around the ceremonial space, often circling the infant and family as a gesture of protection. *Rangda* appears later, interrupting this ordered movement with abrupt gestures and intense expressions, creating a charged interaction that draws the attention of participants. Within this sequence, desire is not negated; it is staged, negotiated, and ritually contained, allowing it to be integrated into a broader cosmological order rather than excluded from it.

At the level of signification, *Barong* operates through a combination of iconic, indexical, and symbolic modes (Peirce, 1931–1958). His large body, covered in fur, brightly colored, and adorned with gold ornaments, visually conveys vitality, strength, and expansiveness. Movement reinforces this impression: forward-directed steps, rhythmic stamping, and controlled bursts of energy synchronized with the *gamelan* ensemble. These elements index a form of masculine energy that is active, outward-oriented, and protective, yet not excessive. Within Balinese cultural codes (Eco, 1976), *Barong* comes to signify an idealized masculinity, expansive but restrained, powerful yet disciplined, closely aligned with *dharma*. In this context, *kāma* is not denied but regulated; it becomes a force directed toward balance and continuity. From a Barthesian perspective, *Barong* functions as a mythic figure through which this regulated desire appears natural and self-evident (Barthes, 1972).

This reading corresponds with Hindu ethical formulations that place *kāma* within the guiding framework of *dharma* (Yuliadi, 2022). The distinction between *śreya* (the higher good) and *preya* (immediate pleasure), as articulated in the *Katha Upaniṣad* (I.2.1–2), provides a useful parallel: *Barong* may be understood as embodying desire oriented toward *śreya* (ultimate good), where strength is governed by responsibility. At the same time, from the perspective of *Advaita Vedānta*, this disciplined form does not stand as an ultimate reality but as a provisional expression shaped by *māyā*, the domain of differentiation. *Barong* thus represents not an absolute principle but a conditioned manifestation of a deeper unity that underlies both order and tension.

*Rangda*, by contrast, presents a semiotic configuration marked by ambiguity and intensity. Her iconography, disheveled hair, protruding tongue, elongated nails and teeth, signals excess, instability, and latent danger. Movement amplifies this: irregular gestures, sudden shifts, and emotionally charged expressions that evoke both fear and fascination. Within the ritual sequence, *Rangda* does not simply negate *Barong*; she disrupts, challenges, and reconfigures the space established by him. As a sign, she articulates a dimension of desire that remains uncontained, closer to raw impulse than to regulated force.



Figure 3. Climax of the *Barong* and *Rangda* performance, showing the *Barong*'s vital, protective strength as it overpowers *Rangda* (the antagonist) (Source: Author's documentation, July 2025).

At the connotative level, as shown in the figure above, *Rangda* is associated with feminine power understood through the concept of *śakti*, a creative energy inseparable from destruction. Her link to Durgā situates her within a broader Hindu symbolic field in which feminine force generates, transforms, and

dissolves. In this sense, *Rangda* represents *kāma* prior to its ethical modulation, a form of energy that must be engaged rather than simply suppressed. While psychoanalytic parallels, such as Freud's notion of libido before sublimation (Freud, 1920), may illuminate aspects of this dynamic, the local interpretation emphasizes not pathology but potency. From a Peircean perspective, *Rangda* also functions symbolically as a generative field (*kṣetra*), echoing the imagery of *Manusmṛti* IX.33 (Olivelle, 2005), where feminine capacity is likened to fertile ground. Her destructive dimension, therefore, does not cancel her creative potential; instead, it underscores the necessity of balance.

The presence of *Barong* and *Rangda* within the *nyambutin* ritual raises an important question: why introduce such charged symbols in a ceremony centered on infancy? Observations in Penarukan suggest that the performance is directed not toward the infant alone but toward the collective field of participants, including family and community members. As noted by Ida Bagus Nyoman Sunantara (interview, June 9, 2025), “the child is present, but the ritual is for everyone: the family, the ancestors, and the unseen forces that surround them.” During the encounter, *Barong*'s circling movements and *Rangda*'s interruptions create a dynamic tension that is ritually resolved without a definitive victory. This tension, according to Sunantara, reflects “the balance that must always be maintained, not defeated, because both forces are part of life.” The infant is positioned within this space, often held by family members, becoming part of a sensory environment shaped by sound, movement, and affect. Through this process, the child is not taught in a cognitive sense but is inscribed into a relational and cosmological order, where harmony emerges through the ongoing negotiation of opposing yet complementary forces.

Within Balinese Hindu thought, humans are understood to embody both *daivī sampad* (constructive tendencies) and *āsurī sampad* (destructive tendencies), as described in the *Bhagavadgītā* XVI.4 (Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, 1983). The *Barong–Rangda* interaction externalizes this condition, rendering it perceptible and experientially accessible. *Nyambutin*, in this light, functions as an early moment of orientation, where the regulation of *kāma* is introduced as a foundational principle. Yet, when viewed through *Advaita Vedānta*, this duality is not final; it belongs to the empirical level of experience. The ritual can thus be read as guiding participants through differentiation while implicitly pointing toward an underlying non-duality that transcends opposition.

Eco's concept of cultural codes helps clarify how these meanings are sustained within the community, while Peirce's triadic model explains how *Barong* and *Rangda* operate simultaneously as icons, indices, and symbols. Their interaction, situated within the *sakala–niskala* framework, connects visible performance with invisible forces, aligning the child's social incorporation with

a cosmological orientation. Barthes' notion of myth further illuminates how this structure becomes internalized as common sense: harmony is achieved not by eliminating desire but by regulating it. At the same time, ethnographic evidence from Penarukan indicates that local participants often articulate these meanings in practical rather than abstract terms, emphasizing protection, balance, and continuity. The analytical reading presented here, including its dialogue with *Advaita Vedanta*, therefore extends rather than replaces local interpretations. It highlights how a specific ritual configuration, whose historical emergence still invites further study, can sustain multiple layers of meaning, linking lived practice with broader philosophical reflection.

#### 4.4 The Uniqueness of Penarukan: Local Knowledge, Tradition, and Ritual Authority

The presence of a *Barong–Rangda* performance within the *nyambutin* ritual in Penarukan Village should not be treated as incidental or merely aesthetic variation. Instead, it is better understood within the framework of local religious knowledge (local religious epistemology) and ritual authority that determine what is considered legitimate, necessary, and efficacious in a specific Balinese village context. This perspective clarifies why such a configuration is sustained in Penarukan while remaining absent in many other regions of Bali.

Balinese Hinduism, ritual practice does not depend on centralized orthodoxy but is shaped by *desa adat* authority, which regulates religious life through locally inherited norms (*awig-awig*), ancestral precedent (*dresta*), and the interpretive role of ritual specialists (Geertz, 1973; Lansing, 2006). Consequently, rituals such as *nyambutin*, although grounded in shared doctrine, are always locally articulated. What is considered ritually appropriate in one village may be unnecessary or even unsuitable in another. Rather than indicating fragmentation, this variation reflects the adaptive and context-sensitive nature of Balinese cosmology. For example, while the *nyambutin* in Penarukan is well-known for its elaborate *Barong–Rangda* performances, research on the *nyambutin* ceremonial language in Gianyar shows how ritual speech, ceremonial structure, and symbolic forms vary across villages, reflecting distinct local interpretive traditions and social functions (Primayanti, 2021). These kinds of localized expressions demonstrate that even within the broad category of Manusa Yadnya, variations in practice are endemic to the *desa adat* system and its negotiation of ritual appropriateness across Bali.

In Penarukan, the inclusion of *Barong* and *Rangda* in *nyambutin* is sanctioned by the *desa adat* council (*krama desa*) and ritually mediated by *pemangku* alongside senior ritual actors, who transmit this knowledge through embodied practice rather than written liturgy. As noted by Geertz (1973), Balinese religion

operates through “models of” and “models for” reality, where ritual action becomes the principal medium of theological communication. Within this setting, the *Barong–Rangda* performance serves as a locally authorized model for understanding cosmic balance and human desire, introduced symbolically at the earliest stage of life.

Ritual knowledge in Penarukan is conveyed genealogically and performatively, passed down from elder priests, dancers, and custodians to subsequent generations. This pattern aligns with Bloch’s (1989) notion of ritualized tradition, in which authority rests not on innovation but on continuity grounded in ancestral legitimacy. Local narratives consistently indicate that *Barong* and *Rangda* are not optional additions but necessary mediators linking the infant, the community, and unseen forces (*niskala*) believed to intensify during transitional moments such as birth. During the ceremony, *Barong*’s movements encircle the ritual space, while *Rangda*’s appearance introduces tension that is subsequently contained, reinforcing the protective and balancing dimensions of the rite.

It is important to note that not all villages require or permit the involvement of *Barong* in *nyambutin*. Within Balinese cosmology, *Barong* is not simply a cultural object but a consecrated presence whose participation must correspond to specific ritual conditions and local cosmological needs (Eiseman, 1990). Villages lacking a ritually consecrated *Barong*, or those whose historical narratives do not associate infancy with heightened vulnerability, typically conduct *nyambutin* without such performances. Thus, the absence of *Barong* in regions such as Gianyar, Buleleng, or Karangasem does not indicate incompleteness; instead, it reflects a different local interpretation of cosmological risk and moral formation, shaped by distinct historical trajectories that still require further study.

This situation underscores the importance of symbolic jurisdiction: ritual obligations and symbolic resources vary across villages. As Victor Turner (1967) emphasizes, symbols derive their force from social consensus and ritual context. In Penarukan, the pairing of *Barong* and *Rangda* has long been regarded as an effective symbolic mechanism for regulating *kāma* and harmonizing male–female energies. Its inclusion in the *nyambutin* ritual is therefore perceived as both necessary and efficacious.

Conversely, if the performance fails to be properly enacted, whether due to ritual omission, improper execution, or lack of communal participation, it is commonly believed that the balance between visible (*sakala*) and invisible (*niskala*) forces may be disrupted. As noted by I Ketut Kamiyana, a senior ritual practitioner and community elder actively involved in the *nyambutin* ceremony in Penarukan Village (interview, April 7, 2025), “if the ritual is incomplete or

the performance is not carried out properly, the protection is also not complete; imbalance can arise, and it may affect the child and the family.” Such imbalance is thought to potentially manifest in forms of disharmony, including physical vulnerability, emotional disturbance, or spiritual unease affecting both the child and the wider family. In this sense, the absence or failure of the *Barong–Rangda* performance does not merely reduce ritual completeness but risks weakening its protective and harmonizing functions within the cosmological order.

From an anthropological standpoint, this case illustrates that locality is central to the production of meaning. Rituals do not simply express universal doctrine; they articulate cosmologies negotiated within specific communities. The *nyambutin* ritual in Penarukan exemplifies what Geertz (1973) terms local knowledge: a system of meaning that is internally coherent, historically situated, and socially maintained. The *Barong–Rangda* performance gains significance not because of its visual impact, but because it is recognized locally as a valid intervention in the child’s moral and spiritual formation, even as analytical interpretations may extend beyond explicitly stated community meanings.

Thus, the question “why only in Penarukan?” is best approached not by emphasizing uniqueness alone, but by examining the interplay between tradition, ritual authority, and symbolic necessity. The practice endures because it is socially validated, ritually effective, and cosmologically meaningful within Penarukan’s particular religious landscape. In this light, the inclusion of *Barong* and *Rangda* in *nyambutin* should be understood not as an anomaly, but as a deliberate articulation of localized Hindu cosmology and moral pedagogy.

#### 4.5 Ritual Performance versus Touristic Performance of *Barong* and *Rangda*

The *Barong–Rangda* performance in Bali occupies a complex position between sacred ritual and cultural spectacle. While widely known internationally through touristic presentations, its meaning and function differ radically when situated within a ritual context such as the *nyambutin* ceremony in Penarukan Village. Addressing this distinction is crucial to avoid conflating ritual efficacy with cultural entertainment and to clarify how local ritual meaning persists despite the global circulation of *Barong* imagery.

In the *Nyambutin* ritual, the *Barong–Rangda* performance functions primarily in a pedagogical–cosmological register. Its purpose is not to entertain an audience, but to symbolically mediate the infant’s transition into the social and spiritual order. Here, performance operates as a form of embodied teaching, communicating fundamental cosmological principles, such as the balance between dharma and adharma, controlled and uncontrolled desire (*kāma*), and the interaction between the seen (*sakala*) and unseen (*niskala*) worlds. The ritual audience, consisting mainly of family members and the local community,

participates as witnesses to a moral and ontological process rather than as consumers of spectacle.

By contrast, touristic *Barong* and *Rangda* performances are oriented toward an aesthetic-economic function. These performances are typically staged in neutral or commercial spaces, detached from specific ritual cycles, and adapted to meet the expectations of a heterogeneous, often foreign audience (Sala, 2022). Narrative elements are simplified, dramatic contrasts heightened, and performance duration standardized to suit tour schedules. In this context, *Barong* and *Rangda* are re-presented primarily as icons of Balinese culture, valued for visual impact and narrative excitement rather than ritual potency (Picard, 1996).

This shift can be understood through the processes of de-ritualization and re-contextualization. De-ritualization occurs when a performance is removed from its original cosmological framework and stripped of its ritual obligations, prohibitions, and consecrated timing (Bell, 1997). Re-contextualization follows, as the same symbols are embedded within new frameworks, tourism, heritage display, or cultural diplomacy, where meaning is reorganized around entertainment, authenticity, and economic value (Cohen, 1988). Importantly, this transformation does not erase the ritual meaning entirely, but creates parallel semiotic regimes in which the same figures operate differently.

The case of Penarukan demonstrates that ritual meaning resists total commodification. Despite the widespread commercialization of *Barong* performances in Bali, the *Barong* and *Rangda* used in the *nyambutin* ritual remain ritually consecrated (*sungsungan*), restricted in use, and governed by *desa adat* authority. They are not interchangeable with touristic *Barong* figures, nor can they be deployed outside ritually sanctioned contexts without violating local norms. This distinction aligns with what Keesing (1987) describes as the persistence of “cultural logic” beneath surface-level commodification.

Local actors in Penarukan explicitly differentiate between *Barong upacara* (ritual *Barong*) and *Barong bali-bali* (performance-oriented *Barong*). The former is believed to possess spiritual agency and is treated as a living sacred presence, while the latter functions as a representational object. This differentiation reinforces the idea that commodification operates selectively, affecting outward forms without fully penetrating the inner ritual core. As Geertz (1973) argues, religious symbols derive their power not merely from visual form, but from their embeddedness in a lived system of meaning.

From a global perspective, this case contributes to broader anthropological discussions on the relationship between ritual and tourism. Rather than viewing tourism as a unidirectional force that inevitably erodes ritual meaning, the Penarukan *nyambutin* ritual illustrates a model of selective accommodation.

Ritual actors allow *Barong* and *Rangda* to circulate globally as cultural symbols, while simultaneously protecting their ritual efficacy through local restrictions, consecration practices, and narrative control. In this sense, ritual meaning is not passively consumed by the market, but actively defended and reproduced by the community.

The contrast between ritual and touristic performances of *Barong* and *Rangda* should not be framed as a simple opposition between “authentic” and “inauthentic.” Instead, it reflects the coexistence of multiple performance regimes, each governed by distinct logics of value. In Penarukan, the *nyambutin* ritual remains firmly rooted in a pedagogical–cosmological framework, ensuring that *Barong* and *Rangda* continue to function as moral and spiritual educators rather than mere aesthetic commodities. This resistance to total commodification underscores the enduring authority of local knowledge and ritual tradition in shaping the meanings of Balinese performance.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the performance of *Barong* and *Rangda* within the *nyambutin* ritual in Penarukan Village constitutes a culturally embedded symbolic system through which male and female desires are represented, interpreted, and ritually regulated. By employing a semiotic framework, this study has shown that the *Barong–Rangda* performance is not merely an aesthetic or narrative expression, but a structured field of meaning in which desire (*kāma*) is articulated within a moral and cosmological order.

At the denotative level, *Barong* and *Rangda* appear as mythological figures engaged in a dramatic encounter. However, at the connotative and mythic levels, they function as symbolic representations of masculine and feminine energies. *Barong* signifies disciplined, outwardly directed desire associated with protection, control, and alignment with *dharma*, while *Rangda* embodies a more ambivalent form of desire, characterized by its latent, transformative, and potentially disruptive force. Their interaction does not culminate in the victory of one over the other; rather, it expresses an ongoing process of balancing opposing yet complementary forces, consistent with the principle of *rwa bhineda*. In this sense, desire is not negated but reoriented, channeled into a state of equilibrium that sustains both individual and collective harmony.

The placement of this symbolic performance within the *nyambutin* ritual further reveals how such meanings are introduced at the earliest stage of human life. The infant, although not cognitively engaged, is positioned within a sensory and relational environment shaped by sound, movement, rhythm, and affect. Through this embodied exposure, the child becomes part of a symbolic field in which fundamental cultural values, such as balance, self-regulation,

and the coexistence of opposing forces, are implicitly transmitted. The ritual thus operates as a form of early moral and cosmological inscription, where knowledge is not conveyed through verbal instruction but through participation in a structured experiential process.

This study also highlights that the integration of *Barong–Rangda* within the *nyambutin* ritual is a locally specific practice rooted in the socio-religious configuration of Penarukan Village. The authority of the *desa adat* and ritual specialists plays a central role in determining the legitimacy and necessity of this performance within the ritual sequence. This demonstrates that the meaning and function of ritual symbols are not universal or fixed, but are shaped by localized systems of knowledge, authority, and tradition. As such, the Penarukan case challenges homogenizing interpretations of Balinese Hindu rituals and underscores the importance of attending to local variations in anthropological analysis.

By distinguishing between ritual and touristic contexts, this study contributes to broader discussions on cultural commodification and resilience. While *Barong* and *Rangda* are widely circulated as cultural icons in the global tourism industry, their ritual enactment in *nyambutin* remains governed by sacred time, space, and authority, thereby preserving their symbolic efficacy. This dual existence illustrates how cultural forms can be simultaneously adapted and protected, allowing ritual meaning to persist despite external pressures of commodification.

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### Disclosure of AI Use

The authors used artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted language tools solely to improve the clarity, grammar, and readability of the manuscript. AI was not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, interpret findings, or formulate the study's conclusions. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this article.

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### Author Profiles

**I Gede Suwantana** is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Brahma Widya, Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Indonesia. His research interests cover Hindu philosophy, spirituality, and the hermeneutics of sacred texts. He has published numerous works on the reinterpretation of Hindu rituals, philosophical consciousness, and the ethical dimensions of Balinese culture. Email: [suwantana@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:suwantana@uhnsugriwa.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0926-5913>

**I Made Girinata** is a lecturer and researcher at Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa, Denpasar, Indonesia. His academic focus includes Hindu ritual studies, Balinese religious practices, and cultural anthropology. He has conducted several field studies on the transformation of traditional rituals in contemporary Balinese society and the intersection between religion, ecology, and ethics. Email: [imadegirinata@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:imadegirinata@uhnsugriwa.ac.id)

**I Putu Agus Aryatnaya Giri** is a researcher and lecturer at Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Indonesia, focusing on Hindu theology, ritual performance, and interreligious dialogue. His scholarly work often explores the relationship between ritual practice, social change, and local wisdom in Balinese Hinduism. Email: [iputuagusaryatnayagiri@uhnsugriwa.ac.id](mailto:iputuagusaryatnayagiri@uhnsugriwa.ac.id)

**Sudip Chakravortti** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sanskrit at Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, West Bengal, India. His academic interests include Sanskrit studies, Hindu philosophy, Indian religious traditions, and classical textual interpretation. He has contributed to research and publications related to Sanskrit literature, culture, and interdisciplinary religious studies. Email: sudip-chakravortti@skbu.ac.in ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9690-0591>

# Symbolic Meaning of Space: Interpreting Cosmological Order in Indigenous Balinese and Javanese Architecture

Titis Srimuda Pitana<sup>1\*</sup> , Pratiwi Anjar Sari<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Studies on Nusantara architecture often isolate spatial systems and disregard their shared cosmological foundations. This comparative study examines how cosmology shapes spatial planning in the Balinese *Tri Mandala* (a tripartite spatial hierarchy) and the Javanese *Catur Gatra Tunggal* (a quadripartite civic order), with a focus on orientation, zoning, and structure. Using an interpretive qualitative approach, the research draws on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Ricoeur's symbolic hermeneutics, and spatial phenomenology. The findings show that both traditions project cosmology into space through different spatial logics: Bali emphasizes a vertical sacred-profane hierarchy, whereas Java stresses horizontal integration of social, religious, and political domains. Variations in spatial form do not indicate distinct cosmological paradigms but rather different symbolic expressions of comparable ontological concepts. The novelty of this study lies in synthesizing zoning, structure, orientation, and philosophical meaning into a unified analytical model that views architecture as a spatial knowledge system mediating relationships among humans, nature, and transcendence.

**Keywords:** architectural cosmology; *tri mandala*; *catur gatra tunggal*; spatial hermeneutics; traditional spatial symbolism

## 1. Introduction

Although Indonesian architectural traditions are renowned for their rich symbolism and cosmological linkages, academic research frequently focuses on documenting forms rather than explaining the underlying principles that shape their spatial organization. To address this weakness, this study employs the frameworks of the phenomenology of place (Norberg-Schulz, 2019) and philosophical and symbolic hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2008; Ricoeur, 1971). These approaches view a constructed space as a cultural text whose

\* Corresponding author's email: [titissrimuda@staff.uns.ac.id](mailto:titissrimuda@staff.uns.ac.id)

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meaning emerges through a dialogue among material form, tradition, and interpretation. From this perspective, architecture is seen as a system of signs articulating relationships among humans, cosmology, power, and social order, instead of simply a physical product or visual style. This theoretical framework allows the analysis to move beyond morphological description and structural explanation toward an examination of the spatial logic underlying traditional spatial systems.

As Javanese and Balinese architectural are the most well-documented cosmological systems in Indonesia, both show similar metaphysical roots but differing spatial configurations due to different political histories, social structures, and religious transformations (Graaf & Pigeaud, 1985; Kusno, 2014; Santosa & Noorwatha, 2025; Wicaksono, 2024). In contrast to previous studies, which tended to study each tradition separately or focused on features of typology, environmental performance, or contemporary adaptation (Ardana, 2023; Aryani & Tanuwidjaja, 2013; Rajendra, 2012; Semadi, 2023), this study uses cosmology as the key analytical variable to explain how metaphysical concepts are applied to spatial orientation, hierarchy, and zoning. The key question is how local cosmologies anchored in history, power dynamics, and diverse structure of society in Java and Bali are spatially translated through architectural systems and cultural spatial planning.

To ensure analytical clarity, this study distinguishes between two dimensions that are frequently conflated in the literature: architecture as a physical artifact and cultural spatial planning as a system of spatial organization. This distinction is significant a concept like *Catur Gatra Tunggal* or a quadripartite civic order, a Javanese architectural concept of four elements uniting in one unified space and function, operates at the urban scale as configurations of political-religious-economic-public relations (Adityaningrum et al., 2021; Nas, 2002), whereas *Tri Mandala* or a tripartite spatial hierarchy, a Balinese concept of dividing the temple complex space into three zones based on their level of holiness, operates directly on the organization of architectural and ritual space. Thus, the comparison offers a spatial logic distinctive to each tradition by examining how cosmology is realized at two different scales of buildings and spatial arrangements rather than combining categories. In the Javanese context, the concepts of dualism and spirituality constitute a spatial semantics organizing the oppositions of inside-outside, high-low, and center-periphery as a relational spectrum instead of an absolute dichotomy (Eliade, 1959; Fox, 2006; Pemberton, 1994).

Through this framework, the study's contribution extends beyond reaffirming the widely recognized proposition that architecture reflects cosmology. More specifically, it compares the epistemological mechanisms

through which cosmological principles are expressed in different spatial configurations. The study demonstrates that traditional spatial planning cannot be reduced to a single universal model, as each architectural system constitutes a local articulation of broader cosmological logic. This approach broadens the discourse on Southeast Asian architecture by positioning buildings and spatial organization as conceptual media through which societies understand and construct reality. It also provides an analytical foundation for studies on heritage preservation, interpretation, and architectural theory grounded in local knowledge systems.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Cosmology of Traditional Javanese and Balinese Architecture*

Studies on Nusantara vernacular architecture reveal that traditional spaces serve not only as symbols of cultural cosmology in addition to serving as venues for activities. In the Balinese context, most studies confirm that spatial organization is based on a sacred-profane hierarchical system manifested through mountain-sea orientation and zoning concepts such as *Tri Mandala*, which organizes space based on levels of sacredness and ritual function (Cuthbert & Suartika, 2017; Eiseman, 2011; Rajendra, 2012). Balinese architecture is seen as an open system facilitating interactions between humans, nature, and the transcendent dimension through the principle of cosmic balance (Lansing, 2012).

In contrast, Javanese architectural cosmology displays a more centralized and symbolic spatial configuration. Its spatial structure is typically associated with concepts of duality, inner balance, and cosmic hierarchy that mediate the relationship between humans, power, and nature (Kusno, 2014; Pemberton, 1994). In a traditional urban context, the *Catur Gatra Tunggal* model demonstrates how cosmology is expressed through communal spatial planning integrating political, religious, social, and economic elements within a unified spatial system (Adityaningrum et al., 2021; Nas, 2002). Archaeological and historical studies indicate that this pattern is rooted in the transformation of Hindu-Buddhist cosmology into a Javanese Islamic framework, resulting in a hybrid spatial configuration that retains cosmic symbolism (Graaf & Pigeaud, 1985; Soekmono, 1976).

Previous comparative literature has tended to examine the two traditions separately or to emphasize aspects of typology, climate performance, or aesthetics (Aryani & Tanuwidjaja, 2013; Semadi, 2023). Consequently, the epistemological relationship between cosmology and spatial structure has not been analyzed integratively. This gap underlies the need for comparative philosophical studies.

## 2.2 *Symbolic Foundation of Architectural Concept in Theoretical Perspective*

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the phenomenology of space and symbolic hermeneutics. They view architecture as a manifestation of human existential experience in the world, where spatial structures reflect ontological orientations toward the cosmos (Norberg-Schulz, 2019). In this perspective, orientation, axis, center, and boundaries are not only geometric elements, but also categories of meaning that shape the identity of a place.

Philosophical hermeneutics adds an interpretive dimension by emphasizing that the meaning of space is not fixed, but rather is formed through a historical dialogue between tradition and interpreter (Gadamer, 2008). This approach allows us to view architecture as a cultural text with symbolic, mythological, and social layers. Ricoeur (1971) further elaborates this concept by asserting that symbols always have layered meanings that must be interpreted through an analysis of the relationship between form, context, and belief system. In the context of traditional architecture, this theory allows for the interpretation of structural elements such as axes, spatial hierarchies, and orientations as sign structures that encode cosmological concepts, rather than simply technical decisions.

Through combining spatial phenomenology and symbolic hermeneutics, this study positions Javanese and Balinese architecture as distinct yet internally coherent systems of world representation. This approach simultaneously addresses criticisms of previous descriptive studies by providing analytical tools to explain how cosmological meanings are interpreted into concrete and conceptually comparable spatial configurations.

## 2.3 *State of the Art*

The study of traditional Indonesian architecture has developed into several main streams. First, studies of religious symbolism and cosmology interpreting space as a manifestation of belief systems, especially in Bali and Java (Eiseman, 2011; Pemberton, 1994). Second, studies on architectural morphology and typology emphasizing form, structure, and spatial composition have not provided an in-depth analysis of philosophical meaning (Handinoto, 1996; Subiyantoro, 2010). Third, an environmental and sustainability approach interprets vernacular architecture as an ecological response to a tropical climate (Aryani & Tanuwidjaja, 2013; Rajendra, 2012). Fourth, historical-cultural studies trace how the Javanese-Islamic social and architectural structures evolved from Hindu-Buddhist cosmology (Graaf & Pigeaud, 1985; Kusno, 2014).

Although this body of literature demonstrates significant progress, much of the existing study remains sector-specific. Studies on symbolism are rarely integrated with concrete spatial analysis, while morphological studies are

often detached from cosmological contexts. Furthermore, comparative studies between Balinese and Javanese traditions remains limited and typically focus on describing formal differences without using a systematic philosophical interpretative framework.

#### ***2.4 Research Gap and Research Position***

First, only a few studies have simultaneously examined the interrelationship between cosmology, spatial structure, and construction symbols within a single integrated analytical framework. Second, theoretical comparisons across Nusantara architectural traditions remain rarely conducted theoretically; most studies discuss Bali or Java independently, leaving the epistemological relationship between these traditions insufficiently explored. Third, the use of interpretive approaches, such as the phenomenology of place and symbolic hermeneutics, to the analysis of traditional architecture remains limited, consequently their dimensions of meaning are often presented descriptively, instead of being examined through explicit and rigorous interpretive methodologies.

This study seeks to address these gaps by combining a qualitative comparative approach, spatial phenomenology (Norberg-Schulz, 2019), and philosophical and symbolic hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2008; Ricoeur, 1971) to interpret architecture as a cosmological text. Thus, the main contribution of this study is not simply to confirm that traditional architecture contains widely discussed symbolic meanings but to demonstrate how historically rooted cosmological systems produce distinct yet coherent spatial logics within Javanese and Balinese traditions. This approach expands the paradigm of previous research by offering a cross-traditional analytical model that conceptualizes architecture as a structure of cultural knowledge, not merely a form artifact or aesthetic product.

### **3. Method and Theory**

This is an interpretive-comparative qualitative study in the field of architectural humanities, which focuses on interpreting the symbolic meaning of space rather than measuring physical form. This is classified as conceptual-analytical research as its primary object of study is not direct social behavior, but rather the representation of cosmology in the spatial layout of Javanese and Balinese architecture as shown in texts, images, architectural artifacts, and historical literature. Accordingly, the study is situated within the interpretive humanities tradition, which views architecture as a system of cultural signs.

### 3.1 Method

This research was conducted over a period of approximately three months (September to November 2025), which included the stages of data collection, interpretative analysis, and preparation of a comparative synthesis. In the initial stage, the researchers collected and curated secondary data sources in the form of architectural literature, historical manuscripts, visual documentation, and spatial diagrams related to the concept of *Tri Mandala* in Balinese architecture and *Catur Gatra Tunggal* in Javanese spatial planning traditions. This stage also included a review of the results of studies previously conducted by the authors independently in research activities of the Building Engineering and Urban Rural Design and Development (URDC) groups that examined the configuration of traditional urban spaces in the Central Java region, especially in Yogyakarta and Surakarta.

In the next stage, researchers conducted remote observation of the spatial configuration of Balinese architectural complexes through visual documentation and spatial maps, complemented by online academic discussions with Balinese architectural experts through virtual meetings (Zoom). These discussions focused on understanding the principles of *Tri Mandala*, the sacred orientation of mountains and seas, and the relationship between temples, settlements, and landscapes in Balinese cosmology. All data obtained during the research period was then analyzed through a process of hermeneutic interpretation and conceptual comparison to identify patterns of cosmological similarities and differences in spatial articulation between Balinese and Javanese architectural traditions.

### 3.2 Theory

The main theoretical basis of this research is the philosophical hermeneutics developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (2008), which views the process of understanding as a dialogue between the interpreter and the tradition that forms a cultural text. In this perspective, meaning is not seen as something fixed or completely objective, but rather emerges from the interaction between the historical horizon inscribed in the object of study and the researchers' own horizon of understanding. Thus, spatial architecture is not only understood as a physical structure or formal composition, but as a "cultural text" that records the historical experiences, cosmological values, and knowledge systems of the society that built it. Through this hermeneutic approach, architectural elements such as building orientation, spatial organization, and symbolic configuration are viewed as interpretive expressions of the worldview that develops within a cultural tradition.

This approach was then enriched with symbolic hermeneutics developed by Paul Ricoeur (1971), who emphasized that cultural symbols contain layers of meaning that go beyond their literal function. Within this framework, architectural symbols, such as the division of sacred zones, ritual gates, or spatial hierarchies, are understood as forms of symbolic expression that harbor cosmological and religious meanings. Ricoeur (1971) argued that symbols not only represent reality but also open up new interpretive possibilities that connect human experience with deeper dimensions of cultural and spiritual reality. Using this approach, research can interpret how spatial elements in traditional Balinese and Javanese architecture function as symbolic media that articulate the relationship between humans, the social order, and the cosmos.

In addition, the theoretical framework of this research is also enriched by the perspective of spatial phenomenology which views space as an existential experience directly experienced by humans. In the phenomenological approach, architectural space is not merely understood as a venue for activity, but rather a structure of experience that shapes how humans understand their existence in the world. Through integrating philosophical hermeneutics, symbolic hermeneutics, and spatial phenomenology, this research views architectural characteristics, such as the axis of orientation, zoning, and vertical structure, as symbolic codes that represent the cosmic hierarchy and the relationship between humans, nature, and transcendence. The synthesis of these three approaches allows for a more comprehensive analysis of traditional architecture as a system of meaning that combines material, symbolic, and cosmological dimensions in one interpretive unity.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section examines sacred architecture in Bali and Java, including temple complexes and ritual spatial organization in Bali, as well as mosques, palaces, and related structures in the Javanese tradition. The analysis explores how spatial orientation, zoning systems, sacred hierarchies, and relationships between buildings and landscapes are articulated within each tradition through the interpretation of spatial configurations and symbolic elements. Differences between Balinese and Javanese architecture are not treated as fixed or absolute categories but as tendencies arising from distinct ways of spatializing cosmological principles and social structures. In general, Balinese architecture tends to externalize cosmology through explicit relationships among sacred orientations, architectural forms, and the natural landscape, whereas Javanese architecture emphasizes symbolic spatial hierarchies associated with spirituality, political authority, and social order. A conceptual comparison between the two traditions is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Balinese and Javanese Sacred Architectural Philosophies and Designs

| Analytical Aspect         | Balinese Architecture                                                                                        | Javanese Architecture                                                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cosmological Foundations  | <i>Tri Hita Karana</i> ; <i>Mandala</i> cosmology; mountain–sea axis; Mount Mahaeru symbolism                | Syncretic Hindu–Buddhist–Islamic cosmology; cosmic axis; sacred mountain orientation |
| Spatial Hierarchy         | <i>Tri Mandala</i> zoning; <i>Catus Patha</i> settlement pattern; temple–village–landscape integration       | <i>Catur Gatra Tunggal</i> concept; palace–mosque–square–market axis                 |
| Architectural Symbolism   | Sacred gateways ( <i>candi bentar</i> , <i>paduraksa</i> ); ritual thresholds; open–closed spatial gradation | Tiered roofs; layered interior hierarchy; ceremonial spatial sequence                |
| Architectural Expression  | Rich ornamentation; processional temple layout; integration with landscape                                   | Monumental forms; restrained ornamentation; emphasis on permanence                   |
| Socio-religious Structure | Temple-centered ritual life; communal religious authority                                                    | Kraton-centered cosmology; linkage between power and sacred order                    |

Source: Authors (2025)

As shown in Table 1, the main differences between Balinese and Javanese sacred architecture lie in their cosmological foundations and how these principles are translated into spatial organization and architectural expression. In the Balinese context, the spatial system is strongly influenced by the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy, which emphasizes the balanced relationship between humans, nature, and God. This principle is embodied in the concept of *Tri Mandala*, which divides space into three sacred zones and establishes a close relationship between temples, settlements, and the natural landscape.

In contrast, Javanese architecture developed through a more syncretic cosmology that blends Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and local traditions. Concepts such as *Catur Gatra Tunggal* demonstrate how traditional urban planning integrates the palace, mosque, town square, and market into a single cosmological structure that represents the relationship between political power, religious life, and the social order of society. Thus, Balinese architecture tends to emphasize the integration of landscape and ritual space, while Javanese architecture emphasizes cosmological symbolism related to power structures and urban organization.

#### 4.1 Cosmological Foundations in Balinese and Javanese Architecture

Balinese and Javanese architectural systems are both grounded in cosmological conceptions of the relationship between humans, nature, and transcendence, yet they differ markedly in their philosophical foundations, spatial logic, and symbolic expression. Balinese architecture is primarily informed by the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, which contends that human well-being is achieved through harmony among the divine (*parhyangan*), human society (*pawongan*), and the natural environment (*palemahan*) (Eiseman, 2011; Lansing, 2012; Sau et al., 2021). This framework is not only intellectual, but it also influences how Balinese environments are structured, produced, and inhabited. Balinese building design emphasizes the alignment between the physical and spiritual realms, and every housing, temple, or village plan becomes a microcosm of the universe. In Balinese cosmology, harmony between the physical and spiritual realms is a normative principle. However, in practice, this principle is primarily articulated explicitly at the scale of traditional villages and ritual architecture, while its application to individual dwellings depends heavily on the social and economic context and the degree of continuity of local traditions.

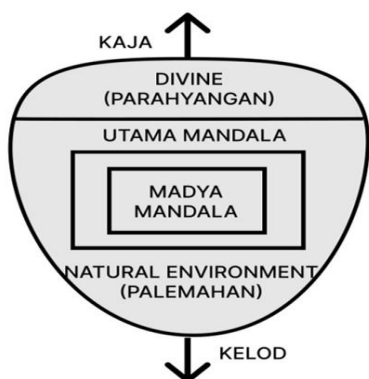


Figure 1. Balinese Traditional Spatial Concept (Adapted from Eiseman, 2011).

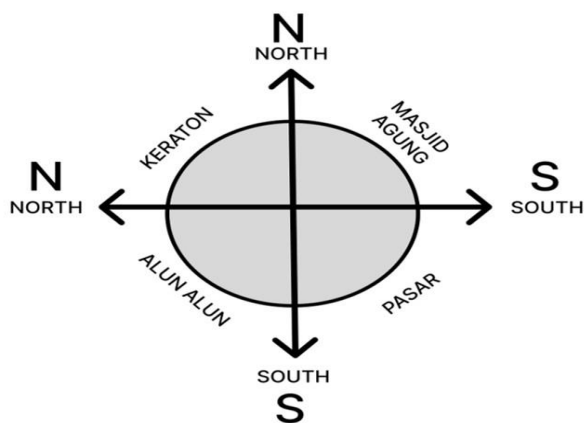


Figure 2. Javanese Traditional Spatial Concept (Source: Authors, 2025).

Figures 1 and 2 are not intended as universal diagrams explaining the entirety of Balinese and Javanese architectural practice, but rather as conceptual models that demonstrate how specific cosmologies are translated into spatial logic at the communal and sacred architectural scale. In the Balinese tradition (Figure 1), the *Tri Mandala* and *Tri Hita Karana* systems are represented through a hierarchical and oriented spatial organization, where the *kaja-keled* directions serve as symbolic references to differentiate levels of spatial sacredness. This

orientation is not always literally realized in the form of a single building, but is primarily manifested in the layout of temples, traditional villages, and the spatial relationships between ritual elements.

In contrast, in the Javanese tradition (Figure 2), cosmological concepts are realized through communal spatial formations such as the *catur gatra tunggal*, which organizes the relationships between the palace, mosque, town square, and market into a symbolic whole. Structurally, this pattern bears similarities to the *catus patha*, a Balinese concept of crossroad used as a central point for urban growth, operates within a different socio-political and religious framework. The comparison of these two diagrams is not intended to reaffirm that cosmology influences architecture, a long-established notion, but rather to ask how this historically effective system of spatial signification has become increasingly fragmented or lost its operability in the context of contemporary architectural planning and practice. These drawings thus serve as analytical tools for examining the tensions between traditional cosmologies and modern spatial systems, and for reflecting on the limitations and possibilities of reinterpreting these principles in contemporary social and economic conditions (Sarjana et al., 2020; Sarjana & Anshori, 2023).

The layout of *Catur Gatra Tunggal* represents a Javanese communal-urban spatial formation not a building scale that is structurally comparable to the Balinese *Catus Patha*, because both arrange four social elements in a cosmological grid oriented to the cardinal points: the palace in the northwest (political authority), the mosque in the northeast (spiritual), the town square in the southwest (public space), and the market in the southeast (economic), thus creating a political-religious-civil-economic synthesis that reflects cosmic balance (Alhazmi, 2020; Marlina, 2020). In Javanese tradition, this kind of symbolism is rarely a normative formula, but rather appears through landscape and orientation, as seen in the tiered composition of Borobudur which signifies the mandalic journey of enlightenment (Soekmono, 1976).

In the classical to Islamic period, this cosmological pattern developed into a hybrid configuration that combined animism, Hindu-Buddhist metaphysics, and Islamic mysticism, consequently the spatial orientation expressed a cosmopolitical harmony between power, nature, and mythology (Kusno, 2014; Nas, 2002). Yogyakarta's north-south axis diagram depicts a cosmogram connecting Mount Merapi, the palace, and the South Sea, a concept chosen by Prince Mangkubumi based on the premise of determining cosmological sacred locations, which positions the city at the center of the upper-middle-lower triadic. This axis is both geographical and spiritual in Javanese philosophy, consistent with the *Sang Hyang Tattwa Jnana* text and Magnis-Suseno's (1996) and Pemberton's (1994) interpretations of cosmic ethics. The Merapi-Palace-

South Sea route is therefore interpreted as a symbolic journey from holiness to the mortal world and back to the cosmic origin; even ecologically, the flow of volcanic material and the *Labuhan* rituals in the mountains and on the coast emphasize the reciprocal relationship between humans, nature, and transcendence in a spatial structure that functions as a living cosmogram. This makes the imaginary axis closely related to the *Catur Gatra Tunggal* (Figure 4) as an expression of the unity of spiritual, political, social, and ecological order (Nas, 2002; Revianto, 2000; Tjahjono, 1989).

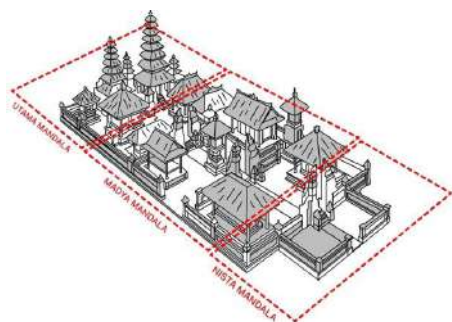


Figure 3. *Tri Mandala* as a conceptual spatial hierarchy in Balinese cosmology (Source: Authors)

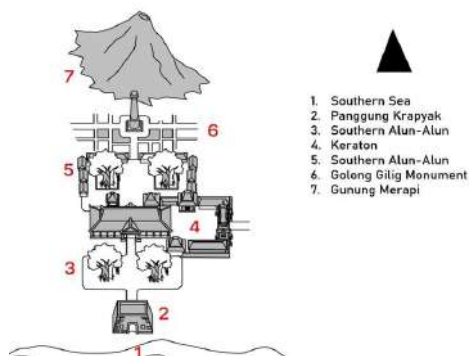


Figure 4. Javanese Imaginary and Philosophica Axis (Source: Authors)

*Mandalas* are used in both traditions as cosmological models to portray sacred order and spatial hierarchy (Figure 3). This concept is embodied in Balinese architecture by the *Tri Mandala* spatial organization, which is aligned with the sacred *kaja-kelod* axis, where *kaja* represents the direction toward the mountain (sacred) and *kelod* represents the direction toward the sea (profane). Spatial zoning distinguishes between sacred and secular areas, situating the most sacred spaces nearest to the mountain and the least sacred spaces towards the sea (Eiseman, 2011; Ramseyer, 1987). Temple compounds (*pura*) exhibit this hierarchical arrangement through three successive zones: *Nista Mandala* (the outer courtyard), *Madya Mandala* (middle courtyard), and *Utama Mandala* (inner sanctuary), which together depict the symbolic journey from profane to sacred (Figure 5).

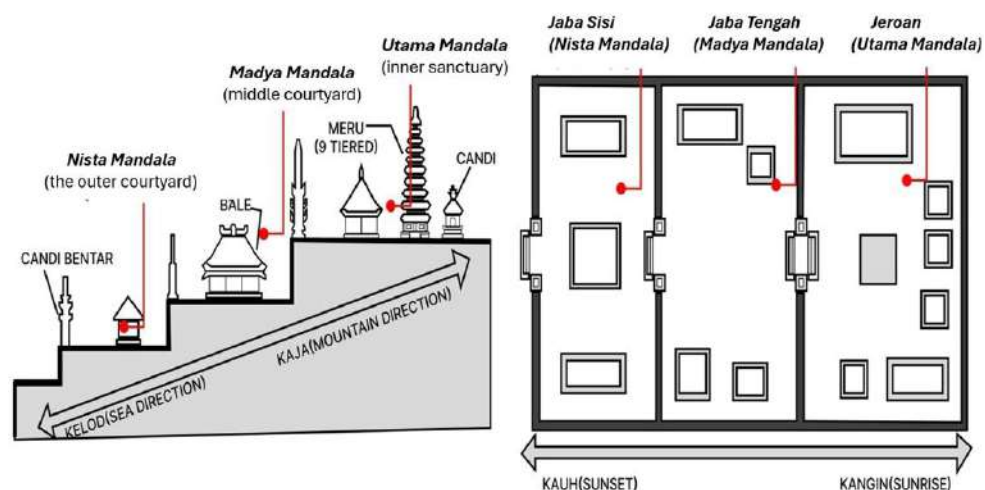


Figure 5. Application of the Tri Mandala concept in the layout of a Balinese temple along the *kaja-kelod* axis (Source: Authors)

The *Tri Mandala* notion is an essential concept of spatial arrangement in Balinese architecture, dividing the environment into three hierarchical zones based on sacredness and ritual function. The outermost zone, *Nista Mandala* (*jaba sisi*), is seen as the most profane, providing a support or transitional space from the outside world. The middle zone, *Madya Mandala* (*jaba tengah*), is an area with a moderate level of sacredness that is often used for social activities or ritual preparations. Meanwhile, the innermost and most sacred zone is the *Utama Mandala* (*jeroan*), which houses the sacred elements or main building. This layered form embodies the cosmological concept of the spiritual journey from the profane to the sacred, highlighting that spatial design is more than simply a physical arrangement; it also represents a hierarchy of spiritual values.

The *Sanga Mandala* philosophy expands on this concept by organising space based on cosmic alignment using two symbolic axes: *Kaja-Kelod* (mountain-sea) and *Kangin-Kauh* (east-west). The *Kaja-Kelod* axis represents the sacred-natural orientation, with the mountain direction representing purity and the sea representing profane elements, whereas the *Kangin-Kauh* axis represents the ceremonial orientation determined by the movement of the sun. The intersection of these two axes creates a grid of nine spatial zones with varied levels of symbolic meaning, allowing us to view space as a living map of the cosmos. Thus, the *Tri Mandala* provides a vertical-spiritual hierarchical structure, and the *Sanga Mandala* provides a cosmic-horizontal framework; both works synergistically to ensure that every spatial arrangement is in line with the order of the cosmos as described in Balinese cosmology.

#### 4.2 Spiritual Spatial Hierarchy in Traditional Balinese Architecture

Traditional Balinese architecture's spatial hierarchy is based on Hindu-Balinese cosmology, which combines elements of the Vedas, ancestor worship, and local animism, thereby incorporating religious practices into residential area planning (Eiseman, 2011; C. Geertz, 1973; H. Geertz, 1999). In the context of a dwelling, the most essential principle is the *Tri Mandala*, which divides space into three levels of sacredness; *utama*, *madya*, and *nista*, and governs zoning from most sacred to most profane areas. However, in the practice of traditional yard layout, as illustrated in the image, the *Tri Mandala* principle is expanded in more detail through the *Sanga Mandala* structure, which maps nine zones based on the cosmic orientations of *kaja-kelod* (mountain-sea) and *kangin-kauh*. Therefore, *Sanga Mandala*, basic principles of traditional Balinese spatial planning, is not a distinct concept, but rather a site-specific operational development of *Tri Mandala*. The Sanctuary and *Bale Daja* are located in the *kaja-kangin* sector of the mandala, representing the realm of gods and ancestors. *Bale Dangin*, located on the east side, belongs to the sacred-ritual zone and is still part of the *utama-madya* realm. The *Lumbung* or *Jineng* and *Bale Dauh* occupy the middle zone as venues for the family's social and economic activities, indicating that the space's role is determined by the cosmological map rather than by practical necessities (Figure 6).

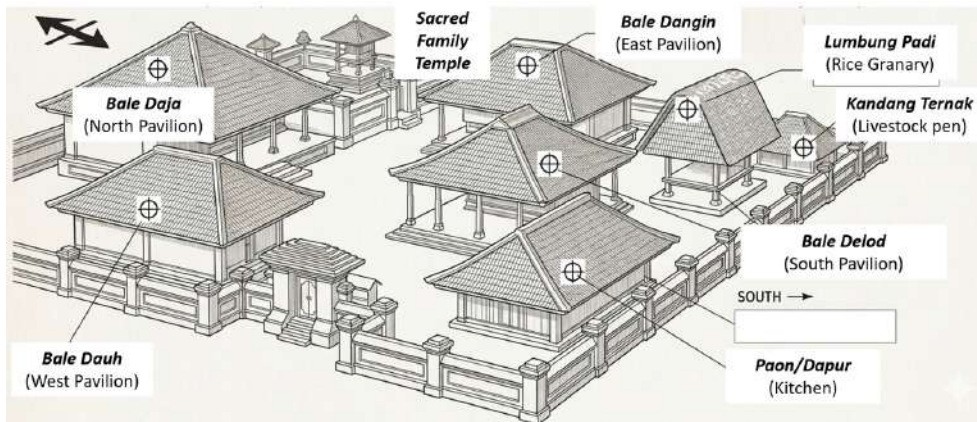


Figure 6. *Sanga Mandala* Spatial Concept (adapted from Putra et al., 2025)

The *nista mandala*, located in the courtyard's southern zone, is reserved for the most profane chores, such as the *Paon* or Kitchen, *Bale Delod*, and animal enclosures, because the *kelod* direction is associated with earth, material work, and physical transformation. This design stresses the spatial structure of the Balinese house as a microcosm, transforming holy order into household spatial organization (Cuthbert & Suartika, 2017). *Bale Dangin* is an important part of this

composition; it serves as a family ritual pavilion in the eastern sector, representing birth, purity, and the start of life. Its symbolic importance is accentuated by the *saka guru* (supporting pillars) structure, the four main pillars, which are not only structural supports but also emblems of the cosmos' stability and the four corners of nature. The stone base, pillars, and the ornate ceiling reflect the vertical tripartition of the underworld, human existence, and the divine world (Aranha, 1991). Thus, the overall spatial arrangement demonstrates that Balinese house architecture operates as an integrated symbolic system, with the *Tri Mandala* serving as the basic conceptual principle, the *Sanga Mandala* as the spatial application tool, and building elements such as *Bale Dangin* and *saka guru* serving as the physical articulation of this cosmology (Figure 7).

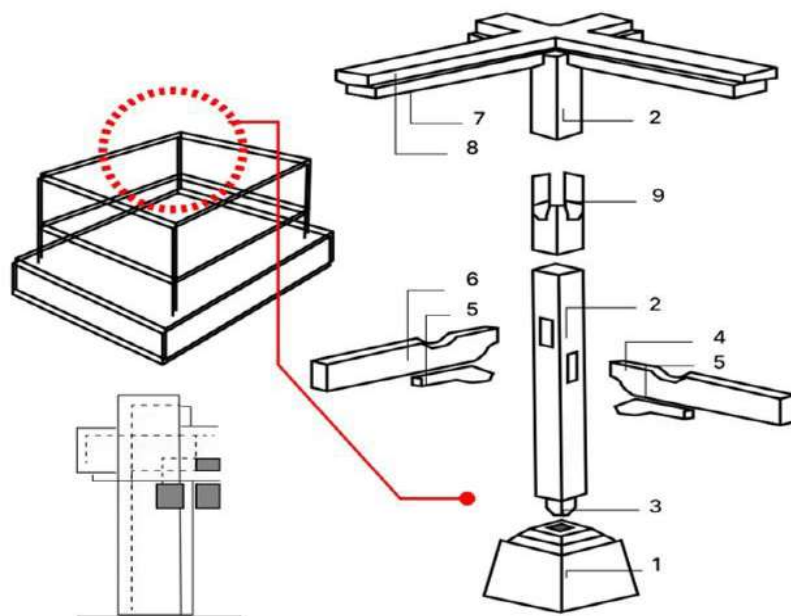


Figure 7. *Saka Guru* (supporting pillar) (Source: Authors).

The *Bale Dangin* framework structure in traditional Balinese architecture displays a hierarchical wooden construction system from the foundation to the roof frame. At the very bottom is the *umpak* or joint (1), a stone foundation that serves as a base for the pillars and protects the wooden elements from soil moisture. Above it stands the *saka* or main pillar (2), which serves as a vertical element supporting the entire building structure. This pillar is connected to the foundation through *purus* to joint (3), a wooden dowel or joint that locks the column to the *umpak*. In the center of the framework is the *sunduk bawak* (4), a horizontal tie beam that connects the pillars to maintain structural stability, and the *lait* (5) as a connecting element that strengthens the joints between the

beams. At the top of the framework is the *sunduk dawa* (6), a main tie beam that connects the pillar caps and functions to support the load of the roof frame. This structure is then reinforced by the *sineb* (7) as an additional tie beam and the *lambang* (8) which acts as a crown beam on which the roof frame elements rest. The entire system is locked using *purus* to *lambang* (9), a wooden dowel that unites the joints between the elements so that the structure becomes a stable whole (Suwirya, 2017). This construction system demonstrates the distinctive character of Balinese architecture, which uses traditional wooden joints without metal nails, where each element mechanically interlocks to distribute the load from the roof to the columns and then to the stone foundation.

Hindu-Balinese cosmology is visualized through structural language in the *saka guru* exemplified in *Bale Dangin*. The vertical arrangement, the stone base, the pillar shaft, and the carved pillar cap represent the tripartition of the cosmos *bhur-bwah-swah* (lower, middle, and upper realms), while the four main pillars symbolize *catur loka pala* (guardians of the four corners) and the principle of balance in the universe. The base, which is detached from the ground, represents the severance of the earth's profane elements, resulting in the structure's sacred ritual status, while the nailless wooden joints depict the organic concord between humans and nature. The carved floral and fauna ornaments and tendril motifs on top are beyond simply decoration; they represent life energy (*prana*) rising from the earth to the realm of the gods, so that the entire pillar system functions as a mini cosmic axis (*axis mundi*), emphasizing *Bale Dangin* as a transitional space between human activities and the sacred realm of the ancestors.

#### 4.3 *Joglo as a Representation of Cosmology and Spatial Hierarchy in Javanese Architecture*

The *Joglo* house can be viewed as a symbolic representation of Javanese cosmology principles, which also underpin traditional urban planning concepts such as the Catur Gatra Tunggal, namely the unification of the center of supremacy, spiritual space, social space, and economic space. In this sense, *Joglo* architecture is more than simply a type of house; it is a miniature cosmos that resembles the structure of the universe, according to classical Javanese concepts. *Joglo's* spatial hierarchy, from *pendapa* (public), *pringgitan* (transition), to *dalem* (private core), follows a concentric pattern similar to the structure of royal cities like Surakarta and Yogyakarta, where the town square, grand mosque, market, and palace form a cosmological unity (Yusran et al., 2021). The *Joglo* house thus operates as a micro-representation of the kingdom's macro-order: the house becomes a "small palace," the family head serves as a symbolic center of authority, and the spatial arrangement reflects both the social and spiritual order.

It is obvious in the decorative elements and symbolic structure. The four main pillars in the center of the *Joglo* represent the pillars of the cosmos and are analogous to the four corners of royal power in royal systems such as the Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace and the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace, whereas the layered overlapping patterns above them indicate the stratification of the universe and social hierarchy. Carved motifs consisting of *lung-lungan*, *wajikan*, and *saton* are not only decorative but also suggest the authenticity of palace culture, as they used to be associated with noble or *priyayi* status. Even the orientation of *Joglo* buildings, which takes into account the cardinal directions as well as the position of mountains and seas, corresponds to Javanese royal city design concepts. Thus, *Joglo* represents more than just a traditional architectural typology; it is a symbolic device that embodies Javanese spatial ideology: harmony between humanity, power, nature, and the spiritual realm, as monumentalized in the concept of *Catur Gatra Tunggal*.

The typology of traditional Javanese architecture represents social stratification, cosmology, and power symbols, which are prominently reflected in the shape of the *Joglo* House, an aristocratic style of housing. The *Joglo* is regarded as the highest status in the domestic sphere in the hierarchy of Javanese building forms because it has historically been associated with nobles, royal officials, or the *priyayi* elite, so that the roof shape, spatial scale, and structural complexity serve as markers of social legitimacy as well as cosmological symbols (Muktiono, 2024; Prihatmaji et al., 2014). *Joglo* houses can still be found in Central Java's interior and around Yogyakarta and Surakarta, particularly in agricultural areas where big spaces are required for crop storage and social and religious activities. Economic conditions, resource availability, the tropical temperature, and geographical uniqueness all have an impact on the building's size, material quality, and orientation, but the symbolic component remains the primary concern. The southern orientation, for example, is commonly connected with Javanese cosmology, which reveres the strength of the South Sea and the mythological figure of Nyai Roro Kidul. While the central space, such as the *senthong*, is sacred and used for offerings, the *Joglo* home is more than just an ecological or economic adaptation; it is also a symbolic space that ties humans to the natural order and spiritual forces (Budiwiyanto, 2013; Djono et al., 2012).

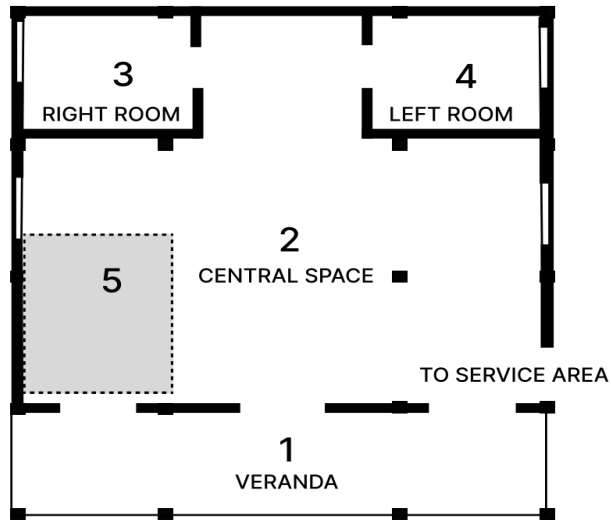


Figure 8. Traditional Javanese *Joglo* house (source: authors)

Legend: (1) *Pendopo* (public reception pavilion); (2) *Pringgitan* (transitional hall); (3) *Dalem* (main family living area); (4) *Senthong* (sacred inner chamber); (5) *Gandhok* (side wing used for supporting domestic activities and additional family spaces).

The *Joglo* house represents Javanese cosmology through a hierarchical structure of form and space: a tiered roof as a symbol of a mountain or cosmic axis, a *soko guru* as the center of universal balance, and a spatial gradation from the communal veranda to the serene interior signifying increasing sacredness towards the center. This composition maps the upper cosmos as the sky, the living space as the human world, and the foundation as the basis of existence while the sequence of the terrace, central room, and private space emphasizes socio-spiritual harmony with the *dalem* as the core of family balance.

As shown in Figure 9, the *Joglo* structural system consists of seven principal components, *mala*, *ander*, *tumpangsari*, *sunduk*, *kili*, *soko guru*, and *umpak*, which together establish both structural stability and cosmological symbolism (Maer & Pudjisuryadi, 2015; Subiyantoro, 2010).

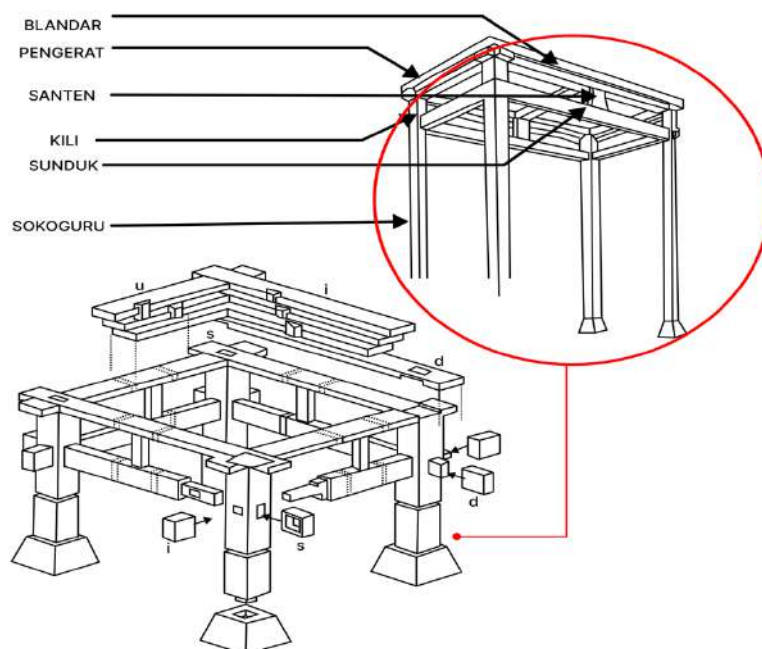


Figure 9. The structure of the main pillars (*sokoguru*) of the *Joglo* building (Source: Authors)

The urban planning of palaces such as Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace and the Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace reflects *Joglo's* cosmology, which is equivalent to the *Catur Gatra Tunggal*. The private center, *Dalem*, resembles a cosmic palace, while the public realm is *Pendapa*. The four directions and spiritual order are symbolized by the *saka guru* and the hierarchy of floors, while the horizontal *dalem-njaba* and the vertical division of feet-body-head and the vertical division of feet-body-head represent the layers of nature and the socio-sacred balance, making the house a microcosm of the family's symbolic authority (Frick, 1997; Maer & Pudjisuryadi, 2015; Subiyantoro, 2010). Based on Ricoeur (1971) and Gadamer's interpretive hermeneutics (2008), architecture is read as a cultural text; the study shows that *Tri Mandala* and *Catur Gatra Tunggal* are not identical systems, but rather two articulations of a connected cosmology: Bali emphasizes a vertical hierarchy of the sacred-profane based on a mountain-sea orientation, whereas Java emphasizes the horizontal integration of spirituality, economy, and power, confirming that the archipelago's ancient spatial arrangement is a local representation of a larger cosmological logic.

The Balinese and Javanese architectural traditions both use space to represent cosmology, although this is a methodological rather than metaphysical commonality. In the Balinese context, spatial structure is based

on the principle of cosmic harmony, which organizes the relationship between humans, nature, and the divine through the vertical hierarchy of the *Tri Mandala* and the sacred orientation of *kaja-kelod*, transforming space into a living and constantly renewed ritual medium (Eiseman, 2011; Sarjana et al., 2020; Sarjana & Anshori, 2023). This approach correlates with Geertz's (1973) symbolic reading of culture, which views spatial practices as meaning systems, as well as Cuthbert and Suartika's (2017) architectural analysis of Balinese houses and temples as ritual cosmogram configurations. In contrast, Javanese tradition portrays cosmology by horizontally integrating the *Catur Gatra Tunggal* (palace, mosque, town square, market), which forms a symbolic landscape of authority and social order (Adityaningrum, 2022; Marlina, 2020). Political-cultural studies such as Kusno (2014) and Pemberton (1994) support this perspective, viewing the palace's spatial design as more than just a physical structure but as a means for the cosmological legitimization of the state.

These differences are evident in the symbolic orientation, aesthetics, and material logic. Javanese architecture is typically closed, axial, and monumental, emphasizing hierarchical stability and spiritual contemplation (Miksic, 2012; Soekmono, 1976), whereas Balinese architecture is open, porous, and organic, creating permeability between the physical and spiritual scales while simultaneously responding to a passive tropical climate (Rajendra, 2012; Wicaksono, 2024). Consequently, the two are not variants of the same system but rather two approaches to cosmological representation that emerged from distinct political, theological, and historical contexts.

This study's primary contribution is its comparative synthesis across traditions, which simultaneously integrates spatial, symbolic, environmental, and power dimensions. This goes beyond prior studies that typically only looks at physical typology or one tradition in isolation (Alhazmi, 2020; Semadi, 2023). This approach highlights how the architecture of Nusantara can be seen as an operational cosmological text, a system of spatial knowledge that expresses the organization of reality in accordance with the inhabitants' worldview.

#### ***4.4 Sustainability and Transformation of Traditional Architecture***

Rapid social, economic, and cultural upheavals have had an impact on the long-term viability of traditional Balinese and Javanese architectural concepts in the modern day. Bali's transition from an agrarian community to a tourism and creative economy has impacted the values and spatial arrangements of residential and public buildings. Changes in lifestyle, economic expansion, and modern functional demands have resulted in changes to the shape, materials, and function of classic architectural elements, such as *angkul-angkul* alterations (traditional entrance gate to a house or yard in Bali which functions as the main

access as well as a symbolic element separating the outside and inside spaces ) and courtyard layouts that no longer strictly adhere to traditional patterns (Wijaya, 2017). Furthermore, rejuvenation and tourism development projects tend to shift from classic open concepts to more closed and monumental forms, indicating a weakening of the application of conventional architectural principles (Permana et al., 2024). Nonetheless, fundamental ideas such as cosmological navigation and zoning concepts (e.g., *Tri Mandala*) are frequently preserved, albeit in an adaptable form tailored to contemporary conditions (tarubali.baliprov., 2024).

Meanwhile, in the Javanese context, variations in traditional architecture have been prompted by technological improvements, urbanization, and societal changes. Javanese architecture, which was formerly inextricably linked to old cosmological systems and social structures, is now evolving into a more adaptable and contextual form that adapts to modern needs (Pitana, 2023). The recent development of contemporary house architecture that selectively integrates traditional aspects indicates a process of reinterpretation, rather than form preservation. In numerous instances, key elements such as spatial hierarchy and symbolic orientation are conceptually retained, but are implemented in a more minimalist form that does not always adhere to the traditional configuration in its entirety. This suggests that Javanese architecture is currently transitioning from a normative to a representative system that is more open to creative innovation.

Thus, historical architectural patterns in Bali and Java have not decayed completely, but have experienced a process of adaptation and negotiation with modern challenges. This study contributes to existing evidence that cosmological concepts in Nusantara architecture are dynamic and interpretive rather than static. In this setting, traditional architecture's survival is no longer dependent on the literal reproduction of forms, but rather on the ability of fundamental cosmological principles to be modified and rearticulated in response to current social, economic, and cultural concerns.

## 5. Conclusion

This study asserts that traditional Balinese and Javanese architecture constitute spatially embodied cosmological knowledge systems, not merely the result of aesthetic considerations or technical construction. Using a comparative-hermeneutic approach inspired by the ideas of Gadamer and Ricoeur, this study demonstrates that *Tri Mandala* and *Catur Gatra Tunggal* can be understood as two distinct expressions of the Nusantara cosmological horizon that both structure the relationship between humans, nature, and transcendence. The difference lies in the logic of spatial articulation: the Balinese system emphasizes

a cosmically oriented vertical hierarchy of the sacred and profane, while the Javanese system emphasizes the horizontal integration of social, religious, and political dimensions as a diagram of world order.

Thus, the similarity between the two lies not in their architectural forms, but rather in the ontological assumption of space as a medium for balancing the cosmos. Unlike previous studies that generally examine certain aspects separately, whether religious symbolism (Eiseman, 2011), cultural interpretation (H. Geertz, 1999), architectural morphology (Cuthbert & Suartika, 2017), or structural symbols of buildings (Aranha, 1991), this study proposes an analytical synthesis that connects cosmological zoning, spatial orientation, spatial organization, and architectural expression within a unified interpretative framework. With this approach, architecture is not understood merely as a material object, but as a cosmological text that articulates the worldview of society through spatial structures.

These comparative findings yield new conceptual contributions to the study of architecture and the study of Indonesian culture. Specifically, this research demonstrates that the diversity of spatial configurations between Bali and Java does not simply reflect local cultural differences, but can also be understood as interpretive variations of a similar cosmological logic, translated differently through the social, political, and religious systems of each society. By positioning architecture as an epistemological medium that represents the relationship between humans and the cosmos, this study broadens the perspective in the study of Indonesian architecture from a descriptive or typological approach to a more philosophical and comparative understanding. Therefore, traditional architecture can be viewed not only as a material cultural heritage, but also as a local intellectual model that reveals how societies interpret world order, social structure, and the position of humans in the cosmos.

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## Disclosure of AI Use

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in a limited capacity during the preparation of this manuscript. AI-assisted tools were employed to improve the clarity and quality of the English language, enhance the resolution and readability of visual materials, and support the exploration of cultural terminology and symbolic elements relevant to the architectural analysis. All scientific interpretations, conceptual development, critical analysis, and conclusions presented in this manuscript were conceived, verified, and approved solely by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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## Author Profiles

**Titissrimuda Pitana**, is a lecturer in the Architecture Study Program, Faculty of Engineering, Sebelas Maret University (UNS), Surakarta, Indonesia. He earned a Bachelor of Engineering, a Master of Tropical Architecture, and a Doctorate in Cultural Studies from Udayana University. His areas of study include locality-based architecture, sustainable settlements, and contextual design, with various collaborative scientific publications discussing the dynamics of village architecture, passive housing, and culture-based tourism area planning. In addition to teaching activities, he actively supervises final projects, is involved in interdisciplinary collaborative research, and carries out community service in the field of architectural planning. He is a member of the URDC (Urban Rural Design and Conservation) Laboratory, Faculty of Engineering, Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia. Email: [titissrimuda@staff.uns.ac.id](mailto:titissrimuda@staff.uns.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5009-2917>

**Pratiwi Anjar Sari**, is a lecturer in the Architecture Study Program, Faculty of Engineering, Sebelas Maret University (UNS), Surakarta, Indonesia. She completed her undergraduate education in architecture at UNS and earned her master's degree from Gadjah Mada University. Her academic interests include architecture, urban design, and sustainable built environments, with a research focus on residential performance, thermal comfort, and the quality of urban spaces. Her research results have been published in various national and international scientific forums. In addition to teaching activities, she is also active in collaborative research and is a member of the URDC (Urban Rural Design and Conservation) Laboratory, Faculty of Engineering, Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia. Email: [pratiwias@staff.uns.ac.id](mailto:pratiwias@staff.uns.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7062-2561>

# The Role of the Five Loyalties Philosophy in Creating Business Sustainability for Small and Medium Enterprises in Bali

I Nyoman Normal<sup>1\*</sup> , I Gusti Bagus Wiksuana<sup>2</sup> ,  
Ica Rika Candraningrat<sup>3</sup> , I Gde Kajeng Baskara<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Udayana University, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** The number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bali declined by 18.42% in 2023, threatening business sustainability, partly due to limited managerial capabilities. This study examines the effect of financial capability on SME business sustainability, with financial performance as a mediator and the *Panca Satya* (Five Loyalties) philosophy as a moderator. Data were collected from 177 SMEs using proportional stratified random sampling and a questionnaire. The hypotheses were tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The results show that financial capability positively affects both financial performance and business sustainability. Financial performance partially mediates this relationship. While the *Panca Satya* philosophy positively predicts business sustainability, it does not significantly moderate the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability. This study contributes to the literature by positioning *Panca Satya* as an indigenous cultural resource that supports sustainable entrepreneurship and broadens the application of local wisdom in sustainability research.

**Keywords:** *panca satya* philosophy; business sustainability; small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

## 1. Introduction

Business sustainability remains a major challenge for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia due to limited resources for implementing sustainable business practices and the need to balance economic, social, and environmental objectives (Prabawani, 2016; Chatterjee et al., 2024). These challenges are particularly evident among SMEs in Bali, which continue to face low financial capability, limited access to finance, inadequate managerial

\* Corresponding author's email: [nyomannormal311@gmail.com](mailto:nyomannormal311@gmail.com)

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competence, and heavy dependence on the tourism sector. As a result, they are highly vulnerable to economic shocks and fluctuations in tourist arrivals. Strengthening financial capability while leveraging local cultural values is therefore essential for enhancing business sustainability (Poerwanto et al., 2021; Prabawani et al., 2023; Widiastini et al., 2025; BPS Bali Province, 2026).

The expansion of the financial sector stimulates economic growth but also increases the risk of financial instability. In Indonesia, rapid financial innovation and the widespread adoption of e-commerce have improved access to financial services, yet they have also heightened the risk of financial shocks that can adversely affect individuals, households, businesses, and the broader economy (OJK, 2020; Sanchez et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2022).

The sustainability of SMEs in Bali is particularly vulnerable to financial shocks, fluctuating business conditions, and heavy dependence on the tourism sector. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 77% of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) experienced declining revenues, while 87.5% were directly affected. Only 12.5% were able to survive by adopting innovation, digitalisation, product diversification, and market adjustments (OJK, 2021; Heatubun, 2021; Bali Provincial Cooperatives and SMEs Office, 2023). These conditions highlight the importance of financial capability as a strategic resource for strengthening business sustainability. Consistent with the Resource-Based View (RBV), financial capability enables firms to develop competitive advantages that support long-term sustainability. Empirical evidence also confirms that financial capability has a positive effect on SME sustainability (Hilmawati & Kusumaningtias, 2021; Susanto et al., 2023).

Organizational culture is a strategic internal resource that supports business sustainability. In the Balinese context, Panca Satya embodies five ethical values—truthfulness in speech (*satya wacana*), sincerity (*satya hredaya*), integrity in action (*satya laksana*), loyalty in relationships (*satya mitra*), and commitment to promises (*satya samaya*)—derived from the Hindu principle of *satya* (Dauh, 2019; Budiasih et al., 2023). These values shape organizational behavior, strengthen stakeholder trust, and support sustainable business performance (Chatterjee et al., 2024).

Despite their economic importance, SMEs in Bali continue to face financial constraints, including limited access to formal financing and dependence on high-interest informal loans, which reduce competitiveness and innovation capacity (Mardika, 2024). Although the number of SMEs increased during 2019–2022, it declined by 0.28% in 2023, indicating challenges to long-term business sustainability (Department of Cooperatives and SMEs, 2023). According to Law Number 20 of 2008, SMEs are distinguished from micro-enterprises by their larger business scale, workforce, and broader access to markets, technology, and other productive resources (President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2008).

Bali's SME population declined by 18.42% in 2023 (Department of Cooperatives and SMEs, 2023). The decline comprised a 14.13% reduction in small enterprises and a 35.52% reduction in medium-sized enterprises. This trend has been associated with limited human resources, particularly inadequate business management knowledge and experience, which constrain SME growth and long-term sustainability. Accordingly, SME leaders and managers require strong financial capability, together with loyalty, integrity, and accountability, to sustain business performance in an increasingly uncertain environment.

This study examines the effect of financial capability on SME business sustainability and investigates the role of *Panca Satya* culture as a strategic local resource in strengthening this relationship through financial performance. The study contributes to the literature by extending the Resource-Based View (RBV), Legitimacy Theory, and Contingency Theory through the integration of financial capability, financial performance, *Panca Satya* culture, and business sustainability. Practically, it offers insights for SME managers to strengthen long-term business sustainability and provides evidence to inform government policies promoting sustainable SME development.

## 2. Literature Review

Business sustainability refers to a firm's ability to maintain continuous operations, growth, and long-term viability while creating economic, social, and environmental value (Chang & Cheng, 2019; Gomis et al., 2018). It encompasses three interrelated dimensions—economic, social, and environmental sustainability—commonly referred to as the *people, planet, and profit* framework (Prabawani, 2016).

Financial capability refers to the ability to make informed financial decisions and effectively manage financial resources, products, and services (Taylor, 2011). It comprises two key dimensions—financial literacy and financial inclusion—which enable business owners to understand, access, manage, and utilise financial resources efficiently (Çera et al., 2021; Amaliya & Anam, 2023). By integrating financial knowledge with access to financial services, financial capability enhances decision-making, improves financial performance, and supports SME sustainability (Quaid & Egdell, 2010; Susanto et al., 2023).

Financial performance reflects a firm's financial condition and operational effectiveness over a given period (Faisal et al., 2017). It is commonly assessed using indicators such as profitability, asset utilisation, revenue growth, and business expansion (Trailer et al., 1996; Chong, 2008). Previous studies (Miswanto & Oematan, 2020; Rosyadah et al., 2022; Yunus et al., 2022) have shown that financial performance mediates the positive relationship between financial capability and business sustainability.

In this study, *Panca Satya* is proposed as a moderating variable because it embodies loyalty, honesty, ethical conduct, and Balinese local wisdom that may influence financial management practices and business sustainability. These values were operationalised into questionnaire items measuring loyalty in speech, thoughts, actions, relationships, and commitments using a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was subsequently validated by experts in Hindu teachings.

Financial capability is expected to enhance SME business sustainability by strengthening financial literacy, financial inclusion, and financial decision-making (Prasetya et al., 2021; Rukmiyati et al., 2023). Higher levels of financial literacy contribute to improved business performance and long-term sustainability (Piyani et al., 2023; Rahayu & Musdholifah, 2017). Likewise, financial literacy and financial inclusion have been shown to improve SME financial performance (Aribawa, 2016; Ayem et al., 2020; Darmawan et al., 2021; Yi et al., 2023). Strong financial performance, in turn, enhances business sustainability by supporting long-term growth and organisational resilience (Rosyadah et al., 2022; Selvarajah et al., 2018; Indriastuti & Mutamimah, 2023; Yaniar et al., 2021).

Financial capability also improves SME financial performance, which subsequently strengthens business sustainability (Riffianto & Suryani, 2016; Menne et al., 2022; Miswanto et al., 2024; Yaniar et al., 2021). Firms with stronger financial capability are better able to manage financial resources efficiently, make informed financial decisions, and achieve superior organisational performance. However, the magnitude of these benefits may vary across different organisational and cultural contexts (Xiao & O'Neill, 2016; Sulistyowati, 2023).

Financial capability enables SMEs to manage financial resources effectively through appropriate financing decisions, investment planning, and sound financial record-keeping (Riffianto & Suryani, 2016a). Nevertheless, many SMEs still experience weaknesses in these areas, including selecting unsuitable loan products, inadequate investment planning, and poor financial record management, which ultimately constrain business growth and sustainability (Riffianto & Suryani, 2016a).

Access to financial resources and literacy have no bearing on the long-term viability of SMEs' businesses, according to Zaitul & Ilona (2022). Naufal & Purwanto (2022) stated that financial literacy has little bearing on the sustainability and business success of SMEs. Additionally, according to Hilmawati & Kusumaningtias (2021), financial inclusion has no bearing on MSMEs' sustainability or financial success. SMEs' business sustainability is unaffected by financial literacy (Kusuma et al., 2022).

Previous findings remain inconclusive. Mahanavami et al. (2019) found that the local wisdom value of *Asta Brata*, reflected in human capital, had no significant effect on the financial performance of Rural Banks (BPR) in Bali Province. Similarly, Nuryani (2017) reported a positive but insignificant relationship between organizational culture and the financial performance of farmer cooperatives in Bali.

Previous studies (e.g., Susanto et al., 2023; Zaitul & Ilona, 2022; Darmawan et al., 2021; Yi et al., 2023; Song et al., 2007; Rosyadah et al., 2022; Çera et al., 2021; Miswanto et al., 2024; Yaniar et al., 2021) have examined the relationships among financial capability, financial performance, and business sustainability in SMEs. However, the role of indigenous cultural values, particularly *Panca Satya* culture, remains underexplored.

This study conceptualizes *Panca Satya* as an intangible cultural resource that promotes ethical behaviour, stakeholder trust, and business sustainability. It integrates financial capability, financial performance, and *Panca Satya* culture into a unified framework to address an important research gap. Specifically, previous studies have not examined *Panca Satya* culture as a moderating variable, have largely overlooked the mediating role of financial performance, and have paid limited attention to the integration of Balinese local wisdom into business sustainability research. The RBV has rarely been applied to explain financial capability as an intangible strategic resource that enhances business sustainability. Accordingly, this study proposes an integrative model with financial capability as the exogenous variable, business sustainability as the endogenous variable, financial performance as the mediator, and *Panca Satya* culture as the moderator. The subsequent section presents a description of this study concept (Figure 1).

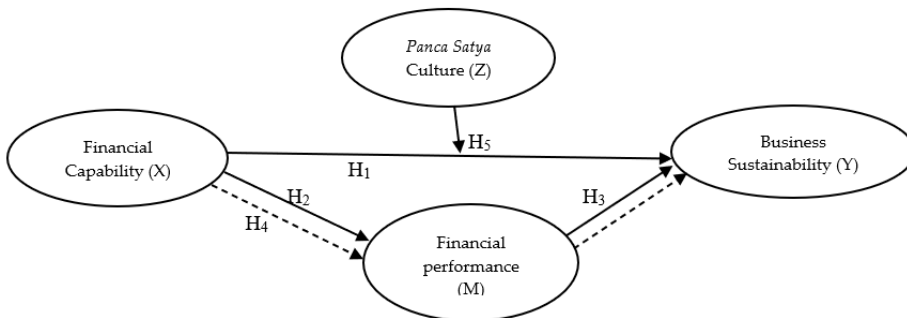


Figure 1. The Research Concept

Relevant mediating and moderating factors are needed to address the different constraints on SMEs' financial capacity to sustain business

sustainability. Both empirical and theoretical research support the use of *Panca Satya* culture as a moderator and financial performance as a mediator.

Financial capability is expected to enhance SME business sustainability by improving financial literacy, financial inclusion, and financial decision-making (Prasetya et al., 2021; Rukmiyati et al., 2023). Higher financial literacy contributes to better financial performance and long-term sustainability (Piyani et al., 2023; Rahayu & Musdholifah, 2017), while financial literacy and financial inclusion positively influence SME financial performance (Aribawa, 2016; Ayem et al., 2020; Darmawan et al., 2021; Yi et al., 2023). Consistent with the RBV, financial capability represents a valuable strategic resource that enables firms to utilize financial resources effectively, improve financial performance, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

Financial performance is a key driver of business sustainability by strengthening organizational resilience and long-term growth (Rosyadah et al., 2022; Selvarajah et al., 2018; Indriastuti & Mutamimah, 2023; Yaniar et al., 2021; Weber, 2017; Bartolacci et al., 2020). In line with Legitimacy Theory, superior financial performance enhances stakeholder trust and organizational legitimacy, thereby supporting long-term business sustainability (Alfiana, 2021). Therefore, financial performance is expected to mediate the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability (Riffianto & Suryani, 2016; Menne et al., 2022; Miswanto et al., 2024; Yaniar et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of financial capability may depend on contextual and cultural factors (Xiao & O'Neill, 2016; Sulistyowati, 2023). Based on Contingency Theory, this study proposes that *Panca Satya* culture moderates the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability by fostering honesty, integrity, loyalty, sincerity, and commitment in financial management. As a Balinese ethical value rooted in local wisdom, *Panca Satya* is expected to reduce opportunistic behavior, strengthen stakeholder trust and accountability, and promote a long-term business orientation (Natih, 2021; Sari & Savira, 2022). *Panca Satya*, as the embodiment of a code of ethics based on Balinese local wisdom, teaches SMEs to maintain loyalty, increase responsibility, and maintain business sustainability.

### 3. Method and Theory

#### 3.1 Method

This study surveyed SMEs in Bali Province, comprising a population of 43,769 enterprises (36,837 small and 6,932 medium-sized). Using the Slovin formula with a 7.5% margin of error, a sample of 177 SMEs was selected from various business sectors (Radjab & Jam'an, 2017). The sample included both Hindu and non-Hindu business owners, as most SMEs operate within Bali's shared socio-cultural environment, where the values underlying *Panca*

*Satya*, particularly loyalty and ethical conduct, are broadly reflected across communities despite differences in religious beliefs.

A proportional stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 177 SMEs across the nine regencies/cities of Bali. Samples were allocated proportionally according to the SME population in each region, with the largest proportion drawn from Gianyar (103 SMEs), followed by Buleleng (26), Badung (20), Bangli (14), and Denpasar (11). The remaining samples were obtained from Jembrana, Karangasem, and Klungkung (one SME each), while no sample was drawn from Tabanan due to its negligible population proportion. The sample size in each district/city is quite different and varied because samples were drawn proportionally from the population in each district/city. The population data was obtained from the Department of Cooperatives, Small and Medium Enterprises, which recorded the highest number of MSMEs in Gianyar and none in Tabanan.

The variables used in this study consist of four types, namely: one endogenous variable, namely business sustainability, one exogenous variable, namely financial capability, one mediating variable, namely financial performance, and one moderating variable, namely the *Panca Satya* culture. The variables analyzed are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational Definition and Measurement of Variables

| Variable              | Operational Definition                                                                                                         | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Number of Items | References                                                                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Financial Capability  | The ability of SME owners to manage financial resources effectively through knowledge, skills, access, and financial behaviour | Financial behaviour, financial skills, financial knowledge, financial attitude, financial experience, financial information, time value of money, financial access, financial quality, financial use, financial well-being | 39              | Rosyadah et al. (2022); Naufal & Purwanto (2022); Aribawa (2016); Yunus et al. (2022) |
| Financial Performance | SME financial achievement reflected through profitability, assets, capital, sales, customer growth, and cost efficiency        | Profitability growth, asset growth, capital growth, fixed cost reduction, sales growth, customer growth                                                                                                                    | 14              | Menne et al. (2022); Aribawa (2016)                                                   |

| Variable                | Operational Definition                                                                                                | Indicators                                                                       | Number of Items | References                                  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Business Sustainability | SME ability to maintain long-term business continuity economically, socially, environmentally, and operationally      | Economic condition, social condition, environmental condition, production growth | 11              | Bae & Smardon (2011); Yunus et al. (2022)   |
| Panca Satya Culture     | Balinese local wisdom emphasizing honesty, loyalty, integrity, commitment, and trustworthiness in business activities | Satya Wacana, Satya Hredaya, Satya Lak-sana, Satya Mitra, Satya Samaya           | 13              | Sari & Savira (2022); Sharma & Rawat (2023) |

Sources: Some Previous Empirical Research

All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Instrument validity was established through expert review and PLS-SEM analysis. Content validity was confirmed by a professor of Hindu philosophy and a certified Hindu religious instructor, while construct validity and reliability were verified through outer loadings ( $>0.70$ ), average variance extracted (AVE  $>0.50$ ), Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha (both  $>0.70$ ).

The sample size was proportional to the population in each district/city. Gianyar Regency had the largest SME population, reaching 25,639 units (58.58%), according to data from the Bali Provincial Cooperatives and SMEs Office in 2023. The sample size used in Gianyar Regency, using a proportional system of 58.58%, was 103 units. Gianyar, with the largest SME population, ultimately had the largest sample size in Bali Province.

Primary data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews (30 unit), and structured questionnaires administered both online/Google Forms (17 unit) and in person (130) over a 2.5-month period. These qualitative activities supported instrument development rather than hypothesis testing. Quantitative data were obtained using a structured questionnaire, with most responses collected through direct field distribution and a smaller proportion via Google Forms. Descriptive analysis was performed using mean scores and frequency distributions. The use of *Panca Satya* as a moderating variable requires in-depth interviews with relevant sources or figures, including lecturer and religious leaders, non-Hindu religious leaders, and SMEs that have implemented it.

PLS-SEM, as described by Rahadi (2023), was the data analysis method employed. PLS-SEM was used to explain the qualitative nature of the *Panca Satya* cultural phenomenon, which was previously initiated by conducting in-depth interviews with a Hindu religious figure and lecturer who is an expert in Hindu religious teachings and a competent Hindu religious instructor from the Ministry of Religion, Bali Provincial Office.

The initial phase was to determine the validity of the interpretation of the findings through validity testing (convergent and discriminant) (Karakaya-Ozyer & Aksu-Dunya, 2018). The second step, reliability testing, examines how well the measurement model can consistently assess the latent construct. The reliability indicators, namely Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability score of over 0.7 suggests acceptable reliability (Tentama & Anindita, 2020). Calculating the R-squared ( $R^2$ ) is the third step in determining the model's degree of fit.

The fourth step involves comparing statistical significance was assessed based on a t-statistic of 1.96 or a corresponding p-value of 0.05 to determine statistical significance. The fifth step involves testing for mediation. According to Hair et al. (2021), there are three forms of mediation: competitive mediation, indirect-only/complete mediation, and supplementary/partial mediation. The sixth step is to employ moderated regression analysis (MRA) to check for moderation. The regression equations for the moderation test are as follows (Ghozali, 2013): a)  $Y_{i=\alpha} + \beta_1 X_i + e$  (without considering the moderating variable), b)  $Y_{i=\alpha} + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 Z_i + e$  (involving the moderating variable), and c)  $Y_{i=\alpha} + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 Z_i + \beta_3 X_i * Z_i + e$  (involving the moderating variable and its interaction). Sharma et al. (1981) divided the tipology of moderation as follows (Figure 2):

|                               | Related to Criteria and/or Predictors                                 | Not related to Criteria and Predictors |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| No Interaction with Predictor | 1<br><i>Intervening; Exogenous; Antecedent; Suppressor; Predictor</i> | 2<br><i>Moderator (Homologizer)</i>    |
| Interacting with Predictors   | 3<br><i>Moderator (Quasi Moderator)</i>                               | 4<br><i>Moderator (Pure Moderator)</i> |

Figure 2. Tipology of Moderation by Sharma et al., (1981).

### 3.2 Theory

This study is primarily grounded in the RBV theory, which posits that sustainable competitive advantage originates from valuable intangible resources. Financial capability enhances financial performance through effective financial

management, thereby supporting business sustainability. *Panca Satya* culture is conceptualized as an intangible cultural resource that strengthens stakeholder trust and sustainable business practices. Financial performance is proposed as a mediator, as RBV suggests that strategic resources improve sustainability through enhanced organizational performance.

RBV theory recognizes that financial capability and *Panca Satya* culture function as complementary strategic resources. Their synergy enables SMEs to manage financial resources more responsibly, ethically, and strategically, thereby strengthening the positive effect of financial capability on business sustainability. Legitimacy Theory complements RBV by explaining that superior financial performance enhances stakeholder recognition and long-term sustainability, while Contingency Theory provides the rationale for *Panca Satya* culture as a moderating variable, suggesting that the effectiveness of financial capability depends on contextual factors.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Research Dimension Testing

All indicators fulfilled the outer loading criteria of more than 0.7 in the phase 3 validity test results (Figure 3). The AVE values for all indicators were also above 0.5. The loading factors and AVE values for this investigation the measured by Table 2, which satisfied the validity criteria.

The PLS-SEM analysis is also equipped with the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlation (HTMT) or Discriminant Validity test, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) or Collinearity, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) or Model Fit. The HTMT test produces the following figures: 1) Financial Capability  $\leftrightarrow$  Panca Satya Culture = 0.617; 2) Business Sustainability  $\leftrightarrow$  Panca Satya Culture = 0.841; 3) Business Sustainability  $\leftrightarrow$  Financial Capability = 0.647; 4) Financial Performance  $\leftrightarrow$  Panca Satya Culture = 0.635; 5) Financial Performance  $\leftrightarrow$  Financial Capability = 0.635; and 6) Financial Performance  $\leftrightarrow$  Business Sustainability = 0.709. The test results showed that all HTMT values between constructs were below 0.90. The HTMT test concluded that the model met discriminant validity.

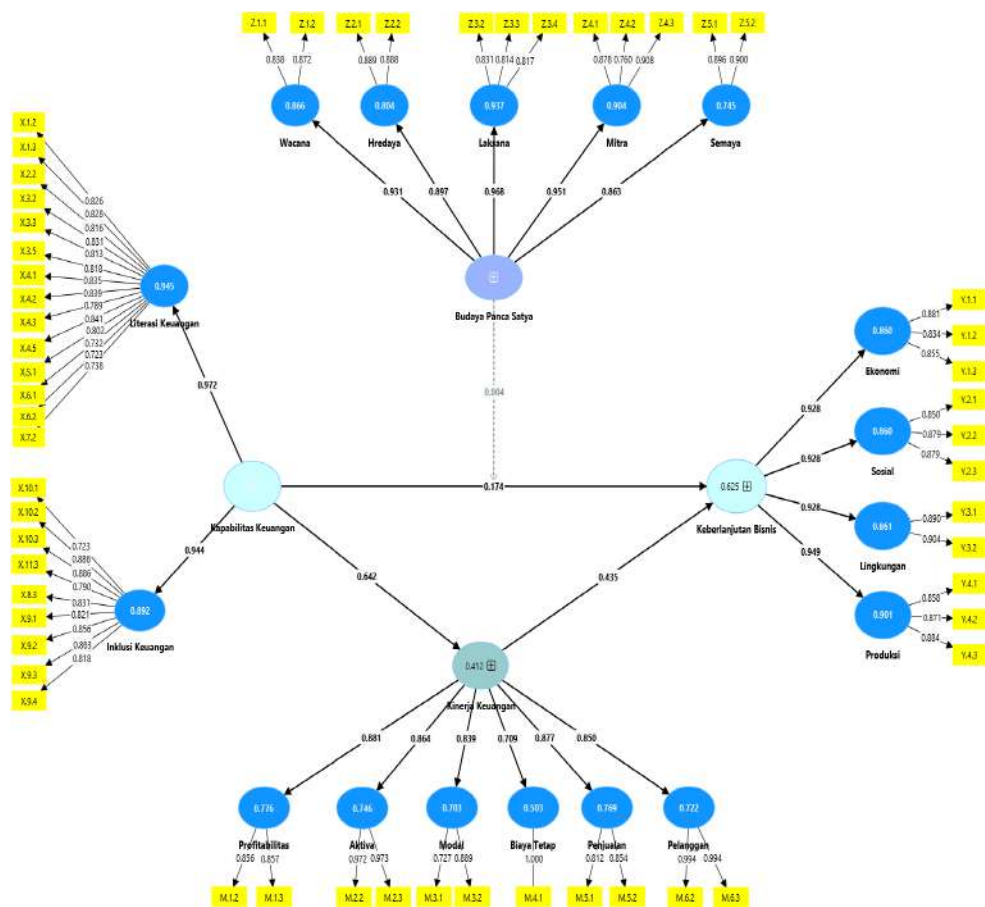


Figure 3. The Testing of Outer Model (Validity) after One Indicator Statement Item is Eliminated from The Model

Table 2. Results of the Third Test of Convergent Validity of Research Variables After One Indicator Statement Item was Removed

| Financial Capability (X) |                |       | Financial Performance (M) |                |       | Business Sustainability (Y) |                |       | Panca Satya Culture (Z) |                |       |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------|---------------------------|----------------|-------|-----------------------------|----------------|-------|-------------------------|----------------|-------|
| Items Code/ Indicator    | Loading Factor | AVE   | Items Code/ Indicator     | Loading Factor | AVE   | Items Code/ Indicator       | Loading Factor | AVE   | Items Code/ Indicator   | Loading Factor | AVE   |
| X.1.2                    | 0.826          |       | M.1.2                     | 0.856          | 0.734 | Y.1.1                       | 0.881          |       | Z.1.1                   | 0.838          | 0.732 |
| X.1.3                    | 0.828          |       | M.1.3                     | 0.857          |       | Y.1.2                       | 0.834          | 0.734 | Z.1.2                   | 0.872          |       |
| X.2.2                    | 0.816          |       | M.2.2                     | 0.972          | 0.946 | Y.1.3                       | 0.855          |       | Z.2.1                   | 0.889          | 0.790 |
| X.3.2                    | 0.831          |       | M.2.3                     | 0.973          |       | Y.2.1                       | 0.850          |       | Z.2.2                   | 0.888          |       |
| X.3.3                    | 0.813          |       | M.3.1                     | 0.727          | 0.659 | Y.2.2                       | 0.879          | 0.756 | Z.3.2                   | 0.831          |       |
| X.3.5                    | 0.818          |       | M.3.2                     | 0.889          |       | Y.2.3                       | 0.879          |       | Z.3.3                   | 0.814          | 0.674 |
| X.4.1                    | 0.835          | 0.645 | M.4.1                     | 1.000          |       | Y.3.1                       | 0.890          | 0.805 | Z.3.4                   | 0.817          |       |
| X.4.2                    | 0.839          |       | M.5.1                     | 0.812          | 0.695 | Y.3.2                       | 0.904          |       | Z.4.1                   | 0.878          |       |
| X.4.3                    | 0.789          |       | M.5.2                     | 0.854          |       | Y.4.1                       | 0.858          |       | Z.4.2                   | 0.760          | 0.725 |
| X.4.5                    | 0.841          |       | M.6.2                     | 0.994          | 0.988 | Y.4.2                       | 0.871          | 0.759 | Z.4.3                   | 0.908          |       |

| Financial Capability (X) |                |       | Financial Performance (M) |                |     | Business Sustainability (Y) |                |     | Panca Satya Culture (Z) |                |       |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------|---------------------------|----------------|-----|-----------------------------|----------------|-----|-------------------------|----------------|-------|
| Items Code/ Indicator    | Loading Factor | AVE   | Items Code/ Indicator     | Loading Factor | AVE | Items Code/ Indicator       | Loading Factor | AVE | Items Code/ Indicator   | Loading Factor | AVE   |
| X.5.1                    | 0.802          |       | M.6.3                     | 0.994          |     | Y.4.3                       | 0.884          |     | Z.5.1                   | 0.896          | 0.806 |
| X.6.1                    | 0.732          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     | Z.5.2                   | 0.900          |       |
| X.6.2                    | 0.723          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.7.2                    | 0.738          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.8.3                    | 0.831          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.9.1                    | 0.821          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.9.2                    | 0.856          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.9.3                    | 0.863          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.9.4                    | 0.818          | 0.692 |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.10.1                   | 0.723          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.10.2                   | 0.886          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.10.3                   | 0.886          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |
| X.11.3                   | 0.790          |       |                           |                |     |                             |                |     |                         |                |       |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

The VIF test yielded the following values: 1) *Panca Satya Culture* → Business Sustainability = 2.237; 2) Financial Capability → Business Sustainability = 1.944; 3) Financial Capability → Financial Performance = 1.000; 4) Financial Performance → Business Sustainability = 1.872; and 5) *Panca Satya Culture* × Financial Capability → Business Sustainability = 2.002. After testing, all variables had VIF values below 5. A VIF value below 5 indicates that the research model does not experience multicollinearity issues.

The SRMR test yielded the following values: saturated model = 0.085 and estimated model = 0.099. Both values are below 0.100. This shows that the research model is stated to have good goodness of fit or is statistically acceptable.

## 4.2 Research Variable Testing

### 4.2.1 Convergent Validity Test

Convergent validity was assessed using outer loadings and AVE. All indicator loadings exceeded 0.70 and the AVE values for each construct were above the recommended threshold of 0.50, confirming satisfactory convergent validity. As shown in Tables 3, these results indicate that the indicators reliably and accurately measure their respective constructs. This study focused on the general characteristics of SME owners and did not perform t-tests or ANOVA to examine differences in the application of *Panca Satya* principles across education levels or age groups. Such analyses are recommended for future research involving more specific respondent characteristics.

Table 3. Results of Convergent Validity Testing of Research Variables

| Variable                                      | Dimension                                     | Loading Factor | AVE Value |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Financial Capability<br>(X)                   | Financial Literacy (X <sub>1</sub> )          | 0.988          | 0.976     |
|                                               | Financial Inclusion (X <sub>2</sub> )         | 0.988          |           |
| Financial Performance<br>(M)                  | Profitability (M <sub>1</sub> )               | 0.892          | 0.706     |
|                                               | Assets (M <sub>2</sub> )                      | 0.846          |           |
|                                               | Capital (M <sub>3</sub> )                     | 0.848          |           |
|                                               | Fixed Cost (M <sub>4</sub> )                  | 0.747          |           |
|                                               | Sales (M <sub>5</sub> )                       | 0.881          |           |
|                                               | Customer (M <sub>6</sub> )                    | 0.819          |           |
| Panca Satya Culture<br>(Z)                    | Wacana (Z <sub>1</sub> )                      | 0.925          | 0.860     |
|                                               | Hredaya (Z <sub>2</sub> )                     | 0.908          |           |
|                                               | Laksana (Z <sub>3</sub> )                     | 0.970          |           |
|                                               | Mitra (Z <sub>4</sub> )                       | 0.936          |           |
|                                               | Samaya (Z <sub>5</sub> )                      | 0.896          |           |
| Business Sustainability<br>(Y)                | Economic (Y <sub>1</sub> )                    | 0.925          | 0.871     |
|                                               | Social (Y <sub>2</sub> )                      | 0.926          |           |
|                                               | Environmental (Y <sub>3</sub> )               | 0.933          |           |
|                                               | Production (Y <sub>4</sub> )                  | 0.950          |           |
| Panca Satya Culture x<br>Financial Capability | Panca Satya Culture x<br>Financial Capability | 1.000          |           |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

#### 4.2.2 Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$  with inter-construct correlations. As all  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$  values exceeded their corresponding inter-construct correlations, the results confirmed satisfactory discriminant validity, indicating that each construct was empirically distinct and well represented by its indicators (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of Discriminant Validity Testing of Research Variables

| Variable                | Panca Satya Culture | Financial Capability | Business Sustainability | Financial Performance |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Panca Satya Culture     | <b>0,927</b>        |                      |                         |                       |
| Financial Capability    | 0,478               | <b>0,988</b>         |                         |                       |
| Business Sustainability | 0,614               | 0,640                | <b>0,933</b>            |                       |
| Financial Performance   | 0,448               | 0,639                | 0,709                   | <b>0,840</b>          |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

#### 4.2.3 Reliability Test

Reliability between indicator blocks in the study model is tested based on Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability coefficients. As seen in Table 5,

Indicators of construct reliability, including Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability both have values over 0.70. For each study variable, Composite Reliability and Chronbach's Alpha offer acceptable reliability. As indicated by the Table 5's findings, the study variables satisfy the validity and reliability requirements, enabling the structural model (inner model) to be evaluated.

Table 5. Results of Reliability Testing of Research Variables

| <b>Variabel</b>        | <b><i>Composite Reliability</i></b> | <b><i>Chronbach's Alpha</i></b> | <b>Description</b> |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Panca Satya Culture    | 0.968                               | 0.960                           | Reliable           |
| Financial Capability   | 0.988                               | 0.975                           | Reliable           |
| Business Sustainabiliy | 0.964                               | 0.951                           | Reliable           |
| Financial Performance  | 0.935                               | 0.916                           | Reliable           |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

#### 4.2.4 Model Goodness of Fit Test

The model's overall fit quality was assessed using R-Square. The evaluation of the model's overall fit quality using PLS starts with analyzing the R-Square for each variable. The  $R^2$  numbers are 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 demonstrate that the structural model is classified as the categories of good, moderate, and poor, respectively. Table 6 displays the R-Square results.

Table 6. Results of the Model Goodness of Fit Test in R-Square Values

| <b>Variable</b>        | <b><i>R-square</i></b> | <b><i>R-square adjusted</i></b> |
|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Business Sustainabiliy | 0.637                  | 0.628                           |
| Financial Performance  | 0.408                  | 0.405                           |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

Financial capability and financial performance explain 62.8% of the variance in business sustainability ( $R^2 = 0.628$ ), indicating a good model, while the remaining 37.2% is explained by other factors. Financial capability explains 40.5% of the variance in financial performance ( $R^2 = 0.405$ ), representing a moderate model, with the remaining 59.5% influenced by other variables.

Business sustainability was measured using four dimensions: economic conditions, social conditions, environmental conditions, and production growth. The economic and production growth dimensions included objective performance indicators, ensuring that business sustainability was assessed not only through SME owners' subjective perceptions.

#### 4.2.5 Significance Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure. Relationships between latent variables were considered significant when the  $t$ -statistic exceeded 1.96 and the  $p$ -value was below 0.05. As presented in Tables 7, financial capability significantly affected business sustainability and financial performance, while financial performance also had a significant positive effect on business sustainability.

Table 7. Results of the Significance Test of Research Variables

| Path                                              | Coefficients Value | T-Statistics | P-Value | Description |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------|-------------|
| Financial Capability--> Business Sustainability   | 0.214              | 2.746        | 0.006   | Significant |
| Financial Capability --> Financial Performance    | 0.639              | 11.607       | 0.000   | Significant |
| Financial Performance --> Business Sustainability | 0.430              | 4.640        | 0.000   | Significant |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

#### 4.2.6 Mediation Test

The mediation analysis (Table 8) revealed that financial performance significantly mediates the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability ( $t = 4.934$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The significant direct and indirect effects indicate that financial performance serves as a partial mediator.

Table 8. Results of the Mediation Test (Indirect) of the Influence of Financial Capability on Business Sustainability Through Financial Performance

| Path                                                                       | Coefficients Value | T-Statistics | P-Value | Description |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------|-------------|
| Financial Capability --> Business Sustainability                           | 0.316              | 3.985        | 0.000   | Significant |
| Financial Capability --> Financial Performance                             | 0.639              | 11.610       | 0.000   | Significant |
| Financial Performance --> Business Sustainability                          | 0.507              | 6.186        | 0.000   | Significant |
| Financial Capability --> Financial Performance --> Business Sustainability | 0.324              | 4.934        | 0.000   | Significant |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

#### 4.2.7 Moderation Test

The first step of the moderation test was carried out without considering the panca satya cultural factor. The beginning phase of the MRA testing process

produced the formula:  $Y_i = \alpha + 0.644 X_i$ . The T-statistics is 11.239 and P-Value is 0.000. That is significant.

The second phase focuses on examining the influence of financial competence and the panca satya culture on company sustainability. The second-step test yields a number which assesses the acceptability of the moderating variable. The equation derived from the second-step analysis is  $Y_i = \alpha + 0.451 X_i + 0.399 Z_i$  with each T-Statistics and P-Value is significant.

In the third phase, the interaction between financial capacity and the panca satya cultural values in shaping long-term business viability is examined. Table 9 displays the findings of the third-step moderation experiment. The following equation is derived from the third-step moderation test:  $Y_i = \alpha + 0.214 X_i + 0.323 Z_i + 0.005 X_i Z_i$ .

Table 9. Results of the Third-Step Moderation Test: The Effect of the Interaction of Financial Capability and *Panca Satya* Culture

| Path                                                                   | Coefficients Value | T-Statistics | P-Value | Description     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------|-----------------|
| Financial Capability --> Business Sustainability                       | 0.214              | 2.746        | 0.006   | Significant     |
| Panca Satya Culture --> Business Sustainability                        | 0.323              | 5.033        | 0.000   | Significant     |
| Panca Satya Culture x Financial Capability --> Business Sustainability | 0.005              | 0.135        | 0.893   | Non Significant |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

The moderation analysis (Table 9) showed that financial capability and *Panca Satya* culture each had significant positive effects on business sustainability (Figure 4). However, the interaction effect was positive but not significant, indicating that *Panca Satya* culture did not moderate the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability. Instead, it functioned as an independent predictor of business sustainability among SMEs in Bali Province.

The inability of *Panca Satya* culture to moderate the relationship may be attributed to several factors. First, its loyalty dimensions are not consistently applied across thoughts, words, actions, relationships, and commitments. Second, the dynamic and pragmatic nature of SME financial management limits the consistent implementation of loyalty values. Third, SMEs prioritize short-term financial needs due to limited resources and dependence on external funding. Fourth, financial capability is more technical while five satya is more of a value philosophy. Finally, the flexibility and rapid decision-making

required for business survival may reduce adherence to loyalty-based financial principles, limiting the moderating role of *Panca Satya* culture.



Figure 4. Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) producing and selling stone shrines and other religious structures while serving customer at their workshop (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra, 2023).

Preliminary observations and expert interviews were conducted to develop and validate the *Panca Satya* construct, ensuring its content validity and contextual relevance. The experts included I Wayan Surpa, a lecturer at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Udayana University, and a certified Hindu religious scholar, as well as I Gusti Putu Suanda, a Hindu religious counsellor at the Bali Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Wayan Surpa emphasised that *Panca Satya* represents a fundamental ethical principle that should guide all aspects of life, including business. He noted that conflicts of loyalty may arise among its five elements, requiring ethical judgement in their application. Putu Suanda explained that *Panca Satya* is closely associated with *Tri Kaya Parisudha* and the Three Basic Frameworks of Hinduism, making it highly relevant to business management.

According to Budi Astuti, an Islamic religious leader and Secretary of the Halal Product Team at the Bali Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the values embodied in *Panca Satya* are comparable to the Islamic

concept of *rahmatan lil alamin*, which emphasises honesty, loyalty, and ethical responsibility. She argued that businesses lacking honesty and loyalty are unlikely to survive or achieve sustainable growth. Nyoman Agus Eka Putra and Father Oscar Naib, Buddhist religious leaders at the Bali Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, explained that the values of *Panca Satya* are consistent with the Buddhist principle of *Asta Arya Marga* (the Noble Eightfold Path), which provides an ethical foundation for responsible business leadership and management.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with SME entrepreneurs to examine the practical application of *Panca Satya*. Made Megayasa, a silver crafts entrepreneur from Celuk, Sukawati, Gianyar, described *Panca Satya* as the philosophical foundation of his business, particularly in fostering trust and maintaining long-term relationships with customers. Putu Adi Saputra, owner of Metamorfosis Ceramics, stated that adopting the *Panca Satya* philosophy had contributed to the growth and prosperity of his business. Similarly, I Made Arjana, owner of UD Sinar, explained that *Panca Satya* has played a vital role in maintaining business partnerships and supporting the long-term continuity and sustainability of his enterprise.

#### 4.2.8 Hypothesis Testing

The findings of the path coefficient and p-value tests reveal the correlation between each study variable. Table 10 displays the findings of the relationship testing between each variable. Using Smart PLS 3.0, the collected data were processed and analyzed and each hypothesis was examined in depth. Table 10 displays the numerical values regarding the hypothesis testing findings.

Table 10. Summary of Research Hypothesis Testing Results

| Symbol         | Hypothesis                                                                    | Coefficients Value | T-Statistics | P-Values | Valuation                  |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------|----------------------------|
| H <sub>1</sub> | Financial Capability --> Business Sustainability                              | 0.316              | 3.985        | 0.000    | Positive & Significant     |
| H <sub>2</sub> | Financial Capability --> Financial Performance                                | 0.639              | 11.610       | 0.000    | Positive & Significant     |
| H <sub>3</sub> | Financial Performance --> Business Sustainability                             | 0.507              | 6.186        | 0.000    | Positive & Significant     |
| H <sub>4</sub> | Financial Capability --> Financial Performance<br>--> Business Sustainability | 0.324              | 4.934        | 0.000    | Positive & Significant     |
| H <sub>5</sub> | Panca Satya Culture x Financial Capability --> Business Sustainability        | 0.005              | 0.135        | 0.893    | Positive & Non Significant |

Source: Data Processing Results, 2025.

Hypothesis testing showed that financial capability positively affected business sustainability (H1;  $\beta = 0.316$ ,  $t = 3.985$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and financial performance (H2;  $\beta = 0.639$ ,  $t = 11.610$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Financial performance also had a significant positive effect on business sustainability (H3;  $\beta = 0.507$ ,  $t = 6.186$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, financial performance partially mediated the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability (H4;  $\beta = 0.324$ ,  $t = 4.934$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that financial capability enhances sustainability both directly and indirectly through improved financial performance. However, the moderating effect of *Panca Satya* culture was not significant (H5;  $\beta = 0.005$ ,  $t = 0.135$ ,  $p = 0.893$ ), suggesting that it functions as an independent predictor rather than a moderator of the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability.

The findings indicate that *Panca Satya* functions as a predictor of SME business sustainability but does not significantly moderate the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability. Future research should therefore examine *Panca Satya* as an exogenous construct to better understand its direct contribution to SME sustainability. The insignificant moderating effect may reflect the inconsistent implementation of *Panca Satya* values across SMEs, the dynamic nature of financial management, firms' short-term business orientation, limited financial resources, and the flexibility of financial management practices.

### 4.3 Discussion

Financial capability had a positive but relatively weak effect on business sustainability ( $\beta = 0.316$ ), indicating the need to strengthen SMEs' financial capability. Based on the RBV, financial capability comprises 11 internal resource indicators that support competitive advantage and business sustainability. The highest mean score was observed for maintaining emergency funds and the efficient use of loans (mean = 4.33), while the highest outer loading was for the efficient use of loans without deviation (0.886). These findings suggest that SMEs prioritize liquidity and prudent financial management due to limited resources and restricted access to finance, consistent with previous studies by Piyani et al. (2023); Rahayu & Musdholifah (2017); Rahadhini (2021); and Rukmiyati et al. (2023).

Financial capability had a strong positive effect on the financial performance of SMEs ( $\beta = 0.639$ ). The most influential dimensions were the availability of emergency funds and the efficient use of loans, indicating that effective financial resource management improves business performance. These findings support the RBV, which considers financial capability a valuable strategic resource that enhances organizational performance, and are consistent

with previous studies by Barney (1991); Darmawan et al. (2021); Yi et al. (2023); Aribawa (2016); and Song et al. (2007).

Financial performance had a positive moderate effect on business sustainability ( $\beta = 0.507$ ), indicating that improvements in profitability, capital, sales growth, customer expansion, and cost efficiency enhance SME sustainability. Although paid-in capital was perceived as the most important financial performance indicator, customer expansion contributed more strongly to business sustainability. These findings support Legitimacy Theory, suggesting that strong financial performance strengthens stakeholder recognition and promotes sustainable business development, consistent with previous studies by Indriastuti and Mutamimah (2023); Rosyadah et al. (2022); and Selvarajah et al. (2018).

Financial performance partially mediated the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability ( $\beta = 0.324$ ), indicating that financial capability influences sustainability both directly and indirectly through improved financial performance. The relatively weak mediation effect suggests that strengthening both financial capability and financial performance is essential for long-term sustainability. These findings support the RBV and Legitimacy Theory and are consistent with previous studies by Riffianto and Suryani (2016); Menne et al. (2022); Miswanto and Oematan (2020); and Yaniar et al. (2021).

The *Panca Satya* culture has not been demonstrated to increase the influence of financial resources to the business continuity of SMEs in Bali Province, but It can serve as a predictor variable. From the perspective of Contingency Theory, cultural values were expected to function as contextual factors that strengthen the effectiveness of organizational resources. Financial capability was conceptualized as a strategic resource, while *Panca Satya* culture was expected to enhance the utilization of that resource through values such as honesty, integrity, commitment, and loyalty. However, the empirical findings indicate that these cultural values do not significantly alter the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability.

Several factors may explain the non-significant moderating effect of *Panca Satya* culture. Financial capability and *Panca Satya* appear to influence business sustainability through different mechanisms, with financial capability representing a managerial resource and *Panca Satya* reflecting ethical and cultural values. The significant direct effect of *Panca Satya* suggests that values such as honesty, trustworthiness, loyalty, and commitment independently promote sustainable business practices rather than strengthen the effect of financial capability. Moreover, increasing market competition, digital transformation, financing constraints, and economic uncertainty may reduce the moderating

role of cultural values, making managerial competence a more dominant driver of business sustainability.



Figure 5. Ceramic artisans demonstrating their commitment to producing high-quality products at the MSME exhibition during the annual Bali Arts Festival (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra, 2025).

This finding contributes to the literature on local wisdom and entrepreneurship by suggesting that indigenous cultural values should not always be conceptualized as moderators. In the context of Balinese SMEs, *Panca Satya* appears to operate more effectively as a cultural resource or form of cultural capital that directly supports sustainability. This finding extends previous studies that primarily viewed local wisdom as a contextual or moderating factor and suggests that cultural values may independently influence organizational outcomes (Figure 5).

The result also helps explain why *Panca Satya* differs from other cultural frameworks commonly examined in sustainability studies, such as *Tri Hita Karana*. While *Tri Hita Karana* emphasizes harmonious relationships among humans, nature, and the divine, *Panca Satya* focuses on personal integrity, commitment, honesty, and loyalty. These values are more closely associated with ethical conduct and organizational trust than with the enhancement of financial capability. Consequently, their contribution is more likely to be

direct rather than moderating. The inclusion of the five notions of loyalty and honesty, which affect the sustainability of the company, is the sole reason that the *Panca Satya* culture acts as a predictor. Financial management that considers the effects or implications of agreements has the greatest average score among respondents on the *Panca Satya*.

In financial management, SMEs that comprehend the concepts of the efficient use of loans, reserve funds, and agreements consider these elements to be essential to the business. and can maximize the usage of their money by investing in other, more lucrative businesses or using it for business operations, as permitted by the agreement. Income that will eventually have an effect on the viability of the SMEs. The results of this investigation are consistent with previous studies conducted by Mahanavami et al. (2019); Hendra et al. (2021); Monogina & Rachmawati (2023); Lusmeida the papers by Rusli et al (2023), Alminanda & Indonesia (2018), Hasan & Kunci (2025), and Arsjah (2024) all make the argument that organizational culture has not been able to be reinforced. The interaction between exogenous and endogenous factors in the study model that was used.

This study did not include both business size and business sector as control variables in the model because it focused on small and medium enterprises as a whole, excluding micro-enterprises and using all business sectors (trade, agricultural industry, non-agricultural industry, and various services) as a single SME business unit. Another reason is that this study used district/city-based stratification in sampling. The use of control variables for business size or business sector presents an opportunity for further research.

This research remains valid when applied to non-Hindu respondents even though *Panca Satya* is a specific teaching in Hinduism, because some of the research respondents interviewed and filled out the questionnaire were SME owners who are non-Hindu. The *Panca Satya* model remains relevant to be applied outside the Hindu-Balinese community. The results of in-depth interviews with several non-Hindu religious figures such as: Islam and Buddhism show that the teaching of loyalty is a very good teaching and has been applied in each religion, but in other terms it is not *Satya*. The results of this study are not only applicable to the Bali region which adheres to Hinduism, but to adherents of all religions.

In-depth interviews were conducted with several SMEs, two of which are Metamorfosis Ceramic and UD Sinar. Metamorfosis Ceramic is a SME operating in the ceramic crafts industry for 13 years, located at Jl. Lembusora I Gg 2A No. 2 Peguyangan, Denpasar. The company has been implementing *Panca Satya* in its business management since 2020, an idea that came from its spiritual mentor. The manager and owner, Mr. Putu Adi Saputra, stated that since implementing

*Panca Satya*, his ceramic crafts business has grown and prospered.

“I believe *Panca Satya* has helped our business grow and prosper because *Panca Satya* teaches loyalty and disciplined financial management,” said the manager (Interview, May 21, 2025).

UD Sinar, established in 1999, operates in the trading sector. The company is located at Jl. W.R. Supratman 21, Denpasar, has been implementing *Panca Satya* in managing his business since 2018. The SME owner drew inspiration from Hindu teachings. The manager and owner, Mr. I Made Arjana, stated that *Panca Satya* has been instrumental in maintaining partnerships, ensuring the survival and sustainability of his business.

“I feel that *Panca Satya* inspires our business to remain resilient and sustainable because it maintains lasting partnerships, especially with customers and suppliers,” said the manager (Interview, May 24, 2025).

Interview results indicate that implementing the *Panca Satya* culture provides tangible benefits for business sustainability. The values of loyalty, discipline in financial management, and a commitment to maintaining good relationships with customers and suppliers can drive business growth, increase trust, and strengthen business continuity. These findings indicate that *Panca Satya* serves as a cultural value that supports sustainability-oriented business governance.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestion

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study confirms that financial capability is a key determinant of both financial performance and business sustainability among SMEs in Bali. Financial performance partially mediates the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability, indicating that financially capable SMEs are more likely to achieve sustainable business outcomes through improved financial performance.

Although *Panca Satya* does not significantly moderate the relationship between financial capability and business sustainability, it exerts a significant positive direct effect on business sustainability. This finding suggests that business sustainability is influenced not only by financial capability but also by local cultural values that foster ethical behaviour, trust, commitment, and a long-term business orientation. Integrating *Panca Satya* into SME development programmes may therefore enhance sustainable business practices while preserving Balinese cultural values.

## 5.2 Suggestion

This study recommends that SMEs in Bali strengthen business sustainability by enhancing financial capability, improving financial and waste management practices, expanding market access, and embedding *Panca Satya* values, particularly *Satya Mitra*, in business operations. Policymakers should promote financial inclusion, improve access to finance, strengthen entrepreneurship programmes, and foster collaboration between SMEs and universities to support resilient and sustainable enterprises.

This study is limited to SMEs in Bali, a selected set of business sustainability indicators, and financial capability as the primary antecedent, while *Panca Satya* functioned as a direct predictor rather than a moderator. Future research should employ broader and more diverse samples, incorporate more comprehensive measures of business sustainability, examine additional antecedents such as innovation, entrepreneurial orientation, and digital capability, and apply comparative or mixed method approaches to further investigate the role of *Panca Satya* in promoting SME business sustainability.

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The author made limited use of ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language editing and improve the clarity of the manuscript. All content, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions in this article are the sole responsibility of the author.

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## Author Profiles

**I Nyoman Normal** is a PhD student in Financial Management at Udayana University (since 2023) and a Principal Expert Researcher at BRIN since 1993. Holding a Chartered Accountant (CA) certification, he completed his accounting and management education at Udayana University. Additionally, he has extensive teaching experience as a lecturer at various prominent higher education institutions across Jakarta and Bali. Email: nyomannormal311@gmail.com / inyo006@brin.go.id ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6428-6381>

**I Gusti Bagus Wiksuana** is a Professor of Financial Management at Udayana University. Born in Mataram in 1961, he earned his bachelor's degree from Udayana University, followed by Master's and Doctoral degrees from Airlangga University. A former Dean and Vice Rector, he actively teaches in graduate programs and publishes research on financial management in reputable international journals. Email: [igb.wiksuana@yahoo.com](mailto:igb.wiksuana@yahoo.com) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3441-555X>

**Ica Rika Candraningrat** is a lecturer at Udayana University. She earned her Bachelor's and Doctorate from Brawijaya University and her master's from Udayana University. Her research focuses on financial management, behavioral finance, financial literacy, fintech, business sustainability, and corporate value, with articles published in accredited national and international journals. She also serves as a reviewer and active academic organization member. Email: [candraningrat@unud.ac.id](mailto:candraningrat@unud.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2580-1926>

**I Gde Kajeng Baskara** is a lecturer at Udayana University. He completed degrees at Udayana, Airlangga, and Brawijaya Universities. His professional experience includes working as an auditor and leading the Bali Cooperative Council's education division. He actively contributes to discussions on Lembaga Perkreditan Desa (LPD) management in Bali and conducts research on finance, microfinance, SMEs, and investments. Email: [kajengbaskara@unud.ac.id](mailto:kajengbaskara@unud.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8775-466X>

## Cultural Resilience in a Globalizing World: Centripetal Fortification and Centrifugal Innovation in Bali and Beishan

I Putu Permana Mahardika<sup>1</sup> , I Gusti Ayu Gde Sosiowati<sup>2</sup> ,  
I Wayan Mulyawan<sup>3\*</sup> , Holger Briel<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

<sup>2,3</sup> Universitas Udayana, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup> Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University-United  
International College, China

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**Abstract:** This study investigates how Bali, Indonesia, and Beishan, China, strategically sustain their cultural identities amid globalizing pressures. It addresses a gap in comparative resilience research by moving beyond sector-specific analyses to uncover the underlying principles of cultural adaptation. Using qualitative oral history, the research captures grassroots perspectives to reveal two contrasting paradigms: Bali enacts centripetal resilience, defending a sacred cultural core through ritual and social cohesion, whereas Beishan pursues centrifugal innovation, treating heritage as assets for entrepreneurial fusion with global culture. The findings demonstrate that the nature of perceived threats shapes whether communities adopt defensive fortification or proactive reinvention. The study argues that cultural resilience is not a universal strategy but a contextually coherent alignment of ontology, threat perception, and adaptive action. By proposing a comparative framework of centripetal and centrifugal resilience, it advances resilience theory and provides a transferable analytical lens for understanding how communities negotiate continuity and change across diverse cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Bali; Beishan; centripetal resilience; centrifugal innovation; globalisation

### 1. Introduction

In an age characterised by accelerating globalisation, digital interconnectivity, and homogenising market forces, preserving cultural distinctiveness has emerged as a crucial concern for communities worldwide. The relentless tide of modernisation, while offering economic opportunities and technological

\* Corresponding author's email: [moelya01@gmail.com](mailto:moelya01@gmail.com)

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advancement, simultaneously exerts profound pressures on local traditions, identities, and social fabrics, a dynamic reflected in the standardising force of “McDonaldization” (Ritzer, 2015) and the subsequent, uneven processes of cultural hybridisation (Pieterse, 2015).

This dynamic sets the stage for a critical inquiry: how do communities actively maintain, adapt, and perpetuate their unique cultural identities amidst such powerful, often disruptive, external forces? This study posits that the answers are not found in isolation but through comparative examination, where seemingly disparate contexts can reveal universal principles of cultural resilience. To this end, this research undertakes a focused comparison between two distinctive locations: the island of Bali, Indonesia, and the urban village of Beishan within Zhuhai, China.

At first glance, pairing a world-renowned island with a Hindu heritage against a small, relatively recent Chinese urban village seems like a “strange undertaking.” Yet, it is precisely within their stark contrasts that a potent analytical synergy emerges. This comparison is analytically productive because these pressures originate from very distinct historical paths and socio-political frameworks—exemplifying global market-driven tourism versus state-led creative urban regeneration (O’Connor & Gu, 2020). Crucially, despite these different frameworks, both Bali and Beishan share a core similarity: they are both profoundly shaped by the dilemmas of tourism development.

In Bali, tourism has functioned as the dominant economic engine and primary external pressure since the early 20th century, a trajectory initiated by Dutch colonial promotion and cemented through national developmentalist policies, which has led to profound economic reliance on foreign exchange but also generated significant external pressures—including environmental degradation, overdevelopment, and neoliberal market forces—that challenge the island’s social and ecological carrying capacity (Anom et al., 2017; Demolingo et al., 2024; Picard, 1996; Putra, 2013).

In Beishan, Zhuhai, cultural resilience is strategically orchestrated as part of China’s state-led creative city agenda, which employs a creative industries model for urban and economic development (Keane, 2013; O’Connor & Gu, 2020). This policy framework drives the village’s transformation, where preservation focuses on the adaptive reuse of its Ming and Qing dynasty architecture into creative spaces, art studios, and cultural hubs, successfully revitalising the local ecosystem (CNBayArea, 2025; Mallard, 2017). However, this model demands a critical balance between tourism commercialisation and the preservation of authentic cultural value to avoid reducing its original historical narratives (Lam et al., 2026; Zhang, 2026). Consequently, the long-term sustainability of the area is contingent on a harmonious integration between its physical spatial

morphology and the maintenance of local socio-cultural identity (Li et al., 2026). Thus, Beishan serves as a compelling microcosm of cultural negotiation, standing at the intersection of deep-rooted heritage and the intense, state-facilitated pressures of the contemporary creative economy.

This comparative study is motivated by a notable gap in the current literature on cultural preservation. While substantial scholarly work exists on the impacts of tourism on heritage sites (Cole, 2007; Hampton, 2005; Su & Teo, 2008; Wise & Jimura, 2020) and on state-led urban cultural regeneration (O'Connor & Gu, 2020; Ponzini & Rossi, 2010), these discourses often proceed within parallel, non-intersecting discourses. What remains underexplored is a systematic, grassroots-driven comparison that illuminates how cultural resilience is enacted and experienced by communities themselves, across these divergent models of tourism-led development. This study addresses the gap by investigating the processes and levels of agency through which local communities manage the “duress” imposed by global tourism markets or state-led developmentalism to preserve their cultural identity. By placing these two models in dialogue, this research seeks to move beyond sector-specific analysis towards a more integrated understanding of cultural resilience as a universal, yet context-dependent, human endeavour.

The urgency of this investigation is underscored by the complex nature of contemporary threats. The forces of globalisation, tourism, and state-led development do not pose a uniform threat of erosion to intangible heritage; rather, they present divergent pressures that challenge its authenticity, context, and meaning in distinct ways.

In Bali, the primary challenge is the commodification and performative adaptation of ritual within a global tourism economy, a phenomenon well-documented in studies noting the re-choreography of traditional arts like the *kecak* dance to suit tourist tastes, the resultant cultural hybridity, and the dual-edged nature of this transformation, while economically beneficial, risks diluting the rituals’ original meaning and wresting control over cultural development from local communities (Demolingo et al., 2024; Picard, 1996, 2008; Putra, 2013). This is illustrated by the transformation of sacred ceremonies, such as the *ngaben* (cremation) ritual and *kecak* dance (Figure 1), which have been adapted into staged performances for tourist audiences, raising critical questions about the dilution of spiritual meaning for commercial gain, which ultimately highlights the double-edged nature of tourism as both a preserver and a disruptor of cultural identity (Demolingo et al., 2024; Howe, 2006; Putra, 2013). Similarly, the daily ritual of *canang sari* (offerings) — a small, beautifully arranged offering of colourful flowers atop a shallow, basket-like square palm leaf, with incense — is a core gesture of Balinese Hindu devotion (*bakti*) to express gratitude to the

divine, which has become a ubiquitous symbol for tourists. As Vickers (2012) argues, this creates a tension between maintaining authentic sacred practices and aestheticising spaces to meet the visual demands of global tourism.



Figure 1. A royal cremation ceremony in Ubud (2018) illustrating the preservation of Balinese traditions and culture while simultaneously serving as a tourist attraction (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra, 2018).

In Beishan, the pressure stems from the state's instrumental repurposing of local heritage within top-down urban regeneration schemes (O'Connor & Gu, 2020). For instance, the state-led "Beishan Music Festival" and the conversion of traditional village houses into chic art galleries and cafes represent a strategic rebranding of local culture to fit a "creative city" template, often sidelining the organic social practices and historical narratives of long-term residents (He, 2019). Thus, the "risk" is not a simple disappearance, but a transformative negotiation in which the very logic and value of cultural practices are redefined by external forces. The strategies developed by communities under these distinct forms of tourism pressure are thus not merely of local interest but constitute a vital repository of knowledge for global cultural sustainability.

To ground this comparative analysis, it is essential to establish the logical framework that makes their juxtaposition analytically powerful. This study is a strategic contrast designed to illuminate the spectrum of cultural resilience by examining its operation under two fundamentally different models of modern

pressure. To enable this, the comparison focuses on a shared contemporary period from the late 20th century to the present, during which both locations became acutely engaged with globalizing forces through divergent pathways.

Bali's negotiated modernity is the product of a long history of strategic synthesis. For this study, however, the critical period begins in the early 1970s, marked by the opening of Ngurah Rai International Airport in 1969 and the Indonesian government's subsequent launch of the 'Bali Tourism Project' in 1971, events widely recognised as initiating the era of mass cultural tourism on the island (Picard, 1996; Wardana, 2019). These events catalysed the island's rapid transformation from a regional destination into a mass tourism archetype (Picard, 1996; Vickers, 2012). Following Indonesia's post-colonial consolidation, the primary pressure shifted decisively to the logic of the global market.

The Indonesian state and Balinese institutions actively engaged in this project, most notably by formalising and promoting cultural events such as the annual Bali Arts Festival, established in 1979. Thus, contemporary Balinese communities navigate a market-driven duress, in which the imperative is to sustain a sacred, holistic cultural core of the *Tri Hita Karana*, which serves as a framework for sustainable development and cultural preservation, that emphasises harmony between humans and God (*Parahyangan*), humans and others (*Pawongan*), and humans and the environment (*Palemahan*) amid its commodification for tourist consumption (Runa, 2012). The central tension is between cultural authenticity and economic performance within a decentralised, yet globally connected, tourism economy, where community-based institutions like the *banjar* – a highly organised, traditional neighbourhood council that manages both the daily civic life and religious ceremonies of a specific village area – play a critical role in managing this interface.

On the other hand, in stark chronological and structural contrast, Beishan's engineered transformation makes its modern identity a direct product of China's post-1978 Reform and Opening-Up era. Its narrative is one of compressed, state-orchestrated transformation catalysed by Zhuhai's designation as a Special Economic Zone in 1980 (Yeung & Shen, 2008). Rapid urbanisation engulfed former agricultural villages, creating the *chengzhongcun* (urban village) phenomenon (Zhang, 2010). From the 2000s onward, Beishan transitioned from an industrial zone to a state-prescribed "creative cultural hub" under national culture-led urban regeneration policies, with key redevelopment plans solidified around 2009 (O'Connor & Gu, 2020). With a small core of permanent residents amidst a larger transient population, Beishan embodies the core tension of this model. The community negotiates a policy-driven duress, in which top-down plans seek to valorise local culture through a lens of creativity and economic productivity, while residual community life strives to maintain organic social practices.

A strategic comparative profile that shows the analytical value of pairing Bali and Beishan lies precisely in their asymmetrical profiles, summarised in Table 1. This contrast isolates key variables, such as the source, logic, and temporal pace of pressure, allowing for a clearer examination of how these variables shape distinct community-level strategies of resilience.

Table 1. Strategic Comparative Profile of Bali and Beishan

| No. | Comparative Dimension       | Bali (Indonesia)                                                                          | Beishan, Zhuhai (China)                                                                   |
|-----|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Primary Period of Analysis  | Early 1970s – Present (post-mass tourism launch)                                          | Post-1978 – Present (focus on post-2000 creative regeneration)                            |
| 2   | Historical Legacy           | Millennial synthesis of indigenous, Hindu, and colonial influences.                       | Recent transformation from agricultural village to urban/industrial zone.                 |
| 3   | Core "Duress" Model         | Market-Driven Tourism Globalization.                                                      | Policy-Driven Development & Tourism.                                                      |
| 4   | Primary Institutional Actor | Hybrid: Government and Local/Religious institutions, cultural councils, tourism industry. | State: Municipal government, planning bureaus, state-linked developers.                   |
| 5   | Key Tension                 | Maintaining sacred authenticity vs. commodification for tourist consumption.              | Preserving organic community life vs. fulfilling state-prescribed creative-city branding. |
| 6   | Tourism's Role              | Dominant, direct economic driver and primary agent of change.                             | Strategic tool within a state-led urban regeneration and economic diversification agenda. |
| 7   | Approx. Resident Population | ~4.3 million (2020)                                                                       | ~2,000 permanent residents (with fluid commuting population)                              |
| 8   | Governance Scale            | Provincial/Island-wide, with strong local institution ( <i>banjar</i> )                   | Local/Village-scale, embedded within municipal/national policy frameworks.                |

Source: Authors (2026)

Thus, while both sites leverage culture within development paradigms, the source and nature of the constraining framework diverge fundamentally. Bali's path is shaped by a decentralised negotiation with the global tourism market, while Beishan's trajectory is shaped by a centralised negotiation with the state, using tourism as a policy tool. This deliberate contrast brings us to

the central question of this study: How do local communities, operating within these distinct institutional and market frameworks, actively strive to sustain their unique cultural identities? How do they navigate, adapt, and reinterpret their traditions to forge viable futures in the face of these powerful, yet different, external forces?

## 2. Literature Review

The accelerating forces of globalization and modernity present a universal, yet varied, challenge to cultural distinctiveness. Scholarly discourse on cultural preservation has consequently multiplied, yet it often remains confined to particular disciplinary or geographical contexts, creating parallel conversations that seldom intersect. A dominant strand of literature examines cultural preservation through the lens of global tourism, a primary vector of globalization's homogenising and commodifying tendencies. This body of work, deeply concerned with the tension between authenticity and economic imperatives, finds a paradigmatic case in Bali.

Classic studies have established foundational frameworks, tracing how Balinese culture became a “touristic culture” and how its externally crafted “earthly paradise” image took shape. The works provide a crucial historical baseline, revealing the agency of Balinese locals in rebuilding the industry post-independence, the role of cultural exchange, and the socio-political context of the mid-20th century—including the ambivalence toward foreigners, the emergence of artshops, and tourism's symbolic role in modernisation (Picard, 1996; Vickers, 2011, 2012, 2013). However, the contemporary landscape of Balinese studies has evolved significantly beyond these seminal works. More recent scholarship critically engages with the intensification and diversification of pressures in the 21st century.

A central contemporary theme is the governance of space and community agency amid complex, overlapping interests. Wardana (2019) provides a critical update by analysing how the island's space—physical, cultural, and political—is contested among the state, capital (including large-scale tourism developers), and customary (*adat*) institutions like the *banjar*. His analysis moves beyond the classic authenticity-commodification binary to examine the concrete political struggles over land, water, and cultural meaning, highlighting how governance structures shape resilience outcomes. This is complemented by research on “over-tourism” and its discontents, which examines community resistance to unchecked development and the search for more sustainable models. Furthermore, studies now explore the digital mediation of Balinese culture, investigating how social media platforms like Instagram create new forms of cultural performance and commodification, extending the tourist gaze

into the everyday lives of residents, while preserving cultural heritage and the challenges faced by indigenous communities worldwide (Maraña et al., 2023). The central question in this evolved discourse remains one of agency, but it is now framed within a more complex ecosystem of actors: to what degree can local communities, leveraging both traditional governance and modern digital tools, navigate the intertwined pressures of global capital, state policy, and digital visibility to steer cultural preservation?

Running in parallel yet operating in a largely separate analytical universe is a vital body of literature focused on state-led cultural preservation and urban regeneration, particularly amid rapid development in Asia. Here, the primary force is not a diffuse global market, but the deliberate policies of the nation-state. Research on China's urban transformation, exemplified by studies of urban villages (*chengzhongcun*) like Beishan, focuses on the political economy of space, displacement, and gentrification. A key contemporary theme is the state's deployment of culture as an instrument for urban policy within the "creative city" paradigm. As O'Connor and Gu (2020) argue, this top-down approach seeks to valorise culture primarily for economic growth and social management, re-engineering historic spaces into hubs for aesthetic consumption and creative enterprise.

Recent analyses have further nuanced this picture, exploring the "soft" cultural governance that accompanies physical redevelopment, such as the curation of arts festivals and the branding of local heritage to attract a creative class (He, 2019; Zhang, 2010). The pressure on communities in this model, therefore, is categorically different; it is not primarily to perform authenticity for a global tourist market, but to align their lived culture, social practices, and use of space with state-defined visions of modernity, civic order, and economic productivity. This literature critically questions whether such state-led regeneration fosters genuine cultural vitality or leads to a form of "gentrification by culture," where organic community life is instrumentalised, sanitised, or erased in favour of a state-sanctioned aesthetic.

This disciplinary and contextual divergence has led to a significant and consequential gap in our understanding of cultural resilience. While both scholarly traditions offer profound insights, they proceed along largely non-intersecting tracks. Studies of sites like Bali, informed by classic and contemporary works, are embedded in discourses of authenticity, commodification, post-colonial identity, and the politics of local governance, often presuming a market-driven but politically complex context. Conversely, analyses of places like Beishan are grounded in theories of state power, political economy, spatial governance, and creative-city policy (He, 2019; O'Connor & Gu, 2020). The result is a lack of systematic, comparative research that examines

how cultural resilience is enacted and experienced by communities themselves across these fundamentally divergent ecosystems of pressure. We possess deep, context-specific answers but lack a framework for cross-contextual learning. Consequently, while principles such as social capital, adaptive innovation, and institutional interplay are central to cultural resilience, they are often examined within isolated disciplinary frameworks.

This fragmented approach limits their utility because it fails to capture the integrated social-ecological dynamics through which communities navigate complex, hybrid threats. A resilience-thinking perspective, which emphasises the interdependence of these capacities within complex adaptive systems, is therefore essential (Folke et al., 2010). However, applying this perspective requires a literature base that actively bridges the market-tourism and state-policy divides, which currently remains underdeveloped.

The urgency of bridging this gap is not merely academic but profoundly practical. We are living through a period in which intangible heritage, such as rituals, oral histories, and communal practices, is eroding on multiple fronts. The strategies developed by communities under pressure, whether from market commodification or state planning, constitute a vital repository of knowledge for global cultural sustainability. Understanding these processes has tangible socio-economic and political implications, as cultural identity is inseparably linked to social cohesion, community well-being, and equitable development. A full understanding of contemporary Balinese resilience requires recognising its multi-layered foundations: its philosophical basis in concepts like *Tri Hita Karana* (Runa, 2012), its historical pattern of selective cultural absorption, where external influences are strategically embraced without dissolving local autonomy (Nordholt, 1996, 2010), and its modern, contested navigation of tourism and spatial governance (Wardana, 2019). In direct dialogue, the policy-navigating, spatially contested resilience of Beishan is forged through compressed, state-orchestrated transformation (Yeung & Shen, 2008) and its recent reframing within creative city agendas (O'Connor & Gu, 2020). The existing models remain partial. We risk prescribing solutions based on a single type of pressure, unaware of the full spectrum of adaptive mechanisms—from community-led tourism management in Bali to subtle forms of everyday resistance and negotiation in Beishan—that communities employ in different institutional environments.

Therefore, this study is urgently positioned to move beyond sector-specific analysis towards a more integrated understanding. It seeks to fill the identified gap by asking not just whether culture is preserved under duress, but how the mechanisms and lived experiences of preservation differ when the source of duress shifts from the complex governance of a global tourism

hotspot (Bali) to the top-down cultural engineering of a state-led creative city project (Beishan). By prioritising grassroots, emic perspectives, the research will illuminate the nuanced strategies of negotiation, adaptation, resistance, and innovation that define cultural resilience in two starkly contrasting yet equally pressured environments. In doing so, the experiences of Bali and Beishan, informed by both classic foundations and contemporary scholarly debates, cease to be merely isolated case studies and become complementary chapters in a global story of cultural endurance. They offer nuanced, transferable lessons for stakeholders worldwide who seek to foster cultural vitality that respects embedded authenticity while engaging constructively with the relentless currents of change.

### 3. Method and Theory

#### 3.1 *Method and Material*

This research is fundamentally an inquiry into the human dimension of cultural survival, demanding a methodology capable of capturing the lived experience, subjective meaning, and grassroots agency at its heart. This study is grounded in a qualitative, interpretative paradigm and is designed as an oral history project. This approach is chosen because oral history provides unique access to the agent-driven narratives that constitute the very process of resilience (Thompson, 2009). It moves beyond official policy to understand how local actors interpret their cultural core, perceive external forces, and strategically navigate between them (Portelli, 2010). Specifically, the method will document the lived reasoning behind strategic actions—such as a Balinese elder’s curation of ritual for tourism or a Beishan entrepreneur’s fusion of heritage with global design—thereby illuminating the informal processes of alignment that are central to the study’s theoretical framework (Yow, 2005). In doing so, oral history directly investigates the “coherent, agent-driven alignment” that is the cornerstone of this comparative analysis. Furthermore, it provides an essential tool for rectifying this, shifting the analytical focus from overarching structures to the personal and collective narratives through which cultural resilience is ultimately enacted, understood, and perpetuated (Abrams, 2016).

The philosophical commitment to privileging the emic, or insider, perspective guided every stage of the research design. We contend that oral history is not merely a technique for gathering anecdotes but an epistemological stance that validates memory and personal testimony as legitimate, vital forms of knowledge. This is particularly crucial for communities whose lived realities and historical agency may be marginalised in official records or dominated by external narratives of commodification or creative-city branding. This approach aligns with demonstrated work showing how oral methods can reveal how

local identity is forged and reformed through both historical continuity and trauma (Briel, 2017).

To ensure both profound depth and systematic comparability, the study was operationalised through two parallel, locally embedded oral history projects, treating Bali and Beishan as two distinct yet analytically synergistic cases of cultural negotiation. The study utilised in-depth interviews and documentary film analysis as its primary data collection methods. This qualitative approach was chosen for its capacity to capture the lived experience, subjective meanings, and nuanced strategies of grassroots agency, which are essential for answering the research question. A shared, detailed protocol guaranteed methodological consistency across these diverse fields. Data were collected through two parallel streams, each tailored to the specific context and resource availability.

Data for the Balinese case were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted by a local research team from Udayana University in May – June 2025. To ensure a representative and diverse range of perspectives, respondents were selected using a purposive random sampling strategy based on key societal criteria. This method combines intentional selection of relevant social categories with a random selection of individuals within those categories to mitigate bias and capture varied community voices (Robinson, 2014). The selection criteria included: profession/role in society (e.g., business owners, educators, students, civil servants, cultural practitioners, or tourism staff), length of residency to understand cultural shock/adaptation, and religious/ethnic background to reflect the island's demographic composition.

This approach yielded a final sample of 14 respondents from diverse backgrounds. For instance, the sample includes business owners such as Ketut Ambara, who provide insights into the economic dimensions of cultural interaction; educators such as Ida Bagus Ariana, who offer historical and pedagogical perspectives; and students such as Evania Andjani and Putri, who represent the experiences of younger generations and cultural adaptation. This diverse composition ensures the data reflects a comprehensive cross-section of Balinese society, making the respondents suitable representatives for studying island-wide cultural dynamics.

For the Beishan case, primary data were sourced from the publicly available documentary film *“Beishan – The Jazzy Side of Life”* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NLqnv1wWaU>) produced by Beijing Normal University - Hong Kong Baptist University - United International College (Briel, 2025). Acknowledging the methodological complexity of using a pre-produced film as a primary data source, the analytical strategy was adapted accordingly. The documentary is treated not as a transparent record but as a curated cultural artefact and a qualitative data repository, an approach well-established in

visual anthropology and media studies for analysing the values, priorities, and narrative constructions embedded in mediated texts (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Rose, 2006).

The film was produced specifically as a scholarly oral history project by Holger Briel (2025), a co-author of this study. The core aims of the documentary are to document the village's transformation from a secluded settlement to a cultural hub, explore preservation through artistic activism, and showcase the synthesis of tradition and modernity that aligns directly with this study's research objectives. Its inclusion provides a purposefully curated, narrative-based dataset that serves as a direct methodological counterpart to the primary interview data collected in Bali.

The filmmaker's integral role in the research team guarantees that the documentary was conceived and executed as a structured qualitative repository, creating a transparent and reflexive scholarly link between data collection, curation, and thematic analysis. Consequently, there are no details of interview data for Beishan, as the individuals featured constitute a sample of 10 selected participants representing key stakeholder groups in urban regeneration, including long-term residents, creative entrepreneurs, and local officials, such as Mr Ban, Director of the Ban Art Museum, who champions calligraphy preservation. Nie Xin, Vice Director of the Cultural Hall, promotes the "Beishan Spirit" to elevate community literacy. Xue Wen, Founder of the Beishan Music Festival, credits his event with saving the village and driving its growth. The Golden Jazz Club Representative highlights international artistic fusion, while the French-style Parlour Owner brings a curated boutique experience. Foreign visitors praise the village's authentic energy and environment. Local residents recall the area's impoverished past and desired development, but one offers a critical note, observing that despite global fame, villagers have become "passive" as government management has increased. This provides grounded, polyphonic testimony that might otherwise be difficult for an external researcher to obtain (Ritchie, 2015). This narrative-based dataset offers a parallel, rich source for thematic analysis, fitting the study's comparative framework while itself embodying the accessible, democratising tools of modern oral history practice.

The analytical process engages this material through a two-stage, inductive approach. First, a detailed thematic analysis is conducted on each corpus independently to identify emergent patterns, tensions, and localised strategies of adaptation arising within each community's narrative world. Subsequently, a focused cross-case comparative analysis places these identified core categories in deliberate discussion. This stage contrasts, for instance, Balinese narratives of religious devotion and ritual precision as a conscious

buffer against commercial weakening with Beishan accounts of navigating and personalising state-prescribed “creativity” and aesthetic branding.

To strengthen the validity of the analysis derived from oral narratives, a strategy of methodological triangulation was employed wherever possible. While the primary evidence is subjective testimony, key claims about material changes referenced by participants were cross-checked against any available empirical documentation. This process does not seek to “prove” the oral history “right”, but to contextualise personal memory within broader socio-material processes, enhancing the interpretive depth and credibility of the analysis (Denzin, 2017).

The objective is to distinguish context-specific adaptations, born of unique historical and political circumstances, from deeper, potentially universal tactics of cultural endurance, thereby building an integrated theory from the ground up. The validity and scholarly merit of this methodology are anchored in its commitment to triangulation, which captures a multiplicity of community voices, and in its firm grounding in the established, reflective tradition of oral history scholarship. The deliberate use of local student-researchers, a defining feature of this project’s design, provided invaluable cultural and linguistic insight, facilitating a depth of access and a nuance of understanding often unattainable for external scholars. This participatory model finds a powerful and successful precedent in community-based projects like the Aparaja Revitalisation initiative in Flores, Indonesia, which has effectively harnessed oral traditions to sustain local language and culture (Age, 2023).

In full acknowledgement of its situated nature, the study does not claim statistical generalizability but rather pursues analytical or theoretical generalizability (R. K. Yin, 2018), aiming to offer a nuanced, transferable framework for understanding the mechanisms of cultural resilience that can be applied and tested in other settings. The subjective nature of memory and the specific dynamics of student-conducted research are carefully considered inherent aspects of the method, and the comprehensive training protocol and ethical framework are designed to mitigate potential constraints and uphold scholarly integrity. Ultimately, this methodology is cohesively designed to be inseparable from the research’s humanistic core argument. By systematically listening to, analysing, and contextualising the stories from Bali and Beishan, it posits that the very mechanisms of cultural resilience are encoded in personal and collective narratives. In doing so, the method itself becomes a part of the preservative and interpretive act it studies, providing a profound, coherent, and academically strong pathway to uncovering how identity is persistently woven, defended, and transformed in the face of unstoppable change.

### 3.2 Theory

Cultural resilience is best understood not as a fixed condition but as a dynamic process through which communities negotiate continuity and change. Building on this premise, the study employs a conceptual model of cultural resilience that distinguishes two complementary orientations: centripetal and centrifugal. This framework is grounded in the foundational sociological literature on globalization, which conceptualizes cultural change as a dynamic interplay between opposing yet coherent forces. On the one hand, centripetal dynamics—akin to fortification—describe the inward-oriented effort to protect, consolidate, and strengthen a perceived cultural core against external pressures of homogenization or dilution (Appadurai, 1996). On the other hand, centrifugal dynamics—aligned with innovation—describe the outward-oriented process through which communities selectively adapt, translate, and hybridize external influences to renew and revitalize their cultural expressions, thereby sustaining their relevance in changing contexts (Pieterse, 2015). Rather than reducing globalization to a binary of resistance versus assimilation, this framework conceptualizes local communities as strategic agents that actively shape the trajectory of their cultural identities through deliberate choices about preservation, adaptation, and transformation.

This agent-centric perspective is further informed by critical heritage studies and strategic management theory. From heritage studies, the model engages with the debate between heritage as a fixed, authentic product to be preserved (a centripetal impulse) and heritage as a dynamic, living process that is continually made and remade through practice and negotiation (a centrifugal impulse) (Harrison, 2013; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995). To understand the mechanism by which a community aligns itself toward one of these poles, we draw on strategic management concepts that view coherence not as an accident but as the result of deliberate, purposive action (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Thus, the centripetal/centrifugal framework provides the analytical lens to categorize and compare the “intentional coherence” observed in community narratives and actions, revealing how diametrically opposed strategies can both serve as viable mechanisms for sustaining cultural continuity under pressure.

## 4. Finding and Discussion

### 4.1 Finding

To comprehend how communities articulate their resilience, one must first define their mental environment. This section presents the core category that emerged from the systematic analysis of interviews conducted in Bali and

Beishan. Rather than offering a simplified comparison, these findings reveal the unique structures of resilience that each community has developed. By extracting complex lived experiences into core analytical categories, we move beyond anecdote to identify the dominant pressures, preservation mechanisms, and adaptive strategies that define each locale's struggle for cultural continuity.

#### *4.1.1 Bali's Cultural Adaptation*

The empirical foundation for the core findings is drawn from the textured, firsthand accounts of Balinese community members whose social positions place them at the forefront of cultural negotiation. This includes individuals such as community elder and business owner Ketut Ambara (60 years old), whose leadership requires daily mediation in interfaith dynamics, and educator Ida Bagus Ariana (60 years old), who consciously instils principles of harmony and cultural identity in young students. The perspectives of youth and newer residents, such as Evania Andjani (20 years old) and Ni Putu Rahayu Primayani (23 years old), provide critical insight into how Balinese values are adapted and internalised by the generation that will steward them forward.

Simultaneously, the narratives of individuals embedded in the domestic and communal fabric—such as homemaker Nyoman Suwini (49 years old) and office worker Bintang (25 years old)—illuminate the often-unspoken daily rituals and cooperative ethics that sustain social cohesion at the neighbourhood level. Crucially, this portrait of active cultural maintenance is framed against a defining counter-narrative from Putu Asmini (53), a professional in the private tourism sector. Her testimony provides a ground-level indictment of the sector's physical impacts, explicitly linking rampant land conversion to ecological degradation and compromised resident safety, thereby giving tangible form to the “dark side” of commodification that the community perceives as a primary threat. Synthesising these diverse voices reveals a unified theme: cultural preservation in contemporary Bali is not a static curation of the past but a dynamic, strategic, and community-driven process of adaptation. Table 2 crystallises the resulting framework of this adaptive process, detailing the specific mechanisms, conscious strategies, and lived practices through which this living system of resilience is continuously enacted in response to external pressures.

Table 2. Balinese Core Category

| No. | Core Category                                | Finding                                                 | Keynotes/Quotes                                                     |
|-----|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Challenges and "Dark Side"                   | Land Conversion and Environmental Impact                | "Many rice fields have been converted..."                           |
|     |                                              | Shift in Values ( <i>Tri Hita Karana</i> to Commercial) | "deep concern over subtle forms of faith conversion..."             |
|     |                                              | Generational Rifts and Tourism Pressure                 | "Younger Balinese are increasingly pressured to work in tourism..." |
| 2   | Cultural Preservation Mechanisms             | Daily Rituals (Offerings/ <i>Banten</i> )               | "I was taught to make daily offerings..."                           |
|     |                                              | Major Ceremonies ( <i>Nyepi</i> , <i>Panca Yadnya</i> ) | "During Nyepi... the Muslim community is very respectful..."        |
|     |                                              | Role of Formal Education                                | "In school... we were taught how to respect one another..."         |
| 3   | Cultural Differentiation/ Interfaith Dynamic | Experienced Harmony and Mutual Respect                  | "We live peacefully side by side."                                  |
|     |                                              | Challenges/ Misunderstandings                           | "What caused tension was mostly Twitter debates..."                 |
|     |                                              | Adaptation by Newcomers/ Migrants                       | "At first, there was a lot of culture shock..."                     |
| 4   | Resilience and Adaptation                    | Grassroots/ Community Education                         | "Communities are adapting through grassroots efforts..."            |
|     |                                              | Role of Community Leaders                               | "Our religious leaders play a big role..."                          |
|     |                                              | Shared Community Events                                 | "We often hold joint activities together..."                        |

Source: Author (Interview Record, 2025)

Table 2 reveals engagement in the active defence of Bali's cultural integrity, striving to protect the holistic core from significant, often existential, pressures. This defensive action is organised around four interconnected core categories, beginning with its most urgent front: the confrontation with the "dark side" of development. Here, interviewees like Putu Asmini, aged 53, who have worked in the private tourism sector for more than 20 years, directly link the relentless conversion of rice fields into villas to tangible ecological consequences, such as recent severe floods, which are framed not as natural disasters but as the result of lost wetlands and deforestation (Guardian, 2025). This physical transformation signifies a deeper cultural shift away from the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy of harmony (Runa, 2012) toward individualistic and commercial values (Warren & McCarthy, 2012), a process that echoes the classic critique of cultural commodification (Greenwood, 1989), in which meaningful practice

risks being hollowed out for external consumption. The consequence of this multifaceted pressure is a profound generational rift, as youth are increasingly channelled into the tourism economy, often at the expense of ancestral trades and ritual knowledge.

In response, Balinese society demonstrates resilience through deeply rooted cultural preservation mechanisms. The primary safeguard is found in daily practice. For Hindus, as noted by Cahyani (23 years old) and Ayu Aristha (23 years old), rituals such as preparing morning offerings like *banten saiban* (a daily ritual of offering a portion of freshly cooked food to God as gratitude) and *canang sari* are understood not merely as religious duties but as essential acts of cultural continuity that reinforce identity and community bonds. Major religious ceremonies such as *Nyepi* (the Day of Silence) and *Panca Yadnya* – the five holy offerings in Balinese Hinduism to maintain cosmic balance: *Dewa Yadnya* (to God), *Rsi Yadnya* (to the Priest), *Pitra Yadnya* (to ancestors), *Manusa Yadnya* (for human life cycles), and *Bhuta Yadnya* (to nature and spirits) – serve as powerful, periodic reinforcements of this Hindu identity, as highlighted by the senior citizens Ketut Ambara (60 years old) and Ida Bagus Ariana (60 years old).

Crucially, these events—such as *Nyepi* coinciding with Muslim holy days, as happened in 2026, with the two just a day apart—do not exist in isolation but are actively framed as moments of interfaith negotiation and respect that require mutual understanding. It is through this ongoing, deliberate negotiation that the community's resilience is most clearly expressed as interfaith harmony. Overwhelming testimony from interviews with both Hindu and Muslim interviewees, like Nyoman Suwini (49 years old) and Safira (24 years old), describes peaceful and respectful coexistence. They describe relationships characterised by routine mutual respect, where major Hindu holidays such as *Nyepi* are observed by the wider community.

The study finds that this harmony is actively constructed and maintained through deliberate social practices. Interviewees like Luh Miniasih (64 years old), for instance, highlighted how shared communal spaces and organised joint activities are fundamental to building the routine, everyday togetherness that underpins resilient interfaith relations. This lived reality of interfaith cooperation is further evidenced during the 2024 *Nyepi*, when Muslims in Bali performed *Taraweeh* prayers in silence (BBC Indonesia, 2024). Furthermore, religious tolerance in Bali is exemplified by events like the annual *Gema Perdamaian* (Echo of Peace), which began in 2003 and promotes harmony among diverse communities through joint prayers and cultural performances, emphasising the importance of living in peace through tolerance (Punia et al., 2018; Yamashita, 2012).

Furthermore, the findings identify formal and community education as a critical, proactive mechanism for fostering interfaith harmony. This is substantiated by the experiences of interviewees such as Rahayu Primayani (23 years old), who highlighted the systematic role of schooling in this process. She noted on the interview on May 2025, *“Maybe religious teachers in school. From elementary to university, they have always emphasised religious tolerance in formal education.”* This direct testimony aligns with the structural framework of Indonesia’s national education system, which, as mandated by the National Education System Law (UU No. 20/2003) and detailed in Government Regulation No. 55/2007 on Religious Education, requires religious education as a compulsory subject at all levels—from elementary school through university. The national curriculum, guided by the principle of fostering faith and piety (*iman dan taqwa*), requires students to receive instruction in their respective religions, with the pedagogical goal of deepening personal faith while simultaneously promoting mutual respect and understanding among different religious communities. This institutional design ensures that the values of tolerance and interreligious dialogue are deliberately instilled from an early age, preparing younger generations to engage constructively with a diverse world while upholding their own traditions.

However, this harmony is not automatic. Interviewees like Andie Prasetyo (23 years old), a Muslim student from Java, reported experiencing “culture shock” upon encountering Bali’s pervasive Hindu temples and rituals, underscoring the ongoing, active effort required to build mutual understanding in a diverse setting. Others note that potential tensions more often flare in the abstract realm of social media debates than in face-to-face community life, raising a gap between online discourse and offline practice, as noted in digital anthropology (Postill, 2018). When obstacles arise in the relationship between Muslims and Hindus in Bali, they are often managed through clear communication, the mediating role of respected community leaders, and a shared commitment to living side by side peacefully. For instance, Ketut Ambara recounted a situation in his village, Banjar Tengah, Blahbatuh, where the construction of a prayer room (*mushola*) caused some tension within the community. As a former *Kelian Dinas* (Head of the local community), he advised halting the construction temporarily to maintain peace and comfort in the area. This suggestion was accepted, and the involvement of a respected community leader further ensured that the decision was well-received by all parties. Moreover, a notable example of religious harmony in Bali is the Puja Mandala

worship complex in Nusa Dua, which houses five places of worship—a Mosque, a Catholic Church, a Protestant Church, a Buddhist Vihara, and a Hindu Pura—side by side. This close arrangement fosters mutual assistance during religious holidays, active collaboration, and social capital among the groups (Putra, 2014; Waruwu & Pramono, 2019). This example highlights how mutual respect, open communication, and the guidance of trusted leaders can effectively resolve potential conflicts and foster peaceful coexistence within a diverse community.

#### 4.1.2 Baishan's Cultural Curation

The findings for Beishan, as synthesised in Table 3, reveal a distinct, strategic model of cultural resilience. Unlike Bali's holistic defence of a spiritual and ecological core, Beishan's approach is curatorial and modular, treating its heritage as a dynamic portfolio of assets to be selectively preserved, adapted, and recombined (Ashworth, 2005). This strategic logic is articulated through the four interconnected categories of the framework: cultural preservation mechanisms, resilience and adaptation strategies, agents of change and leadership, and emerging challenges and tensions.

Derived from the community's own self-presentation in the documentary "*Beishan— The Jazzy Side of Life*," these categories capture a deliberate blueprint for relevance (Table 3). The analysis identifies a core ethos of orchestrated fusion, where cultural elements are not merely protected but are actively remixed—most emblematically through jazz—to engage new audiences and markets. Consequently, resilience is framed not as the preservation of a static tradition, but as the agile, strategic management of heritage within a competitive creative economy. The tensions documented in the final category are therefore not signs of failure but inherent dynamics within this entrepreneurial model of cultural continuity.

Table 3. Beishan Core Category

| No. | Core Category                    | Finding                               | Keynotes                                                                                                  |
|-----|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Cultural Preservation Mechanisms | Architectural Heritage and Continuity | Preservation of ancestral halls (e.g., Yang's Hall), traditional village facades.                         |
|     |                                  | Culinary Intangible Heritage          | Use of hyper-local ingredients (Cishun Paste, deep-sea sand). "One of the bestselling items in her shop." |
|     |                                  | Religious/Ancestral Practice          | Daily household altars, incense in lanes, well-attended temples. "Typical of all southern China."         |

| No. | Core Category                      | Finding                                        | Keynotes                                                                                                  |
|-----|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2   | Resilience and Adaptation Strategy | Concept of 'Innovative Fusion'                 | Core motto of music festivals, fusion of jazz/Yue opera/lion dance, crystal energy with Chinese medicine. |
|     |                                    | Culinary Fusion and Adaptation                 | Modified recipes (sesame for salt); tailoring Italian/French food to local or authentic tastes.           |
|     |                                    | Spatial and Architectural Fusion               | "Gentle gentrification": modern interiors within traditional exterior shells.                             |
|     |                                    | Grassroots Cultural Programming                | Hosting alternative art shows and small concerts to fill a cultural gap.                                  |
| 3   | Agents of Change and Leadership    | Cultural Entrepreneurs and Artists             | Individuals initiating festivals, arts centres, fusion concepts, and architectural redesigns.             |
|     |                                    | Local Business Proprietors                     | Adapting traditional and foreign offerings to market demands, acting as cultural conduits.                |
|     |                                    | International Residents                        | Introducing international standards/events and fostering cross-cultural exchange.                         |
| 4   | Emerging Challenges and Tensions   | Overtourism and Congestion                     | Noise, crowded streets, kitchen fumes, traffic from Hong Kong/Shenzhen. "Sometimes, it is deafening."     |
|     |                                    | Governmental Shift and Disempowerment          | Transition from community-led to government-led decision-making. "We no longer have as much to say."      |
|     |                                    | Commercialisation and Gentrification Pressures | Rising rents, changing demographics ("younger generation entering"), loss of quiet village character.     |

Source: Author (*"Beishan – The Jazzy Side of Life"*, 2025)

The Beishan’s foundation, as detailed under cultural preservation mechanisms, is deliberately selective and modular. Beishan maintains tangible pillars of its past, such as well-preserved ancestral halls and traditional village facades, which act as an authentic scenic backdrop (Figure 2). Simultaneously, it sustains living, market-ready traditions, particularly in its culinary intangible heritage. Here, preservation is pragmatic: bestselling items and secret, hyper-local ingredients (like Cishun Paste) demonstrate that cultural value is reinforced through commercial success. This treats heritage not as a sacred whole but as a

set of strategically curated assets, in which elements are preserved in a modular fashion based on their “exhibition value” (MacCannell, 1973) or their viability within a “touristic culture”.



Figure 2. Yang Family Ancestral Hall after revitalisation (Photo: cnbayarea.org.cn Source: [https://www.cnbayarea.org.cn/english/News/content/post\\_1304140.html](https://www.cnbayarea.org.cn/english/News/content/post_1304140.html))

The dominant and defining concept captured within the resilience and adaptation strategy is ‘innovative fusion.’ This is not passive blending, but an active, creative ethos applied systematically. It is spectacularly manifested in the music scene, pioneered by agents like Xue Wen, where “East-West fusion” drives jazz festivals in century-old theatres and experimental blends of Yue opera with contemporary composition. This fusion logic extends culinarily, in restaurants that adapt French baking, and spatially, through “gentle gentrification” that installs modern interiors within historical shells. This pervasive operational principle across artistic, culinary, and architectural realms positions Beishan as a “creative field” (Scott, 2010), a laboratory for cultural synthesis where value is generated through novel recombinations.

The driving force behind this is a distinct cohort of cultural entrepreneurs and artists who act as visionary architects and curators. Unlike traditional guardians, these agents of change derive their authority from expertise and market appeal, operating with considerable bottom-up autonomy. Xue Wen, the founder of the Beishan Music Festival, explicitly framed his mission as cultural

protection, on video in 2025 stating, *“If we didn’t protect this old village... it would face the fate of being demolished.”* He credits the festival—which grew from 150 to 15,000 attendees—with upgrading the village into a cultural “hot spot.” Nie Xin, a heritage expert and Vice Director of the local Cultural Hall, grounds his authority in 18 years of professional work, describing his role as “continuously digging out” heritage projects to elevate public cultural literacy. The aesthetic transformation of the village’s physical space, moving away from a “backward rural” feel to a curated environment of independent shops, reflects the vision of designers like Ron Rocco, creating what foreign visitors describe as a place with “very good energy.” This entrepreneurial spirit is further embodied by figures like the French Parlour owner, who was drawn to Beishan’s car-free quiet to establish an authentic, quality-focused business, attracting both local and international patrons.

However, the very success of this model has created major new challenges. The village now faces overtourism, straining its infrastructure through flooding and congestion, while rapid commercialisation has fragmented the business environment, inflating prices in renewed areas and diluting local culture through external businesses (Yin et al., 2024). This highlights a lack of unified management and raises serious questions about long-term sustainability. More critically, residents report a shift in government from oversight to direct control. This reflects a classic paradox: the grassroots creativity that makes a place desirable often leads to gentrification and increased regulatory control, a cycle extensively documented in urban sociology (Zukin, 2003). The centralisation of decision-making now risks disempowering the very community and entrepreneurs who built Beishan’s unique character.

#### 4.2 Discussion

Based on the findings above, the core categories of Bali and Beishan reveal that cultural resilience is not a uniform process but a deeply contextual, strategic response. This response is fundamentally shaped by how a community defines its cultural core and perceives its primary threats, leading to a coherent, agent-driven alignment toward one of two strategic poles. The critical insight, therefore, lies in demonstrating how these diametrically opposed approaches of centripetal (fortification) and centrifugal (innovation) can both serve as viable mechanisms for cultural identity continuity. This framework engages with the established sociological dialectic between cultural preservation and adaptive hybridisation (Appadurai, 1996; Pieterse, 2015) and critical heritage debates on authenticity versus process (Harrison, 2013; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995), viewing local actors as strategic agents capable of such intentional alignment (Mintzberg et al., 1998). While both cases develop mechanisms to sustain culture

amid tourism pressures, their fundamental strategies diverge precisely along this axis, informed by their distinct cultural assets and perceptions of threat.

This divergence between Bali's centripetal resilience and Beishan's centrifugal innovation can be conceptually mapped onto Putnam's fundamental distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. Bali exemplifies a profound manifestation of bonding social capital, where communities draw inward (*centripetal*) to protect a sacred core and reinforce tight-knit, localised networks, thereby fostering high social cohesion and cultural preservation. Conversely, Beishan operates by leveraging social capital through centrifugal innovation, strategically projecting its modular heritage outward to form broader, more heterogeneous connections and to link local assets directly into global economic circuits. While Bali leverages internal solidarity to achieve structural stability and resilience against external disruptions, Beishan utilises external bridging mechanisms to drive cross-boundary innovation, demonstrating that both inward cohesion and outward expansion are distinct, vital expressions of community-based social capital (Putnam, 2000).

The foundational divergence lies in the ontology of the cultural core. In Bali, the core is holistic and sacred, embodied in the integrative philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, to have sustainable development as explained by Runa (2012). This core is treated as a fragile, inherited totality, threatened primarily by the commodifying forces of tourism, which serves as a defensive counter-strategy, as described by Greenwood (1989), who warns that commercial tourism risks stripping sacred rituals of their intrinsic meaning. Bridging these perspectives, it becomes clear that the community's perception of threat is not merely economic but rather one of systemic erosion and spiritual dilution. In stark contrast, Beishan's core is modular and secular, shown in a curated portfolio of tangible heritage assets (ancestral halls) and intangible culinary knowledge, valued for their aesthetic and market potential. Here, the perceived threat is not erosion but cultural invisibility and irrelevance within the context of China's rapid modernisation.

The comparison reveals two archetypal models of cultural resilience. Bali's strategy represents a form of managed openness—it engages with global tourism and external influences, but channels this engagement through a defensive, centripetal framework oriented around protecting its holistic socio-spiritual core (*Tri Hita Karana*). This aligns with the concept of Bali: an open fortress, where openness exists alongside a conscious fortification of identity (Nordholt, 2007). Beishan's strategy, conversely, is entrepreneurial and centrifugal; it treats cultural heritage as a dynamic portfolio to be actively curated, remixed, and projected outward to secure economic and cultural relevance. Thus, both communities are "open," but their strategic logics for managing that openness

are fundamentally opposed: one filters engagement through a defensive core, while the other leverages engagement as a primary adaptive tool.

This ontological divergence manifests in distinct mechanisms of action. Bali's centripetal resilience is anchored in ritual-centric, community-based practices characterised by continuity-in-change. Daily offerings and ceremonies like *Nyepi* function as a living social immune system, where the form and context of rituals may adapt to modern pressures—such as tourism schedules or environmental concerns—while their core spiritual purpose and communal function persist. This dynamic process reinforces an “authorised heritage discourse” (Graham & Howard, 2008), one that is community-sanctioned yet historically malleable. These mechanisms generate thick bonding social capital, fortifying group identity through adaptive repetition (Putnam, 2000). Interfaith harmony, therefore, is not a static condition but a managed outcome continuously reproduced through local institutions and face-to-face negotiation within this evolving ritual framework (Bräuchler, 2015).

Beishan, in contrast, operates through project-centric, entrepreneur-led initiatives. Its primary mechanism is “Innovative Fusion,” a deliberate and often rapid synthesis enacted through events like music festivals, fusion cuisine, and adaptive reuse of spaces. This occurs within a dynamic “creative field” (Scott, 2010), where value is generated by attracting new audiences and meeting market demand, thereby generating bridging social capital. Where Bali's resilience is measured by the depth and adaptive fidelity of communal practice, Beishan gauges success by audience engagement, commercial viability, and cultural buzz.

The agents legitimising and driving these mechanisms further crystallise the contrast. Bali's resilience is stewarded by traditional authorities whose legitimacy is derived from inherited roles within a stable social hierarchy. Their role is that of guardians of a sacred order. Critically, this traditional stewardship is often formally partnered with, and at times co-opted by, provincial government authority. This synergy is epitomised by the annual Bali Arts Festival (*Pesta Kesenian Bali*), which has been held without interruption since 1979, with an ever-growing number of participants and spectators, a strong sign of the success of its preservation strategy and of pride in its cultural identity (Figure 3). Officially inaugurated and managed by the provincial government, the festival's content and legitimacy are deeply dependent on the active participation of traditional villages (*desa adat*). Thus, authority in Bali operates through a dual structure: bottom-up stewardship by customary institutions and top-down orchestration by the state, which seeks to harness cultural capital for regional identity and economic policy.



Figure 3. The Bali Arts Festival, held annually since 1979 is a major initiative to preserve and promote Balinese arts while refuting the unfounded claim that Balinese culture has deteriorated as a result of the tourism industry (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra, 2026).

Beishan's transformation, conversely, is orchestrated by a distinct agent: the cultural entrepreneur. Its initiators are figures like festival founders, fusion chefs, and foreign designers, individuals whose authority stems from perceived vision, professional expertise, and demonstrable success in the marketplace. They are initiators and curators, often operating from positions outside traditional structures. While local government in Beishan provides enabling infrastructure and regulatory frameworks, the creative vision and operational drive remain decisively entrepreneurial. This reflects a fundamental shift from integrated heritage guardianship (as seen in Bali's dual system) to a model of project-based, entrepreneurial curation, where cultural value is validated through audience engagement and market logic rather than sacred lineage or state sanction.

Inevitably, the paradoxes and challenges each face are mirror opposites, stemming directly from their core strategies. Bali's tensions arise from the constant friction between maintaining its sacred, bounded integrity and navigating a pluralistic, commercialised environment. Its resilience is a

perpetual exercise in boundary maintenance and managed coexistence. Beishan's difficulties, however, are ironic consequences of its own success. The vibrant cultural economy it created has led to overtourism, commercial saturation, and, most critically, increased top-down governmental control. This trajectory follows a well-documented urban cycle in which artistic pioneering makes a locale desirable, only to invite capital influx and regulatory capture that risk displacing the original creative spirit (Zukin, 2003). Thus, the central dynamic for Bali involves maintaining the integrity of its core through a productive tension with external forces, whereas for Beishan, the imperative is to preserve the grassroots autonomy that defines its core appeal against the very forces of institutionalisation and market co-option that its success invites.

Both models confirm that resilience resides not in resisting change, but in a community's coherent, agent-driven alignment of its cultural core with its strategic engagement of global forces. For instance, Bali's centripetal model is exemplified by the Bali World Culture Celebration. Integrated into the annual *Pesta Kesenian Bali* and organised by the provincial government, this platform strategically deploys international collaboration. By curating performances where global troupes share the stage with local masters, it harnesses the global gaze to validate, finance, and reinforce the island's sacred *adat* system, thus aligning external engagement with the core mandate of cultural preservation. Conversely, Beishan's centrifugal model operates through the Beishan International Tea Culture Festival (Xiangzhou District Government, 2024) (Figure 4). Hosted within a restored ancestral hall, this event strategically fuses the traditional Chaozhou Kongfu Tea ceremony with global beverage trends and international trade forums. This alignment actively repurposes global trends and capital to redefine the village's historic commercial identity, transforming its architectural heritage into a dynamic, market-facing cultural ecosystem. In both cases, global forces are not merely external pressures but become essential resources, strategically engaged by local agents to achieve a coherent vision of resilience—whether to perpetuate a deep tradition or to continuously reinvent a historic one.



Figure 4. The Beishan International Tea Culture Festival takes place on May 19, 2024 at the Yang Great Ancestral Hall in Beishan village (PhotoWeChat account zhxiangzhou, Source: [https://xiangzhou.guangdong.com.cn/2024-05/24/c\\_990057.htm](https://xiangzhou.guangdong.com.cn/2024-05/24/c_990057.htm) ).

Ultimately, these two cases demonstrate that cultural resilience is not a single strategy but a contextual logic of survival. Bali enacts a centripetal logic of fortification, defending its sacred, integrated lifeworld from perceived erosion. Beishan pursues a centrifugal logic of innovation, curating fusion to ensure its cultural relevance in a competitive creative economy. While one guards against the erosion of meaning and the other against cultural obsolescence, both demonstrate that true resilience lies not in resisting global forces, but in the agent-driven art of turning them into a strategic resource.

## 5. Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that cultural resilience is not a universal strategy but a context-specific logic of survival. Bali and Beishan represent two divergent, yet coherent, models shaped by how each community defines its cultural core and perceives external threats.

Bali exemplifies centripetal resilience. Its holistic, sacred identity is defended through inwardly focused rituals and strong social bonding capital, guarding against the threat of commodification and spiritual erosion, which is consistently adaptive to external cultural influences to strengthen Balinese

culture. Beishan embodies centrifugal resilience. Its modular, secular heritage is proactively adapted through entrepreneurial fusion and bridging social capital, innovating to avoid cultural irrelevance in a competitive creative economy.

The key insight is that successful resilience lies not in choosing between preservation and change, but in a community's strategic alignment of its cultural ontology with its mode of engaging global forces. Whether through fortification or innovation, cultural continuity depends on this conscious, intentional coherence

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The corresponding author, on behalf of all authors, declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The corresponding author, on behalf of all authors, declares that popai.pro was utilised in the writing process of this manuscript. These tools were employed for data analysis and language editing, and their contributions are acknowledged accordingly.

### **Author Contributions**

All authors are part of a single research team that conducted the research and drafted the manuscript.

### **Ethics approval**

This study did not involve any ethical procedures, as it utilised narrative and qualitative data collection and was conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines that do not require ethical review for this type of research. Therefore, no formal ethics approval was necessary.

## Data availability

The authors maintain the data that support the findings of this study and are available upon reasonable request. Please contact the corresponding author for access to the data.

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## Author Profiles

**I Putu Permana Mahardika** is a lecturer in the Indonesian Language and Literature Study Program at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. He obtained his doctoral degree in linguistics from Universitas Udayana, Indonesia. His research interests include ecolinguistics, systemic functional linguistics, and

linguistic landscape studies. His current research examines how language constructs ecological relations, cultural values, and development ideologies in public and policy discourse. Email: [permanamahardika@ugm.ac.id](mailto:permanamahardika@ugm.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8308-1654>

**I Gusti Ayu Gde Sosiowati** is a Professor in the Bachelor of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University. She has been a lecturer since 1982, teaching language skills, literature, and linguistics. Her area of expertise is Sociopragmatics, with research interests encompassing language use in social interaction, politeness strategies, discourse analysis, and intercultural communication. She has been actively involved in teaching, supervising student research, and contributing to academic publications in linguistics. Email: [gag\\_sosiowati@unud.ac.id](mailto:gag_sosiowati@unud.ac.id) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1895-5465>

**I Wayan Mulyawan** is a Professor in the Bachelor of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University. He has been a lecturer since 2006, teaching language skills, literature, and linguistics. His area of expertise is Linguistic Landscapes, with research interests encompassing language use in public spaces, language transliteration, and Balinese script. He has been actively involved in teaching, supervising student research, and contributing to academic publications in linguistics. Email: [moelya01@gmail.com](mailto:moelya01@gmail.com) ; ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6893-8036>

**Holger Briel** is a Professor of Cultural Theory and Media Studies at Beijing Normal University and Hong Kong Baptist University. Until 2022, he served as the Dean of the School of Culture and Creativity. He holds a PhD in Cultural Theory from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, an M.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a B.A. in English and German from Eberhardt-Karls-Universität Tübingen, Germany. He has published copiously in media and cultural studies, philosophy, the social sciences, and international management studies and remains active as a journalist for several international newspapers. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the influential Scopus-listed IAFOR Journal of Cultural Studies, sits as an Editor and Joint Editor on many journal boards and is the recipient of numerous prestigious research grants and fellowships. Email: [holger.briel@gmail.com](mailto:holger.briel@gmail.com) ; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9057-0175>

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