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Preserving Local Culture as a Strategy for Sustainable Tourism in Bali

Firman Sinaga¹, I Wayan Mudana², I Ketut Suarja³
Institut Pariwisata dan Bisnis Internasional¹
Institut Seni Indonesia Bali²
Politeknik Negeri Bali³

¹Email: firmanstinaga@ipb-intl.ac.id

²Email : wayanmudana63@gmail.com.

³Email : ketutsuarja@pnb.ac.id

Abstract - Bali, as one of Indonesia's most iconic tourist destinations, is globally celebrated for its rich cultural heritage, traditional arts, and spiritual practices. However, the rapid growth of mass tourism poses significant challenges to the preservation of local culture, potentially leading to cultural commodification and the erosion of community values. This article explores the role of cultural preservation as a strategic pillar for achieving sustainable tourism in Bali. Drawing on qualitative data from stakeholder interviews, local government policy reviews, and ethnographic observations in select Balinese villages, the study examines how traditional customs, rituals, and local wisdom can be integrated into tourism development frameworks. The findings reveal that preserving local culture not only enhances the uniqueness of Bali as a destination but also strengthens community identity, supports local economies, and fosters environmentally responsible tourism practices. Moreover, the involvement of local communities in tourism planning and cultural interpretation is identified as a critical factor in ensuring long-term sustainability. The paper proposes a model of culturally sustainable tourism that emphasizes collaboration between government institutions, private tourism operators, and indigenous communities. By aligning cultural preservation efforts with sustainable development goals (SDGs), Bali can mitigate the adverse impacts of overtourism while enhancing its global competitiveness. This research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism by demonstrating that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is not merely a matter of cultural pride, but a pragmatic and necessary strategy for resilient tourism development. The insights offered may serve as a reference for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and cultural practitioners seeking to balance economic growth with the protection of cultural authenticity in other heritage-rich destinations.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, cultural preservation, Bali, community-based tourism, cultural heritage, local identity, tourism planning, SDGs, tourism sustainability, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing economic sectors globally, contributing significantly to national incomes, employment generation, and international exchange. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2023), tourism accounts for approximately 10% of global GDP and one in every ten jobs worldwide. In developing economies like Indonesia, the tourism industry serves as a vital economic driver,

especially in culturally rich regions such as Bali. Renowned for its distinctive blend of Hindu rituals, traditional dances, artisanal crafts, and spiritual landscapes, Bali has become a magnet for both leisure tourists and cultural explorers. However, the island's growing popularity also brings forth complex challenges, particularly related to cultural degradation, environmental stress, and the socio-economic imbalance between locals and stakeholders in the tourism value chain. As Bali continues to attract millions of visitors annually, there is growing concern over the island's ability to sustain its cultural identity amidst the pressures of mass tourism and global homogenization (Cole, 2007; Picard, 1996). The commodification of cultural practices—where traditional rituals are transformed into staged performances for tourist consumption—risks eroding their intrinsic spiritual and communal significance (Greenwood, 1989; McKercher & du Cros, 2002). This phenomenon has prompted scholars and practitioners to advocate for the integration of cultural preservation within broader sustainable tourism frameworks (UNESCO, 2021; Richards, 2018). In response, sustainable tourism has evolved to include not only environmental and economic considerations but also the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage as a critical dimension of destination management. This paper explores the strategic role of local cultural preservation in achieving sustainable tourism development in Bali. It argues that sustainable tourism must go beyond minimizing environmental impacts and maximizing economic returns; it must also prioritize the continuity, vitality, and authenticity of local traditions and identities. The paper begins with a comprehensive review of literature on sustainable tourism and cultural preservation, followed by an analysis of Bali's tourism evolution and the impacts of cultural commodification. It concludes by proposing a culturally sensitive tourism model that emphasizes community participation, cultural revitalization, and policy integration.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainable Tourism: Evolution and Core Principles

The concept of sustainable tourism emerged in response to the growing realization that uncontrolled tourism development can lead to environmental degradation, cultural disintegration, and socio-economic inequalities (Butler, 1999). Sustainable tourism seeks to balance the needs of tourists, host communities, and the environment by promoting long-term, equitable, and responsible development (Sharpley, 2009). According to the UNWTO (2023), sustainable tourism should “make optimal use of environmental resources, respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, and ensure viable long-term economic operations.” Originally rooted in environmental conservation, sustainable tourism has since expanded to encompass broader dimensions such as social justice, cultural integrity, and governance (Hall, 2001). In the context of heritage destinations, this expansion has led to the inclusion of cultural sustainability as a core principle (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Cultural sustainability involves maintaining the diversity of cultural expressions, promoting intergenerational knowledge transmission, and preserving both tangible and intangible heritage in the face of globalization (Soini & Birkeland, 2014).

2.2. Cultural Tourism and the Challenge of Commodification

Cultural tourism refers to travel motivated primarily by the desire to experience and understand a destination's cultural resources, including architecture, cuisine, festivals, language, and lifestyles (Richards, 2018). While cultural tourism has the potential to generate income and foster cultural appreciation, it also poses risks of commodification, where cultural practices are decontextualized, simplified, or commercialized to meet tourist expectations (Greenwood, 1989). This commodification may result in what MacCannell (1973) termed “staged authenticity,” in which cultural performances are modified or fabricated to provide tourists with a palatable, exotic, yet controlled experience. In the case of Bali, scholars have documented the shift of sacred rituals, such as the kecak dance or the ogoh-ogoh parade, from sacred religious practices to tourist-oriented spectacles (Picard, 1996; Cole, 2007). While such performances can generate revenue and global visibility, they risk undermining the spiritual and communal dimensions of these traditions, especially when local communities are excluded from decision-making processes (Yamashita, 2003).

2.3. Community-Based Tourism and Participatory Models

29 To counter the negative externalities of cultural tourism, scholars and development agencies have promoted community-based tourism (CBT) as a more inclusive and sustainable approach (Scheyvens, 1999). CBT emphasizes local ownership, community participation, and cultural empowerment. It allows communities to control tourism activities, retain economic benefits, and reinforce their cultural values and identity (Murphy, 1985). In Bali, several successful CBT initiatives have emerged, particularly in traditional villages like Penglipuran, Tenganan, and Trunyan, where community leaders actively regulate tourist access and cultural interpretation (Yudhistira & Purnamasari, 2020). These models offer practical pathways for aligning tourism development with cultural resilience, provided that sufficient institutional support and capacity building are in place.

2.4. Bali's Tourism Landscape: Between Globalization and Localization

28 Bali's tourism boom began in the 1970s, driven by international interest in its scenic landscapes, artistic traditions, and spiritual practices (Howe, 2005). The island was promoted as a "paradise" in global tourism circuits, resulting in rapid infrastructure development and a surge in tourist arrivals (Picard, 1996). However, this growth has come at a cost. Issues such as land-use conflict, water scarcity, environmental pollution, and the erosion of traditional values have become increasingly pronounced (Cole, 2007; Geriya, 2001). While tourism remains a major source of income for Balinese households, the island has also experienced a shift in cultural priorities. Traditional occupations like farming and craftsmanship are often abandoned in favor of tourism-related jobs, leading to the weakening of local knowledge systems (Lansing, 2009). Furthermore, the pressure to cater to international tastes has influenced the standardization of cultural performances, diminishing their originality and community relevance (McKean, 1989). Despite these challenges, Bali also presents a fertile ground for innovation in cultural preservation and tourism synergy. Several local organizations, such as the Bali Cultural Agency (Dinas Kebudayaan Bali) and Yayasan Wisnu, have worked to document, revitalize, and protect intangible heritage through education, policy advocacy, and digital archiving (Wirjomartono, 2019). These efforts underline the importance of an integrated approach that aligns cultural preservation with sustainable tourism goals.

2.5. Policy Frameworks and Global Guidelines

11 Globally, institutions such as UNESCO and the UNWTO have underscored the importance of cultural heritage in sustainable tourism. UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) emphasizes the need for state parties to recognize and support living heritage practices. The UNWTO (2022) has also developed guidelines for tourism policymakers to incorporate cultural sustainability into national tourism strategies. Indonesia, as a signatory to UNESCO conventions and an advocate of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has incorporated cultural preservation into its national tourism strategy. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) promotes the concept of "pariwisata berbasis budaya" (culture-based tourism) as a means to sustain both economic and cultural capital (Kemenparekraf, 2022). In Bali, local regulations such as the *Perda Provinsi Bali No. 4 Tahun 2020* on Traditional Villages reinforce the authority of local communities in managing cultural tourism activities. However, implementation remains uneven, and there is a need for greater coherence between national policies, regional plans, and grassroots realities. Bridging this policy gap requires sustained collaboration among stakeholders, transparent governance mechanisms, and culturally responsive education systems.

40 The sustainability of tourism in culturally rich destinations like Bali depends not only on ecological and economic variables but also on the ability to preserve and revitalize local culture. The literature reveals that while cultural tourism can serve as a vehicle for heritage protection and community development, it also harbors risks of commodification and cultural erosion. Strategies such as community-based tourism, participatory governance, and cultural revitalization programs offer viable alternatives to exploitative tourism models. This article positions the preservation of Balinese culture as a central strategy for sustainable tourism development. By synthesizing insights from academic research, policy frameworks, and local practices, it aims to develop a culturally sensitive model of tourism that prioritizes community agency, cultural integrity, and long-term resilience. The subsequent sections will present the

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research methodology, key findings, and a proposed framework for integrating cultural preservation into Bali's sustainable tourism agenda.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the strategies, practices, and perceptions surrounding the preservation of local culture as a foundation for sustainable tourism development in Bali. A qualitative methodology is deemed appropriate as it enables an in-depth exploration of cultural phenomena and allows for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, especially those of local stakeholders (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design focuses on selected communities and tourism practices in Bali, where traditional culture is actively maintained, promoted, or threatened by tourism activity. Through a combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the study investigates how local communities, cultural practitioners, tourism actors, and policymakers interpret, preserve, and integrate cultural heritage within tourism development frameworks. This triangulated approach enhances the validity and richness of the findings (Yin, 2018).

3.2. Study Area

The research was conducted in three culturally significant and tourism-active areas in Bali:

- Penglipuran Village (Bangli Regency) – a well-known traditional village famous for its community-based tourism model and cultural preservation efforts;
- Tenganan Pegringsingan (Karangasem Regency) – one of Bali's oldest Bali Aga villages with unique weaving and ritual traditions;
- Ubud (Gianyar Regency) – a prominent cultural tourism hub experiencing intense commercialization of cultural performances.

These sites were selected based on their contrasting degrees of tourism intensity, community involvement, and cultural resilience. The selection aims to provide comparative insights into the diverse ways Balinese communities navigate cultural preservation in tourism settings.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

a. Semi-Structured Interviews

A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders between January and April 2025. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their roles in tourism and cultural affairs. These included:

- 9 community leaders (*bendesa adat, kelian desa*);
- 5 local cultural practitioners (dancers, artisans, spiritual leaders);
- 4 tourism entrepreneurs (homestay owners, tour guides);
- 6 government officials (Dinas Pariwisata Bali, Dinas Kebudayaan);
- 4 representatives from NGOs involved in cultural sustainability.

Interview questions were designed to explore perceptions of cultural identity, cultural commodification, local participation, and policy implementation. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or Balinese, depending on the interviewee's preference, and subsequently transcribed and translated for analysis.

b. Participant Observation

The researcher conducted participant observations during several cultural events and tourism activities in the study locations, including:

- *Galungan* and *Kuningan* rituals in Penglipuran;
- *Mekaré-karé* (Perang Pandan) festival in Tenganan;
- Daily cultural dance performances and art markets in Ubud.

Field notes were systematically recorded, focusing on the interaction between tourists and cultural practices, the behavior of hosts, tourist attitudes, and the authenticity or performative aspects of events. Observational data served to contextualize and cross-validate interview responses.

c. Document and Policy Analysis

The research also reviewed a range of secondary sources, including:

- Local regulations and cultural policy documents, such as *Perda Provinsi Bali No. 4 Tahun 2020* and the Rencana Induk Pembangunan Kepariwisata Bali;
- Strategic reports from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemendikbud, 2022);
- Cultural preservation initiatives and guidelines from UNESCO and UNWTO;
- Online and printed promotional materials by local tourism offices and cultural organizations.

This document analysis enabled the identification of existing policy frameworks and institutional efforts in cultural sustainability.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). These phases included:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and field notes;
2. Generating initial codes to identify recurring concepts related to cultural preservation, community roles, tourism impacts, and policy engagement;
3. Searching for themes, such as "cultural commodification," "community empowerment," "ritual authenticity," and "policy-practice gaps";
4. Reviewing themes to ensure coherence and relevance across all datasets;
5. Defining and naming themes to construct a narrative aligned with the study's objectives;
6. Producing the report by integrating findings with literature and theoretical insights.

NVivo 12 software was used to assist in data management, coding, and theme development.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of [University/Institution Name]. All participants provided informed consent and were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and the secure storage of interview data. Special care was taken when engaging with sacred or community-restricted cultural practices. The researcher sought permissions from local authorities (*bendesa adat*) before attending rituals or accessing heritage sites. The research approach emphasized cultural sensitivity, respect, and reciprocity, ensuring that the findings could be shared with local communities in meaningful ways.

3.6. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations were acknowledged in the methodological design:

- The qualitative nature of the research may limit generalizability beyond Bali; however, the goal was to generate in-depth, contextual insights rather than statistical generalizations.
- Access to some sacred ceremonies was restricted to outsiders, limiting the depth of participant observation in those contexts.
- Language barriers and nuances in Balinese cultural terminology required careful translation and local validation to ensure accuracy.

Despite these limitations, the multi-site, multi-method approach provides a robust basis for understanding the intersection of culture and sustainable tourism in Bali.

3.7. Methodological Justification and Alignment with Sustainable Tourism Research

The methodology adopted in this study is aligned with established practices in cultural tourism and sustainable development research. According to Yin (2018), case study research is particularly suited for exploratory investigations in real-life, context-bound settings. In tourism studies, qualitative methodologies have been recommended for capturing the socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability, particularly when dealing with intangible heritage, local knowledge, and community dynamics (Timothy & Boyd, 2003; McKercher & du Cros, 2002). Furthermore, the participatory and grounded orientation of this research aligns with the cultural sustainability framework proposed by Soini and Birkeland (2014), which calls for holistic, place-

based, and locally embedded inquiry. By focusing on voices from within Balinese communities and institutions, the study also supports the decolonization of tourism knowledge—a critical theme in contemporary tourism scholarship (Hollinshead, 2009).

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings of the research and critically discusses them within the broader theoretical and practical contexts of sustainable tourism and cultural preservation. The discussion is structured around five major themes that emerged from the data: (1) The Evolving Nature of Cultural Identity in Bali, (2) Community Participation in Tourism and Heritage Management, (3) Cultural Commodification and Ritual Authenticity, (4) Policy-Community Gaps and Local Governance, and (5) Towards a Model of Culturally Sustainable Tourism. Each theme is supported by empirical data and enriched with insights from relevant literature.

4.1. The Evolving Nature of Cultural Identity in Bali

The findings indicate that Balinese cultural identity is not static but rather dynamic and adaptive in response to both internal socio-economic transformations and external tourism influences. Interview participants consistently expressed pride in their cultural heritage—such as *upacara adat* (traditional ceremonies), *tari-tarian* (traditional dances), and *subak* (irrigation systems)—but also acknowledged the pressures to adjust or modify these expressions to align with tourist expectations. A community leader in Penglipuran remarked: “Our culture is not only for display; it is our way of life. But tourism has made us think differently—sometimes we have to ‘perform’ it, not just live it.” This quote encapsulates the tension between cultural continuity and performance. Cultural identity is being rearticulated through the lens of tourism, with the dual purpose of preservation and presentation. As Richards (2018) notes, the rise of cultural tourism has transformed culture into a strategic asset for destination branding, which, while economically beneficial, can lead to the loss of cultural depth if not managed properly. These findings resonate with Picard’s (1996) argument that tourism in Bali has contributed to the redefinition of Balinese identity, where tradition becomes a commodity negotiated in the marketplace. However, this dynamic process does not always imply degradation. In several cases, tourism has stimulated cultural revitalization, especially among youth who learn traditional dances or crafts to engage in the tourism economy. This suggests that tourism can serve as a vehicle for cultural transmission, provided that cultural education remains grounded in authentic community contexts (Yamashita, 2003; Lansing, 2009).

4.2. Community Participation in Tourism and Heritage Management

Across all three case study sites—Penglipuran, Tenganan, and Ubud—community participation emerged as a pivotal factor in ensuring the sustainability of cultural tourism. In Penglipuran, the village governance system (*desa adat*) plays a proactive role in regulating tourism activities, allocating revenue for temple upkeep, and setting visitor codes of conduct. The community maintains control over tourism narratives, ensuring that performances and rituals are explained in culturally accurate ways. As one *kelian adat* in Penglipuran stated: “We decide what can be shown to tourists. Not everything is for the camera. Some rituals are sacred and must stay private.” This statement underscores the importance of local agency in cultural tourism governance. Where communities have a strong voice, tourism tends to align more closely with cultural preservation rather than exploitation. This aligns with the community-based tourism (CBT) framework proposed by Scheyvens (1999), which emphasizes empowerment, local control, and equitable benefit-sharing. In contrast, Ubud demonstrates the challenges of diminished local control in a highly commercialized tourism environment. Here, the proliferation of privately owned cultural venues has diluted community authority, leading to competitive standardization and excessive repetition of rituals such as *Legong* or *Barong* dances. Although these performances generate income, several respondents from Ubud lamented the loss of ritual context: “We perform the same dance three times a day for tourists. It becomes routine, not sacred. Our young people don’t understand its meaning anymore.” These findings confirm the concern expressed by McKercher and du Cros (2002) that without community participation, cultural tourism can devolve into mere spectacle. By contrast, Tenganan illustrates a middle ground, where tourism is carefully managed to respect cultural integrity. Visitors are allowed during festivals like *Mekaré-karé*, but with restrictions and community-led interpretation. This comparative insight

highlights the need for a participatory governance model in which communities are not merely beneficiaries of tourism, but active planners, managers, and interpreters of their heritage.

4.3. Cultural Commodification and Ritual Authenticity

Cultural commodification emerged as one of the most complex and contested themes in the research. While all respondents acknowledged that tourism had brought economic benefits, they also expressed ambivalence about the commodification of rituals, dress, crafts, and performances. Some viewed commodification as a necessary adaptation to modern economic realities, while others feared it threatened the spiritual foundations of Balinese culture. The dual role of Balinese culture—as a lived spiritual tradition and a commercial tourism product—raises difficult ethical and practical questions. Greenwood's (1989) concept of "culture by the pound" aptly describes the dilemma: when cultural expressions are produced and consumed like goods, their meanings can be diluted or distorted. For example, some artisans reported altering traditional motifs to suit foreign tastes, and dance instructors admitted shortening or modifying sequences to make them more entertaining for international audiences. One dancer in Ubud observed: "Tourists like the dramatic parts, not the whole ritual. So we cut it. But then it's no longer the real story." This "selective editing" of culture represents a form of staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973), where the outer appearance is preserved, but the inner significance is compromised. However, other respondents saw these adaptations as forms of cultural negotiation, not betrayal. A younger artisan in Tenganan remarked: "We change a little, but the essence is still there. It's a way to survive and be proud of our culture." These differing viewpoints suggest that commodification is not inherently negative, but depends on the degree of community consent, contextual understanding, and benefit distribution. When managed ethically, cultural tourism can serve as a form of "cultural entrepreneurship" that empowers local creators while keeping traditions alive (Smith, 2009).

4.4. Policy-Community Gaps and Local Governance

Despite the existence of formal policy frameworks supporting cultural preservation—such as *Perda Provinsi Bali No. 4 Tahun 2020* and the Rencana Induk Pembangunan Kepariwisata Bali (RIPPARNAS)—the research found significant gaps between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities. Government officials interviewed acknowledged the importance of culture-based tourism, but also cited limitations in enforcement, budget allocation, and inter-agency coordination. A representative from Dinas Kebudayaan Bali stated: "We have the policies, but implementation is uneven. Some communities are very active, others lack resources. We can't monitor everything." Moreover, several community leaders expressed skepticism about top-down approaches and highlighted the lack of meaningful consultation during tourism planning processes. In Ubud, for example, rapid development of hotels and cultural venues often occurred without adequate input from local residents, leading to tension and feelings of disenfranchisement. "They come, build, make money, and we just watch. The culture becomes a brand, not a belief." This disconnect underscores the need for inclusive governance models that integrate bottom-up and top-down mechanisms. As noted by Hall (2001), sustainable tourism requires multi-level cooperation and policy coherence across different government layers and civil society actors. The findings also suggest that *desa adat* (customary village structures) can serve as effective governance units for cultural tourism, provided they are supported by legal recognition and resources. Strengthening these institutions may bridge the policy-community gap and enable more context-sensitive management of tourism development.

5.5. Towards a Model of Culturally Sustainable Tourism

Based on the findings, this study proposes a Culturally Sustainable Tourism (CST) Model for Bali, centered on five interrelated pillars:

a. Community Agency and Ownership

Local communities must have authority over what aspects of their culture are shared, how they are presented, and how benefits are distributed. This includes decision-making power in planning, marketing, and revenue allocation.

b. Cultural Education and Interpretation

Tourism should include mechanisms for educating both tourists and hosts about the meaning, values, and history of cultural practices. This can involve cultural briefings, local guides, interpretive signage, and community-run museums.

c. Ethical Commodification Frameworks

Cultural products can be commercialized ethically if they retain authenticity, are community-produced, and contribute to cultural continuity. Policies should support local entrepreneurs while discouraging exploitation and misrepresentation.

d. Adaptive Governance and Policy Alignment

Tourism and cultural policies must be flexible, inclusive, and grounded in local contexts. Strengthening *desa adat* structures and ensuring alignment with provincial and national strategies are crucial for effective cultural tourism governance.

e. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

There is a need for continuous monitoring of tourism's impact on culture, using both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Participatory evaluation methods can empower communities to assess and adjust tourism practices over time. This CST model complements global guidelines, such as UNESCO's (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the UNWTO's (2022) recommendations on tourism and culture synergies. It offers a contextually grounded framework that may also be adapted for other heritage-rich destinations facing similar challenges.

The research demonstrates that preserving local culture is not merely a matter of heritage conservation, but a strategic imperative for sustainable tourism development in Bali. While tourism has undeniably introduced economic opportunities and revitalized some aspects of Balinese culture, it has also catalyzed processes of commodification, cultural dilution, and community marginalization. These outcomes are not inevitable, but contingent on governance structures, community agency, and policy alignment. Through comparative analysis of three Balinese locations, this study shows that community participation, cultural interpretation, and ethical commodification are key determinants of whether cultural tourism contributes to sustainability or degradation. While challenges remain – especially in commercialized zones like Ubud – examples from Penglipuran and Tenganan illustrate the potential of culturally grounded tourism to enhance both heritage protection and socio-economic resilience. Ultimately, the path to sustainable tourism in Bali lies in co-creating tourism practices that respect cultural integrity, empower local actors, and educate both hosts and guests. By embedding culture at the heart of tourism strategy, Bali can protect its identity, meet the expectations of responsible travelers, and chart a more resilient and inclusive future.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the integral role of cultural preservation in advancing sustainable tourism in Bali. Amid the complexities of globalization, rapid tourism development, and increasing commodification of cultural assets, the protection and revitalization of Balinese culture emerge not only as an ethical imperative but also as a practical strategy for long-term tourism resilience. This conclusion consolidates the main insights derived from the study and positions them within the broader academic discourse on sustainable tourism, cultural resilience, and community empowerment. First and foremost, the research affirms that Balinese cultural identity – encompassing religious rituals, artistic expression, customary law (*adat*), and architectural traditions – is deeply intertwined with the tourism experience. Tourists are drawn not merely by Bali's natural beauty but by its vibrant culture, which provides a unique and immersive experience. Therefore, the sustainability of the tourism industry in Bali is inseparable from the sustainability of its cultural heritage. Cultural loss, if unmitigated, may result in reduced tourist satisfaction, decreased differentiation in a competitive tourism market, and ultimately, economic decline (Su, Wall, & Ma, 2014). This study also demonstrates that community participation is critical in cultural preservation efforts. Villages such as Penglipuran and Tenganan Pegringsingan illustrate how localized cultural governance, supported by traditional institutions like the banjar and *desa adat*, can protect cultural integrity while benefiting economically from cultural tourism. These cases reveal that bottom-up strategies – where communities are not passive recipients of tourism but active managers of their heritage – foster

9 more inclusive and sustainable development (Cole, 2006). Such participatory models not only maintain cultural authenticity but also contribute to local pride, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and equitable distribution of tourism benefits (Novelli, 2016). Another major conclusion drawn is the importance of collaborative governance between local communities, government bodies, and private sector actors. Top-down policy implementation without contextual understanding can lead to misaligned objectives and ineffective preservation outcomes. As seen in the case studies, synergistic efforts—such as the integration of cultural zoning laws with tourism licensing, or the joint development of community-based tourism programs—are more effective in aligning tourism growth with cultural sustainability goals (Timothy & Tosun, 2003). In particular, the Balinese government's role as facilitator and regulator is vital in ensuring that tourism development adheres to spatial, cultural, and environmental thresholds. Furthermore, the study highlights the urgent need to redefine success in tourism beyond mere economic metrics. Indicators such as community well-being, preservation of intangible cultural heritage, ecological balance, and intergenerational equity must be incorporated into sustainability frameworks. The UNESCO guidelines on cultural sustainability (2017) and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 11.4) provide a global standard against which Bali can benchmark its efforts. By incorporating such multidimensional indicators, tourism development plans can better reflect the values and aspirations of the local population (Salazar, 2012). Despite encouraging examples of best practices, challenges remain. The commodification of culture, often driven by market demands, risks reducing sacred practices into mere performances for tourist consumption (Greenwood, 1989). Likewise, over-tourism in certain areas threatens the spatial and temporal integrity of cultural rituals. Additionally, unequal access to tourism benefits exacerbates social inequalities and undermines community cohesion. These concerns point to the necessity of continuous monitoring, capacity building, and education at the grassroots level. Programs that train youth in heritage conservation, promote ethical tourism practices, and enhance the cultural competence of tourism operators are essential to address these vulnerabilities. From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the discourse on culturally sustainable tourism, advocating for an integrated model that places culture not as a peripheral ornament but as a central pillar in tourism policy and planning. The findings validate the propositions of sustainable tourism literature that emphasize local empowerment (Scheyvens, 1999), cultural authenticity (MacCannell, 1973), and stakeholder collaboration (Byrd, 2007). Moreover, the Bali case offers a replicable model for other destinations facing similar dilemmas between development and cultural conservation. In conclusion, preserving local culture is not a constraint to tourism growth—it is its very foundation and future. By recognizing culture as a dynamic, living system that must be nurtured rather than exploited, Bali can forge a development path that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally responsible. To achieve this vision, a paradigm shift is required—from treating culture as a product to be consumed, to viewing it as a process to be sustained. Through collaborative governance, community agency, and policy coherence, Bali has the opportunity to lead globally as a model of culturally rooted sustainable tourism. The insights provided by this study offer actionable recommendations for policymakers, tourism professionals, and local communities. Future research could further explore the intersection of digital technology and cultural preservation, investigate the impacts of cultural tourism on younger generations in Bali, or evaluate the long-term effects of post-pandemic tourism policies on cultural integrity. As the global tourism industry continues to recover and evolve, the Balinese experience provides a powerful testament to the enduring value of culture in shaping not only tourism economies but sustainable futures.

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