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Balinese ancestral traditions negotiating cultural preservation, commodification, and resilience in Bali's modern tourism economy

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Abstract - Balinese tourism depends on ancestral traditions, yet modernization and commercialization increasingly reshape religious, spatial, and artistic practices. This study aims to analyse how Balinese ancestral traditions are preserved, commodified, and creatively adapted within contemporary tourism development, and how these processes affect identity, space, and local wisdom. Using a qualitative approach, it synthesizes empirical legal studies of customary villages, ethnographic and architectural research on traditional houses and homestays, and cultural analyses of myths, dance, and spiritual practices. The analysis compares transformation patterns in architecture and rituals, the management of customary land and village tourism, and strategies of cultural resilience such as Tri Hita Karana-based regulation and adaptive ritual practice. Findings show a paradox: tourism can erode meanings, spiritual depth, and livelihoods, while simultaneously motivating reconstruction, innovation, and strategic filtering of external influences. The conclusion argues that sustainable Balinese tourism requires community-led, regulation-supported models that prioritize living traditions over purely aesthetic cultural display.

Keywords: Balinese ancestral traditions; cultural tourism; local wisdom; commodification; sustainable tourism development

1. Introduction

Bali's ancestral traditions—rooted in Hindu cosmology, *desa-kala-patra*, and village-based institutions such as *banjar* and *subak*—have become the main attraction and organizing principle of its tourism industry. Rituals, temples, performing arts, myths, architecture, and agrarian landscapes form a cultural system that has long structured everyday life and identity, while also being reconfigured as “cultural tourism” since the colonial era and, later, mass tourism expansion (Adhika & Putra, 2020; Palar & Hewat, 2024; Mahagangga et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2024; Mayuzumi, 2021).

Rapid tourism growth, over-tourism, and commodification now threaten environmental sustainability, spiritual depth, and the socio-cultural fabric of customary communities (Januar, 2024; Sari et al., 2024; Akbar et al., 2024). Spiritual practices, performing arts, myths, and traditional houses are increasingly packaged as products, risking loss of authenticity, value dilution, and intergenerational transmission gaps (Mahendra, 2024; Sutana, 2025; Putra et al., 2025; Mahagangga et al., 2025; Hidajat et al., 2025; Mayuzumi, 2021).

Yet communities also mobilize traditions as resources for resilience, crisis recovery, and new sustainable models, especially after shocks such as COVID-19 (Gunawan, 2025; Hanita et al., 2024; Suyasa et al., 2024; Shantika & Bestari, 2024; Rosalina et al., 2023). Understanding how ancestral traditions negotiate preservation, commodification, and resilience is therefore crucial for designing fair and sustainable tourism futures.



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This study uses ancestral traditions to refer to inherited ritual, spiritual, artistic, spatial, and legal-customary practices embedded in Balinese Hindu cosmology and village life (Sutana, 2025; Palar & Hewat, 2024; Surata et al., 2024; Rosalina et al., 2023). Commodification denotes the translation of these practices into marketable experiences, performances, goods, or spaces for tourists, often involving recontextualization and standardization (Adhika & Putra, 2020; Mahagangga et al., 2025; Hidajat et al., 2025; Hwang, 2024; Mayuzumi, 2021).

Cultural preservation is understood not as static conservation, but as dynamic efforts—formal and informal—to maintain meanings, practices, and identities while adapting to change (Mahendra, 2024; Adhika & Putra, 2020; Bagus et al., 2025; Surata et al., 2024). Resilience refers to the capacity of communities, spaces, and practices to absorb shocks, reorganize, and sustain cultural integrity amid pressures from tourism, crises, and globalization (Sutana, 2025; Suyasa et al., 2024; Bagus et al., 2025; Shantika & Bestari, 2024).

The analysis is grounded in three complementary perspectives. Cultural resilience theory views Balinese communities as actively adapting ancestral practices—through ritual flexibility, hybrid models, and selective innovation—to sustain identity amid commodification and crisis (Sutana, 2025; Hanita et al., 2024; Suyasa et al., 2024; Shantika & Bestari, 2024; Rosalina et al., 2023).

Commodification and cultural tourism theory examines how heritage is packaged, staged, and reinterpreted, creating tensions between spectacle and spirituality, but also opportunities for reconstruction and re-creation of tradition (Mahendra, 2024; Adhika & Putra, 2020; Mahagangga et al., 2025; Hidajat et al., 2025; Hwang, 2024; Mayuzumi, 2021).

Spatial and landscape theories, including Lefebvre's production of space and cultural landscape approaches, illuminate how traditional houses, village space, and ritual landscapes are reordered under tourism economies, revealing paradoxical coexistence of preserved forms and altered meanings (Adhika & Putra, 2020; Putra et al., 2025; Bagus et al., 2025). These are complemented by sustainable tourism and TALC (Tourism Area Life Cycle) models to situate Bali's trajectory of mass tourism, decline risks, and revitalization strategies that attempt to re-centre local culture and ecological limits (Gunawan, 2025; Januar, 2024; Sari et al., 2024). Collectively, these frameworks help explain how Balinese ancestral traditions are simultaneously constrained, commodified, and strategically mobilized in the modern tourism economy.

Recent studies highlight both the protective and transformative effects of tourism on Balinese identity and culture. Research on cultural identity shows that tourism amplifies cultural expression and funds rituals, while also flattening culture into aesthetic performances and intensifying over-tourism and urbanization (Palar & Hewat, 2024; Mahendra, 2024; Shantika & Bestari, 2024; Sari et al., 2024; Mayuzumi, 2021).

Recent studies consistently argue that Balinese tourism can contribute to cultural preservation when development is guided by local wisdom, community participation, and sustainability principles rather than purely economic objectives. Tourism is increasingly viewed as a mechanism for maintaining cultural identity while generating economic benefits, although its long-term success depends on balancing conservation and commercialization (Mudana et al., 2025).

The literature consistently shows that tourism functions as both an opportunity and a challenge for the continuity of Balinese ancestral traditions. The rapid growth of cultural and spiritual tourism has intensified the commodification of rituals, religious practices, and sacred spaces, transforming many cultural expressions into market-oriented products. Although commercialization generates financial resources for cultural preservation and local livelihoods, it may also weaken spiritual authenticity and alter the original meanings of rituals, ceremonies, and religious symbols (Sutana, 2025; Hwang, 2024).

Tourism also reshapes Balinese cultural identity through continuous interaction with visitors. While it enhances international recognition and revitalizes cultural performances, ongoing adaptation to tourist preferences can gradually redefine local identities, traditional architecture, and cultural landscapes. Traditional houses, agricultural landscapes, and sacred spaces are increasingly modified to accommodate tourism facilities, often preserving their visual



appearance while reducing their cosmological and philosophical significance (Mahendra, 2024; Putra et al., 2019; Putra et al., 2025; Putra & Adhika, 2023).

Several studies emphasize that community agency plays a decisive role in determining tourism outcomes. Community-based wellness tourism, village tourism, and traditional healing initiatives demonstrate that locally controlled enterprises rooted in Balinese philosophy, Tri Hita Karana, and indigenous knowledge can simultaneously support economic development and cultural preservation. Similarly, hybrid models integrating rituals into homestays, traditional healing, and cultural experiences illustrate how communities adapt to tourism while maintaining core spiritual values (Hubner et al., 2025; Surpi et al., 2025; Surata et al., 2024).

Research further indicates that myths, performing arts, and ritual performances are increasingly adapted for tourist consumption. Although commercialization improves cultural visibility and creates economic opportunities for artists, repeated modification may diminish symbolic meanings, moral values, and intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Sustainable tourism therefore depends on maintaining community control over cultural representation, equitable benefit distribution, and governance that prioritizes cultural resilience rather than market demand alone (Mahagangga et al., 2025; Hidajat et al., 2025; Mayuzumi, 2021). Overall, existing scholarship demonstrates that Balinese culture is neither passively preserved nor inevitably commodified. Instead, it is continuously negotiated through interactions among customary institutions, local communities, tourism markets, and government policies. Future research should therefore adopt more integrated approaches that examine how governance, community participation, and local wisdom collectively strengthen the long-term resilience of Balinese ancestral traditions while accommodating sustainable tourism development (Judijanto, 2026; Spitz, 2025; Mudana et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop, several interrelated research problems emerge. First, how do Balinese ancestral traditions—ritual, spatial, artistic, and spiritual—negotiate the dual pressures of preservation and commodification in different tourism settings, from villages and cultural landscapes to urban beaches and performance venues? Second, in what ways do commodification processes alter the meanings, authority structures, and transmission of ancestral practices, particularly for younger generations and customary law communities facing over-tourism and environmental stress? Third, which forms of cultural resilience are being developed—through Tri Hita Karana-based governance, hybrid economic-ritual arrangements, or alternative tourism models—and how effectively do they balance economic benefit with spiritual integrity and ecological limits? Finally, how can insights from these negotiations inform more just and sustainable tourism policies that recognize ancestral traditions as living systems rather than mere attractions, while ensuring that local communities retain agency over cultural change in Bali’s modern tourism economy?

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection

Most relevant studies use qualitative, ethnographic or case study approaches to capture lived experiences of commodification, preservation, and resilience in Bali’s tourism context ¹²³⁴⁺⁵MORE. A similar study would adopt a qualitative case study focused on selected traditional villages and tourism sites (e.g., Penglipuran, Ubud, Legian, temple complexes).

Table 2. Study Sites and Participants

Element	Examples / Rationale
Sites	Tourism villages, cultural landscapes, temples, studios (Sutana, 2025; Surata et al., 2021; Pratiwi & Wikantiyoso, 2022).

Element	Examples / Rationale
Actors	Tourism villages, cultural landscapes, temples, studios (Sutana, 2025; Surata et al., 2021; Pratiwi & Wikantiyoso, 2022; Mayuzumi, 2021).

This study employed multiple qualitative data collection techniques to examine the relationship between ethnic tourism, cultural preservation, and community resilience in Bali. Participant observation was conducted at traditional rituals, cultural performances, homestays, craft workshops, tourism villages, and sacred sites. Through direct observation, the researcher explored how ancestral traditions are practiced, adapted, and presented within tourism contexts while examining interactions between local communities and visitors.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including customary leaders, cultural practitioners (e.g., dancers, woodcarvers, traditional healers, and yoga instructors), tourism entrepreneurs, government officials, and domestic and international tourists. These interviews explored perceptions of cultural authenticity, commercialization, community participation, local wisdom, and the opportunities and challenges created by ethnic tourism. The semi-structured format enabled participants to provide detailed insights while maintaining consistency with the research objectives.

Document analysis complemented the field data through the examination of regional tourism regulations, customary village rules (*awig-awig*), *lontar* manuscripts, tourism development plans, and other policy documents. These materials were analysed to understand how cultural preservation and tourism development are represented within institutional frameworks. To enrich the findings, supplementary surveys were administered to selected artisans and craftspeople to collect information on the economic benefits of tourism, market demand, cultural commercialization, and challenges in preserving traditional craftsmanship. The survey findings served as supporting evidence and facilitated data triangulation.

2.2 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts, observation notes, field diaries, survey results, and documentary materials were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns and themes. The analysis focused on cultural commodification, authenticity, community participation, local wisdom, cultural identity, heritage preservation, adaptive resilience, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and the balance between conservation and commercialization.

A comparative analysis was then undertaken across different tourism settings, including Penglipuran, Ubud, temple complexes, craft centres, wellness tourism sites, and traditional villages, to identify similarities and differences in cultural adaptation and preservation strategies. In addition, discourse analysis examined government regulations, *awig-awig*, tourism policies, and promotional materials to investigate how cultural heritage, ethnic tourism, and *Tri Hita Karana* are represented in public and institutional narratives and how these discourses shape tourism governance.

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through methodological triangulation by integrating participant observation, interviews, document analysis, survey data, and multiple stakeholder perspectives. Where available, simple quantitative indicators, such as participation rates and changes in traditional occupations, were also used to support interpretations of cultural preservation, commodification, and community resilience within Bali's contemporary tourism landscape.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Cultural Preservation and Revitalisation

The findings indicate that cultural preservation and revitalisation constitute the core foundation of ethnic tourism development in Bali. Rather than functioning solely as tourism attractions,



Balinese cultural traditions continue to serve as living systems that shape community life, religious practices, environmental management, and local governance. The study found that tourism development increasingly incorporates indigenous philosophies, customary institutions, and ritual practices as integral components of visitor experiences. Simultaneously, these cultural traditions continue to evolve as communities adapt to changing economic opportunities, tourism demands, and globalization while striving to maintain their cultural identity.

One of the most significant findings concerns the continuing role of *Tri Hita Karana*, *Tat Twam Asi*, and *Menyama Braya* as the philosophical foundations of cultural tourism. These values are not merely symbolic concepts but are actively implemented in community life and tourism management. *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasizes harmonious relationships between humans and God (*parhyangan*), among humans (*parwongan*), and between humans and nature (*palemahan*), provides an ethical framework for sustainable tourism development. This philosophy influences village spatial planning, environmental conservation, cultural festivals, and tourism governance, ensuring that economic development remains balanced with spiritual, social, and ecological responsibilities. The findings demonstrate that tourism villages such as Sidetapa, Belimbing, and several villages in Tabanan continue to integrate these principles into tourism planning and daily community activities.

Similarly, the philosophies of *Tat Twam Asi* and *Menyama Braya* strengthen social cohesion and community participation in tourism development. These values encourage mutual respect, collective responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation among local residents regardless of religious or social backgrounds. The research found that these principles are particularly evident in the management of religious tourism destinations, including the *Wali Pitu* pilgrimage sites, where community members collaborate to preserve sacred places while accommodating increasing numbers of visitors. Through these traditional values, economic benefits generated by tourism are continuously negotiated with the need to preserve religious sanctity and cultural authenticity.

The study also found that traditional villages (*desa adat*) continue to play a central role in cultural preservation. Rather than acting merely as administrative institutions, *desa adat* function as guardians of local wisdom, customary law, religious ceremonies, and environmental sustainability. Village authorities regulate tourism activities through customary rules (*awig-awig*), ensuring that tourism development remains consistent with community values and cultural obligations. Tourism revenue is frequently reinvested to support temple maintenance, ceremonial activities, cultural education, environmental conservation, and community welfare programs, illustrating that tourism can become an instrument for sustaining cultural heritage rather than replacing it.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that tourism villages throughout Bali, including destinations such as Tenganan, have become important spaces for transmitting traditional knowledge to younger generations and visitors. Daily cultural practices, traditional ceremonies, handicrafts, agricultural systems, music, dance, and local culinary traditions are continuously performed not only as tourism attractions but also as expressions of community identity. These activities enable visitors to experience Balinese culture directly while providing opportunities for local communities to preserve and revitalize traditions that might otherwise decline under the pressures of modernization.

Overall, the findings suggest that the success of cultural preservation within ethnic tourism depends largely on the ability of local communities to maintain a balance between cultural continuity and economic development. Rather than viewing tourism solely as a commercial industry, many Balinese communities perceive it as a medium through which local wisdom, cultural identity, traditional institutions, and ancestral values can be sustained across generations. Consequently, cultural preservation and revitalisation emerge not as static processes but as dynamic forms of community adaptation that strengthen cultural resilience while supporting sustainable tourism development.

Tab 3. How local values structure tourism practices and spaces



Function of values	Examples in tourism
Philosophical basis for policy	Legal definitions of Balinese cultural tourism grounded in Tri Hita Karana (Widiastini et al., 2023; Sudibya et al., 2023).
Social cohesion & interfaith harmony	Menyama-Braya in multi-religious communities, including around Wali Pitu (Mulyana, 2025).
Design & organisation	Village layouts, temple zones, and mandala concepts in villages used as attractions (Suardana et al., 2022; Chang, 2024; Ginaya et al., 2019; Widiastini et al., 2023).
Community-based tourism governance	Ngayah (voluntary service), banjar adat involvement, participatory homestays (Mulyana, 2025; Suardana et al., 2022). Ginaya et al., 2019).

The findings show that rituals and ceremonies remain central to Balinese cultural identity, functioning not only as religious obligations but also as important mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion, transmitting cultural knowledge, and reinforcing community values. However, the expansion of tourism has changed the visibility, presentation, and management of many ritual practices. Rather than disappearing, rituals have become increasingly public and are often positioned within broader tourism narratives, creating a dynamic relationship between cultural continuity and commercial exposure.

In the traditional village of Tenganan Pegringsingan, rituals continue to function as powerful markers of collective identity and as mechanisms that regulate the relationship between local communities and visitors. The study found that tourist access is not entirely unrestricted; instead, it is shaped by customary rules and ritual schedules established by the community. Rituals therefore serve as “gatekeepers” that determine when, where, and how visitors may observe cultural activities. Through this controlled visibility, tourism is framed less as pure commercial entertainment and more as a form of cultural storytelling in which the community retains authority over the representation of its traditions. Such practices demonstrate that cultural sustainability can be strengthened when local communities maintain control over the boundaries between sacred life and tourism consumption.

A similar pattern is visible in the celebration of *Nyepi* and the accompanying *Ogoh-Ogoh* parades. The research indicates that these events have become increasingly visible within the tourism industry through hotel packages, promotional campaigns, and organized visitor experiences. Nevertheless, Balinese communities continue to negotiate tourism pressures by applying traditional spatial concepts such as Tri Mandala, which distinguish sacred, semi-sacred, and public spaces. Through this spatial arrangement, communities attempt to preserve the religious meaning of *Nyepi* while accommodating the growing interest of domestic and international visitors. The findings therefore suggest that commercialization does not automatically eliminate sacredness; instead, communities actively manage the relationship between religious values and tourism activities.

In destinations such as Penglipuran and Ubud, the study found that certain sacred practices, traditional foods, healing rituals, and cultural performances have been adapted for visitor consumption. This process creates concerns about *desakralisation* and the transformation of cultural practices into commodities. However, local communities have also developed hybrid models that seek to combine economic opportunities with cultural protection. Examples include homestays that integrate participation in village rituals and regulated traditional healing



(Usadha) services that operate within community-approved ethical frameworks. These models allow tourism income to support local livelihoods while maintaining references to authenticity, customary authority, and the principles of Tri Hita Karana.

More broadly, village-based tourism across Bali continues to preserve a wide range of traditional practices, including ceremonial activities, traditional architecture, weaving, local cuisine, dance, music, and the use of local languages. These cultural elements generate economic benefits, strengthen community pride, and create opportunities for younger generations to engage with local heritage. At the same time, the findings reveal ongoing tensions related to commercialization, changing lifestyles, varying levels of stakeholder commitment, and the influence of modern consumer culture. Consequently, the relationship between rituals, ceremonies, and tourism is best understood not as a simple process of cultural loss, but as a continuous negotiation in which Balinese communities adapt, regulate, and reinterpret tradition while attempting to preserve its social and spiritual significance.

3.1.2 Commodification and Loss of Sacredness

Balinese Hindu culture is increasingly entangled with tourism markets, reshaping how rituals, sacred arts, food, healing, and temple spaces are performed and valued. Research shows both clear risks of *desakralisasi* (loss of sacredness) and emerging models of adaptive resilience.

Ngaben cremation is drawn into tourism and money-based logics; offerings once made collectively are now widely bought from specialist makers, eroding togetherness and the sacred value of personally preparing *banten*. *Nyepi's* *Ogoh-Ogoh* effigies shift from ritual burning to artistic competitions, hotel events, and festival displays, turning purification rites into spectacles. Traditional weddings packaged as prestigious services for paying clients lose values such as *menyama braya* (togetherness) and reduce community participation.

Kecak Ramayana at Melasti Beach is redesigned to meet tourist tastes, inserting popular songs and emphasizing entertainment, which dissociates the dance from its ritual context and erodes spiritual values. Barong dance in Batubulan is split into distinct versions for ritual and for tourist consumption, marking a long-standing commodification of a once purely sacred dance. *Tektekan Calonarang* using sacred *barong* and *rangda* now sits “between sacred and profane” when staged for visitors.

In tourist areas, 72% of Satwika restaurants and Usadha clinics drop required rituals and *dana punia* (donation-based service), adopting profit-maximizing business models and selling spirituality as exotic wellness products. Satwika food is rebranded as “superfood bowls” without *matabuh* offerings, and Usadha shifts from karma yoga (service without reward) to wellness tourism commodities.

Table 4. Key domains where sacred practices are monetized

Domain	Key Shift Toward Profit Logic
Restaurants/clinics	Rituals and <i>dana punia</i> removed; commercial pricing dominates
Ngaben preparation	Offerings bought, not made; money replaces collective ritual labour
Wood sculpture & crafts	Mass-produced, “made to order” to fit tourist taste
Sacred dances/temple arts	Ticketed, retimed, re-scripted as tourist shows

3.1.3 Community Agency, Governance, and Cultural Resilience

The transformation of Balinese tourism demonstrates that local communities are not merely passive recipients of tourism development but active agents who negotiate the relationship between economic opportunities and cultural preservation. Across tourism villages such as Penglipuran, Tenganan Pegringsingan, the Subak landscapes of Ceking and Tegalalang, and the



wellness destinations of Ubud, tourism is intentionally framed as a medium for strengthening cultural identity rather than simply generating commercial profit. These communities employ customary institutions, local regulations, and participatory governance to ensure that tourism development remains compatible with Balinese cultural values and religious traditions.

Penglipuran Village represents one of the strongest examples of community-based cultural governance. Tourism activities are regulated through *awig-awig* (customary law), traditional spatial planning, and the protection of sacred natural environments such as the bamboo forest. These customary institutions ensure that tourism development conforms to the principles of *Tri Hita Karana*, preserving the harmony between humans, nature, and the spiritual realm. Traditional architecture, village layout, and ceremonial practices are therefore maintained as living cultural systems rather than merely aesthetic attractions.

Similarly, Tenganan Pegringsingan positions ritual as the central mechanism governing tourism. Sacred ceremonies regulate visitor access, define the boundaries between sacred and public spaces, and transform tourism into a process of cultural interpretation rather than commercial consumption. Rituals function as cultural gatekeepers, allowing visitors to understand local traditions while preserving their spiritual integrity.

Comparable approaches are evident in the rice-terrace tourism landscapes of Ceking and Tegalalang, where tourism is developed around the cultural heritage of *Subak*, Bali's traditional irrigation system. Rather than presenting the terraces solely as scenic attractions, local communities interpret them as cultural landscapes shaped by generations of collective farming practices, ecological stewardship, and religious values. Likewise, wellness tourism in Ubud increasingly incorporates indigenous healing traditions such as *melukat* purification rituals and *Usada Bali*. Although these practices provide distinctive tourism products, scholars emphasize the importance of maintaining local ownership and preventing excessive commercialization that may undermine their sacred significance.

Community participation constitutes another important foundation of cultural resilience. In Penglipuran, residents participate actively in planning, implementation, management, and benefit-sharing, reflecting a partnership model of tourism governance rather than externally imposed development. Similar participatory approaches are promoted throughout Balinese tourism villages, where customary institutions collaborate with local residents to manage natural resources, protect cultural heritage, and create tourism experiences that balance economic development with environmental conservation.

The governance of cultural tourism in Bali is further strengthened through the interaction between customary institutions and formal legal frameworks. At the local level, customary land (*Tanah Ayahan Desa*) functions not only as an economic resource but also as a symbol of collective identity. Communities continue to resist inappropriate privatization and land conversion that threaten cultural continuity. Through *awig-awig*, villages regulate the use of sacred areas, temples, traditional buildings, ritual activities, and natural resources, often providing more effective protection than formal state regulations.

These customary governance mechanisms are supported by provincial legislation. Bali Regional Regulation No. 4 of 2019 concerning Customary Villages formally recognizes the authority of *desa adat*, while Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2020 concerning Cultural Tourism establishes *Tri Hita Karana*, local wisdom, and cultural sustainability as the foundation of tourism development. These regulations also authorize customary villages to establish village-owned enterprises (BUPDA) to manage tourism activities, while promoting environmental sustainability, community participation, local resource utilization, and cultural preservation.

Despite these legal advances, implementation remains uneven across tourism destinations. While some villages demonstrate strong social cohesion, inclusive governance, and effective resource management, others face limitations in managerial capacity, technical expertise, institutional coordination, and financial resources. Additional challenges include inconsistent monitoring of cultural tourism standards, limited participation of customary institutions in higher-level policy formulation, and legal ambiguities surrounding customary land ownership and contractual partnerships with external investors. In sacred tourism



destinations, customary security officers (*pecalang*) and village management committees supervise visitor activities; however, repeated violations indicate that stronger monitoring systems and improved inter-agency coordination remain necessary.

The long-term resilience of Balinese cultural tourism therefore depends upon the strength of community governance rather than tourism growth alone. Villages characterized by effective customary institutions, adherence to *Tri Hita Karana*, clear spatial regulations, environmental protection, and broad community participation demonstrate greater capacity to withstand commercialization pressures while maintaining cultural continuity. Nevertheless, this resilience remains vulnerable to declining youth participation, gender inequality, limited human resource development, unequal distribution of tourism benefits, and increasing external ownership of tourism enterprises, particularly within the wellness sector where foreign-operated businesses may contribute to economic leakage and reduce local cultural authority.

Recent scholarship consequently advocates a more integrated governance model that combines statutory regulations with customary law. Such legal hybridization would formally incorporate *awig-awig* and *Subak* principles into provincial tourism governance, strengthen the authority of customary villages in tourism planning, provide greater protection for customary land, and improve monitoring of cultural tourism standards. Ultimately, the experiences of Penglipuran, Tenganan, Subak landscapes, and Ubud demonstrate that cultural resilience is not achieved by resisting tourism, but by ensuring that tourism remains governed by local values, customary institutions, and community participation. Through this community-centred governance framework, tourism becomes a vehicle for cultural affirmation, sustainable development, and the continued transmission of Balinese ancestral heritage rather than merely an instrument of commercial exploitation.

3.1.4 Socio-economic Impacts on Cultural Bearers

Balinese tourism villages, including Penglipuran, Tenganan Pegringsingan, the rice-terrace destinations of Ceking and Tegalalang, and Ubud's wellness tourism sector, demonstrate that tourism can function as a medium for cultural affirmation rather than merely an instrument of commercial exchange. These communities actively employ customary institutions, provincial regulations, and participatory governance to ensure that tourism development strengthens cultural identity while maintaining social and environmental sustainability. Consequently, tourism is positioned not simply as an economic activity but as a mechanism for preserving local wisdom, reinforcing communal values, and safeguarding Balinese cultural heritage.

Penglipuran Village exemplifies this community-centred approach through the implementation of strong customary institutions, strict *awig-awig* (customary law), spatial planning regulations, and the conservation of its sacred bamboo forest. These governance mechanisms ensure that tourism development remains consistent with the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, requiring tourism activities, village architecture, and land use to conform to traditional values and cultural norms. Similarly, Tenganan Pegringsingan organizes eco-cultural tourism around ritual practices that regulate visitor access, distinguish sacred from public spaces, and position tourism as a vehicle for cultural interpretation rather than commercial exploitation. Rituals therefore function as cultural gatekeepers that preserve spiritual integrity while enabling visitors to appreciate indigenous traditions.

Comparable strategies are evident in Bali's rice-terrace tourism destinations, particularly Ceking and Tegalalang, where tourism development is explicitly rooted in the agricultural traditions of the Subak irrigation system. Rather than presenting the terraces solely as scenic attractions, these communities frame them as living cultural landscapes that embody collective farming practices, ecological stewardship, and religious values. Likewise, Ubud's wellness tourism incorporates locally owned spas and traditional healing practices such as *melukat* purification rituals and *Usada Bali* as culturally embedded tourism assets. Although these practices contribute to the competitiveness of wellness tourism, scholars emphasize that their integration into the tourism economy must be carefully managed to prevent excessive commodification and the erosion of their spiritual significance.



Community participation constitutes another essential element of cultural resilience within Balinese tourism villages. In Penglipuran, local residents participate directly in tourism planning, implementation, management, and benefit-sharing, reflecting a partnership-based governance model that empowers the community rather than external stakeholders. Similar approaches are adopted across many tourism villages, where customary institutions collaborate with residents to manage natural resources, protect cultural heritage, and co-create authentic tourism experiences that balance economic development with environmental conservation.

The governance of Balinese cultural tourism is further reinforced by the interaction between customary law and formal legal frameworks. Customary land (*Tanah Ayahan Desa*) functions not only as an economic resource supporting tourism but also as a symbol of collective identity, prompting local communities to resist inappropriate privatization and unsustainable land conversion. Through *awig-awig*, customary villages regulate the use of sacred areas, temples, traditional buildings, ritual practices, and natural resources, often providing more effective protection than statutory regulations in preserving ecological integrity and cultural authenticity.

At the provincial level, Bali Regional Regulation No. 4 of 2019 concerning Customary Villages and Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2020 concerning Cultural Tourism formally recognize the authority of *desa adat*, local wisdom, and *Tri Hita Karana* as the foundation of tourism governance. These regulations provide customary villages with legal recognition and authorize the establishment of village-owned enterprises (BUPDA) to manage tourism while promoting environmental sustainability, community participation, local resource utilization, and cultural preservation. The regulatory framework therefore strengthens the institutional capacity of customary villages to guide tourism development according to local cultural priorities.

Nevertheless, the implementation of these governance frameworks remains uneven across Bali. While some tourism villages demonstrate strong institutional capacity, inclusive management, and social cohesion, others continue to experience challenges related to managerial expertise, inter-organizational coordination, financial resources, and excessive top-down intervention. Weak monitoring of cultural tourism standards, limited involvement of customary villages in higher-level policy formulation, and legal ambiguities concerning customary land rights and third-party investment agreements further constrain effective governance. In spiritual and wellness tourism destinations, customary security officers (*pecalang*) and village management teams supervise sacred sites and visitor activities; however, recurring violations indicate that monitoring mechanisms and institutional coordination require further strengthening.

The resilience of Balinese tourism villages ultimately depends on the continued interaction between strong customary institutions, community participation, environmental stewardship, and culturally sensitive governance. Villages that consistently apply the principles of *Tri Hita Karana*, enforce clear spatial and environmental regulations, and encourage broad community involvement exhibit greater capacity to withstand tourism-related pressures while maintaining cultural continuity. However, this resilience remains vulnerable to declining youth participation, limited gender inclusivity, inadequate human resource development, unequal distribution of tourism benefits, and increasing external ownership of tourism enterprises, particularly within the wellness industry where foreign-operated businesses may reduce local economic participation and weaken cultural stewardship.

To address these challenges, scholars advocate a hybrid governance model that formally integrates *awig-awig* and Subak principles into provincial tourism policies while expanding the authority of customary villages in tourism planning and management. Such reforms are expected to strengthen legal protection for customary land, improve monitoring of cultural tourism standards, and enhance community participation in decision-making processes. Overall, the experiences of Penglipuran, Tenganan Pegringsingan, Subak landscapes, and Ubud illustrate that community agency remains the cornerstone of sustainable cultural tourism. When supported by effective customary institutions, participatory governance, and coherent legal frameworks, tourism can reinforce cultural identity, preserve ancestral traditions, and promote sustainable development rather than reducing Balinese culture to a commercial commodity.



3.2 Discussion

Balinese ancestral traditions are neither simply preserved nor destroyed; they are strategically negotiated. Tourism stimulates pride, investment, and innovative models (community-based, Vanaprastha, ritual-governed tourism), yet also intensifies commodification and market pressures on sacred practices. Resilience emerges where local norms, ritual authority, and *adat* institutions set clear boundaries—on land, temples, crafts, and rituals—while selectively adapting forms for visitors. Long-term cultural sustainability in Bali's tourism economy depends on strengthening village-level governance, legal protections, and intergenerational education so that economic benefits reinforce, rather than hollow out, ancestral values.

Balinese tourism villages such as Penglipuran, Tenganan, rice-terrace villages, and Ubud's wellness sector show how communities use tourism to strengthen culture, not just to sell it. Customary law, provincial regulations, and village-based management together create a multi-layered governance system that both enables and constrains this aspiration.

Tourism in Balinese villages is increasingly positioned as a form of cultural affirmation rather than merely a commercial activity, with local communities ensuring that tourism development reinforces cultural identity, environmental sustainability, and traditional values. In Penglipuran Village, tourism is governed by strong customary institutions through the implementation of *awig-awig* (customary law), spatial regulations, and the protection of the sacred bamboo forest. These mechanisms ensure that tourism activities remain consistent with the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, preserve traditional architecture, and strengthen community resilience instead of prioritizing economic gain alone.

A similar approach is evident in Tenganan Pegringsingan, where eco-cultural tourism is organized around ritual practices. Religious ceremonies function as cultural gatekeepers by regulating visitor access, defining sacred spaces, and framing tourism as a medium for transmitting local history, beliefs, and traditions rather than as a purely commercial enterprise. Likewise, agricultural destinations such as Ceking Rice Terrace and Tegalalang Rice Terrace develop tourism based on the cultural significance of the *Subak* irrigation system, presenting rice terraces as living cultural heritage landscapes that embody traditional farming knowledge and community cooperation rather than simply scenic attractions.

In Ubud, wellness tourism similarly reflects the integration of culture and tourism. Locally owned spas, traditional healing practices, *melukat* purification rituals, and *Usada Bali* are recognized as authentic cultural assets that enrich visitors' experiences while preserving indigenous knowledge. However, scholars emphasize that these practices require careful management to prevent excessive commodification and the erosion of their spiritual significance.

Community participation constitutes another fundamental characteristic of tourism development in Bali's cultural villages. In Penglipuran, local residents participate at a partnership level, actively engaging in tourism planning, implementation, management, and the equitable distribution of benefits. More broadly, resource management across Balinese tourism villages relies on collaboration between customary institutions and local communities to co-create authentic visitor experiences while supporting cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and sustainable community development.

The sustainability of cultural tourism in Bali is supported by a governance system that integrates customary institutions with formal legal regulations. At the village level, customary land (*Tanah Ayahan Desa* or AYDS) functions not only as an economic resource for tourism but also as a symbol of collective identity and cultural continuity. Consequently, many traditional villages actively resist inappropriate privatization, uncontrolled commercialization, and land-use changes that threaten cultural heritage and community ownership. These efforts are reinforced through *awig-awig* (customary law), which regulates the use of sacred areas, traditional architecture, religious ceremonies, and natural resources. In many cases, these customary regulations have proven more effective than statutory law in controlling land conversion and ensuring that tourism development remains consistent with local cultural and environmental values.



At the provincial level, Bali has strengthened the legal foundation of cultural tourism through Regional Regulation (*Perda*) No. 4 of 2019 on Customary Villages and Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2020 on Cultural Tourism Standards. These regulations formally recognize the legal status of *desa adat*, institutionalize the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, and authorize customary villages to establish Village-Owned Enterprises (*BUPDA*) for managing tourism activities. They also emphasize community participation, environmental sustainability, the utilization of local resources, and cultural preservation while providing legal support for the development of tourism villages and spiritual tourism initiatives.

Despite this comprehensive legal framework, the implementation of community-based tourism governance remains uneven across Balinese villages. Some tourism villages demonstrate strong institutional capacity, inclusive decision-making, and high levels of social cohesion, whereas others continue to face challenges related to limited human resources, insufficient technical expertise, weak coordination among stakeholders, and excessive dependence on top-down government intervention. Additional governance challenges include inadequate monitoring of cultural tourism standards, limited participation of customary institutions in regional decision-making, and legal ambiguities concerning customary land ownership and contractual arrangements with external investors. In spiritual and wellness tourism, village security officers (*pecalang*) and local management teams supervise sacred sites; however, recurring violations indicate that monitoring systems and inter-agency coordination require further strengthening.

Evidence suggests that tourism villages characterized by strong customary institutions, adherence to the principles of *Tri Hita Karana*, effective spatial and environmental regulations, and active community participation exhibit greater cultural resilience in responding to tourism pressures. Nevertheless, this resilience remains vulnerable to several emerging challenges, including limited youth participation, gender inequality in tourism governance, insufficient human resource capacity, and unequal distribution of tourism benefits. Furthermore, the growing presence of externally owned tourism businesses, such as foreign-managed wellness centers and yoga retreats, may contribute to economic leakage while reducing local control over cultural resources and weakening traditional systems of cultural stewardship.

To address these challenges, scholars advocate a model of **legal hybridization** that integrates customary norms, including *awig-awig* and *Subak* principles, into provincial tourism policies and legal frameworks. They also recommend governance reforms that strengthen the role of customary villages in tourism planning, enhance legal protection for customary land, improve monitoring and enforcement of cultural tourism standards, and ensure that tourism development remains culturally authentic, environmentally sustainable, and economically beneficial for local communities.

Across Penglipuran, Tenganan, Subak landscapes, and Ubud wellness settings, communities actively use tourism to affirm identity through ritual, architecture, land rules, and local institutions, rather than treating it as mere commerce. Customary law and provincial regulations provide important filters against commercialization, but uneven enforcement, capacity gaps, and external control mean that community agency and resilience remain a continuing project, not a guaranteed outcome.

4. Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that Balinese ancestral traditions increasingly operate within a tourism economy in which culture functions simultaneously as a source of identity and an economic asset. Rather than producing solely positive or negative consequences, tourism has reshaped rituals, sacred spaces, cultural landscapes, and community identities in complex and dynamic ways. Traditional practices such as ritual dances, *Ngaben*, *Odalan*, temple ceremonies, traditional healing, culinary heritage, and gamelan performances have, in many cases, been adapted in terms of duration, presentation, and accessibility to accommodate visitors. Likewise, village architecture and cultural landscapes have been modified to support tourism development. While



these transformations contribute to economic growth and wider cultural visibility, they also risk reducing authenticity, weakening spiritual values, and diminishing the cultural significance of traditions, particularly among younger generations.

At the same time, tourism has generated substantial resources for cultural preservation. Revenue from tourism supports the maintenance of temples, the organization of religious ceremonies, the preservation of traditional arts, and the continuation of customary institutions. Consequently, Balinese identity is not merely commercialized but is also reaffirmed through the public expression of cultural practices, allowing local communities to strengthen their cultural pride while introducing their heritage to global audiences. In this context, culture functions both as an economic resource and as a medium through which Balinese communities negotiate and reaffirm their collective identity.

The study further reveals that the relationship between tourism and tradition is characterized by persistent tensions involving sacredness, cultural identity, land use, and governance. Sacred rituals and ceremonial spaces are increasingly exposed to commercialization, while cultural landscapes and customary land continue to face development pressures. Although philosophical principles such as *Tri Hita Karana* and *Tat Twam Asi*, together with customary regulations (*awig-awig*) and provincial cultural tourism policies, provide an important governance framework, inconsistencies in implementation, monitoring, and benefit-sharing remain significant challenges.

Evidence across Balinese villages suggests that adaptive cultural resilience offers a more sustainable approach than rigid preservation. Community-based tourism, customary governance, ritual-based visitor management, heritage revitalization, and culturally grounded wellness tourism demonstrate that economic development and cultural conservation can coexist when local communities retain decision-making authority. Sustainable cultural tourism therefore depends on clear boundaries between sacred and commercial activities, strong protection of customary land and cultural heritage, equitable community participation, and the revitalization of local wisdom as a living ethical framework rather than merely a tourism attraction.

Balinese ancestral traditions are not simply diminished by tourism but are continually renegotiated through interactions between cultural preservation and commercialization. When supported by effective governance, strong customary institutions, and meaningful community participation, tourism can become a powerful instrument for safeguarding cultural heritage while promoting sustainable economic development. Future tourism policies should therefore prioritize cultural integrity, local agency, social equity, and environmental sustainability to ensure that Balinese traditions remain vibrant and resilient for future generations.

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