

## Sustainable spiritual tourism experience: Transforming melukat ritual in Sawan Village, Bali

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**Abstract:** This study explores the transformation of the Melukat ritual into a spiritual tourism experience and examines its contribution to sustainable tourism development in Sawan Village. A qualitative approach was employed using purposive sampling to select key informants, including local community members, traditional leaders, temple stakeholders, and tourism actors involved in or knowledgeable about the Melukat ritual at Pura Batu Bolong. Data were collected through field observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the Melukat ritual can be systematically transformed into a spiritual tourism experience through the preservation of ritual authenticity, community-based governance, and active tourist participation. The ritual generates transformative experiences, including purification, emotional healing, inner peace, and self-reflection, which attract both domestic and international tourists seeking meaningful and spiritually enriching journeys. These experiences contribute to spiritual sustainability by safeguarding the sacredness of holy water and the spirit of place, while simultaneously supporting sustainable rural development through cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and local economic opportunities. Nevertheless, its tourism potential remains underdeveloped due to limited promotion, weak destination management, and the absence of structured governance and carrying-capacity regulations. This study contributes to spiritual tourism literature by proposing an integrated framework linking ritual transformation, transformative tourist experiences, spiritual sustainability, and sustainable rural development. The findings also offer practical insights for local stakeholders to design tourism experiences that maintain ritual sacredness while enhancing community welfare and destination competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Community Based Tourism, Melukat Ritual, Spiritual Tourism, Sustainable Rural Tourism, Tourist Experience, Village Tourism

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### Introduction

Spiritual tourism has gained increasing attention within contemporary tourism studies as tourists seek not only leisure and entertainment but also meaningful experiences that foster inner healing, self-reflection, personal transformation, and spiritual fulfilment. This shift reflects a broader transition from consumption-oriented tourism toward experience-oriented tourism, where visitors actively engage with local cultures, traditions, and belief systems. Bali represents a particularly relevant context for spiritual tourism due to its strong cultural identity, living religious traditions, and the integration of spirituality into everyday community life. Among the many spiritual practices embedded within Balinese Hinduism, *Melukat* a sacred purification ritual involving holy water holds significant potential as a tourism experience that combines spirituality, culture, and local wisdom. Beyond its religious function, *Melukat* provides opportunities for participants to experience sacred atmospheres, emotional renewal, and deeper connections with local spiritual values (Choe & Mahyuni, 2023; Şahin & Güzel, 2024).

Spiritual tourism is commonly understood as travel motivated by the search for meaning, transcendence, healing, and personal growth. According to Şahin & Güzel (2024) spiritual tourism

experiences encompass several interconnected dimensions, including transformation, healing, sacred atmosphere, transcendence, escape from daily routines, and divine connectedness. These dimensions align closely with the characteristics of the *Melukat* ritual, which engages participants physically, emotionally, and spiritually through a process of self-purification. Consequently, *Melukat* can be viewed not merely as a cultural attraction but as an immersive and transformative tourism experience in which visitors actively participate rather than passively observe. This perspective is consistent with contemporary tourism trends that emphasize co-created experiences, authenticity, and meaningful engagement with local communities and traditions (Buzinde, 2020; Şahin & Güzel, 2024).

The growing interest in transformative tourism has also encouraged scholars to examine the role of rituals in shaping tourist experiences and destination identity. Rituals contribute to emotional engagement, symbolic meaning, and the construction of memorable experiences that differentiate destinations from conventional tourism products. Research suggests that rituals can enhance tourist participation and cultural understanding. However, the integration of sacred rituals into tourism systems remains a complex issue because tourism development often introduces commercial pressures that may alter ritual meanings and practices (Chen et al., 2024). As a result, the transformation of rituals into tourism experiences requires careful consideration of cultural authenticity, community authority, and the preservation of sacred values.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to ritual-based tourism, existing literature tends to approach ritual transformation primarily through the lens of commodification, often portraying the process as a linear conversion of sacred practices into tourism products. Such perspectives insufficiently address the dynamic negotiations that occur between religious meanings, community interests, cultural preservation, and tourism market demands. In reality, ritual transformation involves ongoing interactions among multiple stakeholders who seek to balance economic opportunities with the protection of sacred traditions. Consequently, there remains a need for a more integrated analytical framework capable of explaining how sacred rituals can be transformed into tourism experiences while preserving their spiritual significance and cultural integrity. This theoretical gap is particularly relevant in destinations where religious practices remain actively embedded within community life.

From a sustainability perspective, the development of spiritual tourism requires balancing economic benefits with cultural preservation, environmental protection, and community participation. Romanelli et al., (2021) argue that religious and pilgrimage tourism can contribute to local development when managed through collaborative stakeholder approaches. However, conventional sustainability frameworks often emphasize economic, social, and environmental dimensions while overlooking spiritual sustainability, including the preservation of sacred meanings, ritual authenticity, and the spirit of place. This limitation is especially important in spiritual destinations where cultural and religious values constitute the primary tourism resource. The challenge therefore extends beyond maintaining physical resources and visitor satisfaction to safeguarding living spiritual systems that provide meaning to both local communities and visitors.

This issue is particularly significant in Bali, where tourism development has generated contrasting patterns between highly commercialized destinations in the south and less-developed rural areas that continue to maintain strong cultural and spiritual traditions. While South Bali has experienced intensive tourism growth accompanied by increasing commodification of cultural elements, many rural communities continue to preserve authentic ritual practices and community-based governance systems. Within this context, Sawan Village in Buleleng Regency offers a compelling case for examining the relationship between spirituality, tourism, and sustainability. The village possesses significant natural, cultural, and spiritual resources, including the *Melukat* ritual conducted at Pura Batu Bolong, where holy water from a sacred spring is believed to facilitate purification, healing, and spiritual balance. Importantly, the ritual remains governed by customary regulations designed to maintain sacredness and protect the site from spiritual pollution, locally known as *leteh*.

Despite its considerable potential, the spiritual tourism value of *Melukat* in Sawan Village remains relatively underdeveloped due to limited promotion, insufficient destination management, and the absence of structured governance mechanisms that regulate visitor

management and carrying capacity. Without appropriate safeguards, tourism development may contribute to ritual commodification, environmental degradation, and the weakening of local community authority over cultural heritage. These challenges highlight the need for tourism models that simultaneously support economic opportunities, ritual preservation, environmental sustainability, and community empowerment.

Previous studies have examined spiritual tourism experiences, transformative tourism, ritual transformation in tourism contexts, sustainable religious tourism development, and the preservation of sacred places. Nevertheless, these studies remain fragmented in their analytical focus and rarely integrate ritual transformation, sacredness preservation, community-based governance, transformative tourist experiences, spiritual sustainability, and sustainable rural development within a single conceptual framework. Addressing this gap, the present study explores how the *Melukat* ritual at Pura Batu Bolong can be transformed into a sustainable spiritual tourism experience and examines its contribution to tourism development in Sawan Village. By proposing an integrated framework linking ritual transformation, community-based governance, transformative experiences, spiritual sustainability, and sustainable rural development, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to the growing discourse on spiritual tourism and sustainable destination management. Other scholars have also emphasized the importance of preserving sacred places and spiritual sustainability within tourism systems (Aulet & Duda, 2020).

## Methodology

### Research Design and Study Site

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the transformation of the *Melukat* ritual into a spiritual tourism experience and its contribution to sustainable tourism development in Sawan Village, Bali. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, meanings, interactions, and cultural practices within their natural context (Dull & Reinhardt, 2014).

The research was conducted at Pura Batu Bolong in Sawan Village, Buleleng Regency, Bali. The site was selected because it is recognized for its *Melukat* ritual and sacred water source, which embody significant spiritual, cultural, and tourism values. As a living religious site that continues to be governed through customary regulations, Pura Batu Bolong provides an appropriate context for examining how spiritual traditions can be developed as tourism attractions while maintaining their authenticity and sacredness.

### Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all informants possessed relevant knowledge, experience, and involvement related to the *Melukat* ritual and its tourism potential. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research because it enables the selection of information-rich participants capable of providing in-depth insights relevant to the research objectives (Sharp, 2003).

Three selection criteria were applied: (1) active involvement in the management, preservation, or utilization of Pura Batu Bolong; (2) substantial knowledge of the history, spiritual meaning, and customary regulations associated with the *Melukat* ritual; and (3) the ability to explain the tourism potential and community implications of ritual-based tourism development. A total of six key informants participated in this study, representing diverse yet complementary perspectives on the spiritual, cultural, environmental, governance, and economic dimensions of the *Melukat* ritual. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, where no substantially new information emerged from subsequent interviews.

**Table 1.** Profile of research informants

| Code | Informant Role                  | Duration of Involvement   | Relevance to the Study  |
|------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| R1   | Customary Leader (Bendesa Adat) | More than 10 years in customary governance and ritual oversight | Responsible for customary governance, implementation of <i>awig-awig</i> (customary |

|    |  |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|
| R2 | Deputy Customary Leader (Wakil Kelian Desa Adat) | More than 5 years assisting in customary and ritual management                      | law), and the preservation of religious and socio-cultural life in Sawan Village. Supports the implementation of customary regulations, visitor coordination, and oversight of ritual activities and community participation. |
| R3 | Traditional Figure                               | More than 70 years of cultural and historical involvement                           | Possesses extensive historical knowledge regarding the origin, development, and sacred significance of Pura Batu Bolong and the tradition of <i>nunas tirta</i> .   |
| R4 | Community Leader                                 | More than 20 years of involvement in community and religious activities             | Provides insights into customary procedures, community values, and the importance of preserving ritual authenticity and sacred meaning.   |
| R5 | Local Resident                                   | Lifelong participation as a community member and regular temple user                | Familiar with local beliefs regarding the healing properties of the sacred water and the environmental significance of the holy spring.   |
| R6 | Community Stakeholder                            | More than 10 years of involvement in local community and tourism-related activities | Identifies potential economic opportunities for local residents through offerings, food, and other supporting services for visitors.  |

Source: Primary data collected by the authors, 2025.

Research informants are determined using purposive sampling. This technique is applied to select individuals who possess relevant knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the *Melukat* ritual and tourism development in Sawan Village. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research as it allows the researcher to obtain in-depth information aligned with the research focus (Sharp, 2003).

### Data Collection

Data were collected between August 2024 and March 2025 through field observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Multiple data collection methods were employed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the *Melukat* ritual and to strengthen the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Field observations were conducted during several visits to Pura Batu Bolong. The researchers acted as non-participant observers and documented the physical setting, ritual procedures, visitor behaviour, community involvement, supporting facilities, and environmental conditions using field notes and an observation checklist. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six key informants to explore perceptions regarding the spiritual significance of *Melukat*, tourism development opportunities, community participation, management challenges, and sustainability concerns. Documentary materials, including village documents and supporting records, were also reviewed to provide contextual information and support data triangulation.

### Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach (Byrne, 2022). This approach was selected because it allows themes to emerge inductively from participants' experiences and perspectives rather than being imposed through predetermined theoretical categories. The analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials to achieve familiarity with the data. Meaningful segments of text were then coded manually and grouped into broader categories through an iterative process of comparison and interpretation. Subsequently, related categories were refined into overarching themes that represented recurring patterns across the dataset. Major themes emerging from the analysis included Spiritual Healing, Active Tourist Participation, Community Based Economic Opportunities, Cultural Preservation, and Environmental Sustainability.

Manual coding was selected because the dataset was relatively small and consisted of six in-depth interviews, observation records, and supporting documents. This approach enabled close

engagement with the data and facilitated continuous comparison between emerging codes, field observations, and contextual meanings. The researcher repeatedly reviewed transcripts and compared findings across different data sources to ensure consistency and analytical rigor throughout the coding process.

### Reflexivity

Given the researchers' familiarity with Balinese culture and religious traditions, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. Reflexive notes were used to critically examine assumptions, interpretations, and potential biases during data collection and analysis. During observations and interviews involving sacred practices, the researchers adopted a respectful and non-intrusive stance and complied with local cultural protocols and customary regulations.

### Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from different informants, while method triangulation compared findings derived from interviews, observations, and documentary sources. Member checking was also conducted by confirming key interpretations with selected participants to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their perspectives.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the research objectives prior to data collection. The researchers respected customary regulations and cultural protocols throughout the study, particularly when observing and discussing sacred rituals at Pura Batu Bolong.

## Results and Discussions

### Results

The findings revealed five interrelated themes that explain the transformation of the *Melukat* ritual into a sustainable spiritual tourism experience in Sawan Village: Spiritual Value, Tourism Experience, Economic Impact, Cultural Preservation, and Environmental Sustainability. Together, these themes illustrate the relationships among ritual transformation, community participation, and sustainability.

Table 2 presents illustrative examples of how interview excerpts were interpreted and organized into broader analytical themes.

**Table 2.** Illustrative examples of theme development

| Informant Quote (Verbatim)  | Initial Code  | Theme                        |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| R1 (Customary Leader): " <i>Melukat</i> in Sawan is focused on spiritual tourism, not for commercial purposes, but for seeking tranquility, self-purification, and inner cleansing."    | Spiritual purification, inner peace, non-commercial orientation | Spiritual Value              |
| R2 (Deputy Customary Leader): "Visitors are expected to come with sincere intentions, not merely to create social media content that may diminish the sacred atmosphere of the ritual." | Respectful participation and meaningful engagement              | Tourism Experience           |
| R3 (Traditional Figure): "Pura Batu Bolong was originally a place for <i>nunas tirta</i> , where people came to request holy water believed to bring purification and spiritual peace." | Historical sacred function and healing significance             | Spiritual Value              |
| R4 (Community Leader): "The ritual must continue to follow customary procedures so that its sacred meaning and authenticity are preserved."   | Ritual authenticity and customary regulation                    | Cultural Preservation        |
| R5 (Local Resident): "The holy water flowing from the rocks is believed to help heal certain skin diseases."  | Importance of sacred water resource                             | Environmental Sustainability |

|  |                                |                 |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| R6 (Community Stakeholder): "Local residents can provide offerings, food, and other supporting services for visitors." | Community income opportunities | Economic Impact |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------|

Source: Author's analysis based on interview transcripts

The identified themes provide the analytical foundation for understanding how the *Melukat* ritual can be transformed into a sustainable spiritual tourism experience. The following sections discuss each theme and its implications for spiritual tourism development in Sawan Village.

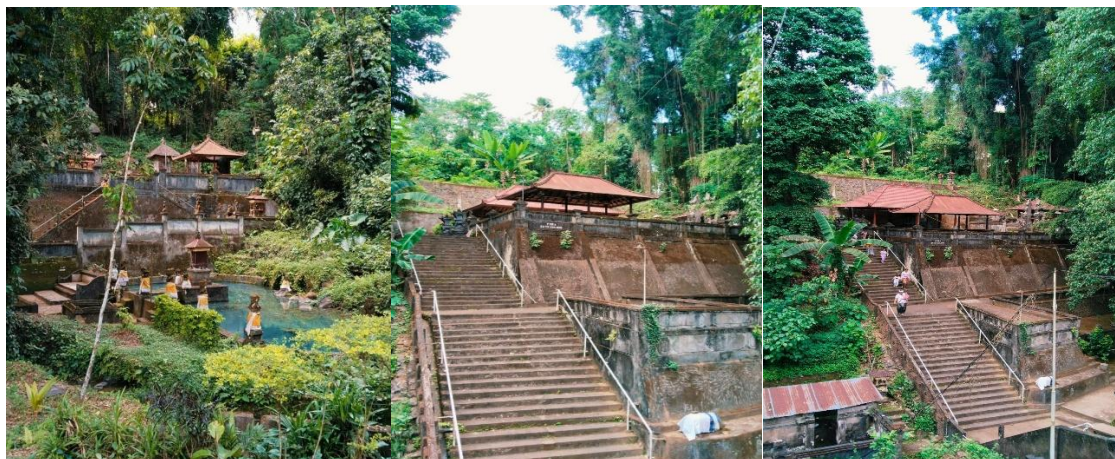
### *Melukat as a Spiritual Tourism Experience*

The findings indicate that the *Melukat* ritual at Pura Batu Bolong in Sawan Village has strong potential to be developed as an experience-based spiritual tourism attraction. As the Customary Leader (R1) explained, "Melukat in Sawan is not intended for commercial purposes, but for seeking inner peace, self-purification, and spiritual cleansing." This statement confirms that the primary value of the ritual lies in its sacred and transformative meaning rather than in its economic potential. During field observations, visitors were observed preparing offerings, waiting quietly near the sacred spring, and following purification procedures under the guidance of temple custodians. Many participants engaged in silent prayer and remained in the temple area after the ritual for reflection and meditation. These observations indicate that Pura Batu Bolong offers a sacred atmosphere and participatory setting that support transformation, healing, and emotional release.

The uniqueness of this ritual lies in the use of holy water flowing from natural rock formations, which is believed by the local community to carry meanings of purification, healing, and inner balance. In the context of spiritual tourism, the primary strength of *Melukat* does not merely reside in the beauty of the site or the uniqueness of the ritual itself, but in the inner experience felt by tourists during the purification process. This aligns with (Şahin & Güzel, 2024), who explain that spiritual tourism experiences encompass dimensions such as transformation, healing, atmosphere, transcendence, escape, and divine connectedness.

Field observations conducted during several visits revealed that visitors generally demonstrated respectful and focused behavior throughout the *Melukat* ritual process. Most participants wore traditional Balinese attire and followed the purification procedures solemnly and attentively. Some visitors appeared deeply engaged in prayer and self-reflection during the ritual, while others interacted respectfully with local community members to seek information regarding ritual procedures and temple regulations without disrupting ongoing religious activities. Visitors who came only to observe the ritual were also expected to follow temple regulations. During the observation process, individuals who did not wear appropriate traditional Balinese attire were not permitted to enter the sacred ritual area. These practices demonstrate that local customary rules and community supervision play an important role in maintaining the sacredness and spiritual integrity of the ritual despite increasing tourism interest. The observations further indicate that visitor participation in the *Melukat* ritual is shaped not merely by tourism consumption, but by spiritual engagement, cultural respect, and adherence to local religious values.

*Melukat* is not only a ritual activity but also a holistic tourism experience that involves the body, emotions, beliefs, and sacred atmosphere. Tourists participating in *Melukat* do not merely observe the ritual process but actively engage in each stage of purification. This level of involvement enables tourists to gain more personal, reflective, and meaningful experiences. (Cheer et al., 2017) highlight that spiritual tourism provides space for individuals to step away from daily routines and engage in spiritual quests through travel.



(Source: Author's documentation, 2025)

**Figure 1.** Picture of Pura Batu Bolong

Figure 1 presents Pura Batu Bolong as the physical and spiritual setting of the *Melukat* ritual in Sawan Village, Buleleng Regency, Bali. The images highlight several landscape and environmental characteristics that support its development as a spiritual tourism destination. The temple is situated within a lush forested area characterized by dense tropical vegetation, natural rock formations, and a tranquil atmosphere. The left image shows the holy water pool, which serves as the central element of the *Melukat* ritual. Surrounded by greenery and temple shrines, the water source illustrates the close relationship between spirituality and the natural environment. In the Balinese Hindu context, holy water (*tirta*) functions not only as a medium for ritual cleansing but also as a symbol of healing, balance, and spiritual renewal. The central and right images reveal the scale of the temple complex and the surrounding forest, emphasizing the sense of seclusion, serenity, and connection with nature that enhances the visitor experience.

From an observational perspective, Figure 1 demonstrates several elements that support spiritual tourism developments. The presence of a sacred natural setting that creates a peaceful and contemplative atmosphere, the holy water source as the core ritual and symbolic resource, temple architecture and shrines that reinforce cultural authenticity, wide access pathways that accommodate visitors while maintaining ritual order and the integration of built and natural environments that preserves the spirit of place. The visible presence of visitors in the temple area also suggests that the site is accessible and capable of accommodating tourism activities without diminishing its sacred character.

Overall, Figure 1 provides visual evidence that Pura Batu Bolong offers more than a scenic attraction. The combination of sacred water, temple structures, forest surroundings, and tranquil atmosphere creates an environment conducive to purification, emotional healing, and self-reflection. These characteristics support the argument that the *Melukat* ritual at Pura Batu Bolong possesses strong potential to be developed as an authentic and sustainable spiritual tourism experience rooted in cultural preservation and environmental stewardship.

Based on observations and interviews, several key themes emerge in the development of *Melukat* tourism in Sawan Village. These themes include spiritual values, tourist experiences, economic impacts, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. Together, these themes demonstrate that *Melukat* cannot be understood solely as a religious ritual or a tourism attraction, but rather as a multidimensional experience that integrates spiritual, social, economic, cultural, and ecological aspects simultaneously. A summary of these key themes is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Key themes of *Melukat* tourism development

| No | Theme                 | Description  |
|----|-----------------------|--|
| 1  | Spiritual Value       | <i>Melukat</i> as a purification ritual with healing meaning |
| 2  | Tourism Experience    | Tourists actively participate in the ritual                  |
| 3  | Economic Impact       | Increased income through tourism services                    |
| 4  | Cultural Preservation | Maintaining Balinese traditions and rituals                  |

|   |                              |                                      |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 5 | Environmental Sustainability | Protection of sacred water resources |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

Source: Author's analysis, 2026.

Table 3 shows that spiritual value serves as the primary foundation in the development of *Melukat* tourism. *Melukat* is understood as a purification ritual that embodies healing in physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. This value distinguishes *Melukat* from conventional cultural tourism attractions. While cultural tourism often positions tourists as observers, *Melukat* provides space for them to directly experience the process of self-purification. This finding reinforces (Buzinde, 2020) argument that spiritual tourism is closely related to the search for meaning, self-reflection, and subjective well-being.

The second theme in the table highlights that the *Melukat* tourism experience is participatory in nature. Tourists are not merely spectators but actively engage in the ritual process under the guidance of temple priests (*pemangku*) or local facilitators. This participation creates a deeper experience, as tourists directly encounter the sacred atmosphere, the touch of holy water, prayers, and ritual procedures. This aligns with the concept of experiential spiritual tourism, which emphasizes direct involvement, emotional engagement, and personal meaning-making in tourism activities (Şahin & Güzel, 2024).

The economic theme in the table indicates that the development of *Melukat* tourism can generate income opportunities for local communities. Spiritual tourism activities may stimulate the emergence of services such as guides, ritual facilitators, food and beverage providers, local transportation, accommodation, and souvenirs. However, these economic benefits must be managed carefully to avoid shifting the sacred meaning of the ritual into mere tourism commodification. (Choe & Mahyuni, 2023) emphasize that spiritual tourism development in Bali should be inclusive, community-based, and provide direct benefits to local communities.

The themes of cultural preservation and environmental sustainability reveal that *Melukat* carries two primary responsibilities. First, the ritual must be preserved in accordance with the values, procedures, and cultural authority of the local community. Second, the holy water source as the core element of the ritual must be protected from pollution and pressures resulting from tourism activities. (Aulet & Duda, 2020) argue that the sustainability of sacred sites largely depends on the ability of stakeholders to maintain their original meaning, spiritual values, and sense of place. Therefore, the development of *Melukat* as a spiritual tourism attraction must balance tourist experience, cultural preservation, economic benefits, and environmental protection.

The potential of *Melukat* as a form of spiritual tourism has been clearly identified. The ritual demonstrates strong attributes in its sacred values, participatory experience, local economic potential, cultural preservation, and the sustainability of water resources. The five themes presented in Table 3 indicate that *Melukat* can be developed as an authentic and sustainable spiritual tourism experience. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on spiritual tourism by demonstrating that local rituals in Balinese villages can serve as sources of transformative experiences, rather than merely functioning as complementary cultural attractions or commercial wellness products (Bowers & Cheer, 2017; Choe & Mahyuni, 2023; Şahin & Güzel, 2024).

### *Economic Potential and Strengthening Community-Based Tourism*

The findings indicate that the development of *Melukat* tourism can create economic opportunities for the local community of Sawan Village. These opportunities may arise through services such as local guiding, provision of ritual materials, food and beverages, local transportation, accommodation, and souvenirs. This finding suggests that *Melukat* not only holds spiritual value but can also function as a driver of the local economy when managed under the principles of community-based tourism. (Choe & Mahyuni, 2023) emphasize that the development of spiritual tourism in Bali should adopt an inclusive model that actively involves local communities and supports small-scale rural enterprises.

As stated by a community stakeholder (R6), "Local residents can provide offerings, food, and other supporting services for visitors." This statement demonstrates that spiritual tourism

can generate direct income opportunities for local households while encouraging the growth of small-scale community enterprises. The economic potential identified in this study is closely linked to the spiritual and experiential dimensions of the *Melukat* ritual. The sacred value of the ritual attracts visitors seeking purification, healing, and inner peace. As the number of visitors increases, demand for supporting services also expands, allowing community members to participate as guides, offering providers, food vendors, transportation operators, and homestay hosts. In this way, the spiritual experience becomes the foundation for destination attractiveness, which subsequently creates local economic benefits.

However, the findings also indicate that economic development should not be separated from cultural and environmental considerations. As emphasized by the Customary Leader (R1), "*Melukat* in Sawan is focused on spiritual tourism, not for commercial purposes, but for seeking tranquility, self-purification, and inner cleansing." This statement highlights those economic activities must remain subordinate to the primary spiritual purpose of the ritual. Tourism development should therefore enhance community welfare without reducing *Melukat* to a purely commercial product.

The themes identified in this study are strongly interconnected. Spiritual value forms the foundation of the tourism experience, which generates destination attractiveness and economic opportunities. At the same time, these benefits can only be sustained when cultural authenticity is preserved through customary regulations (R4) and when the sacred water source is protected as an essential environmental resource (R5). This relationship demonstrates that economic impact is not an isolated outcome but part of an integrated system linking ritual transformation, transformative experiences, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability.

These findings suggest that the development of *Melukat* tourism should follow the principles of community-based tourism, in which local communities act as owners, managers, and primary beneficiaries. The active involvement of customary institutions, village leaders, and local residents is essential to ensure that economic gains are distributed equitably while maintaining the sacred character of the ritual. When managed in this way, *Melukat* tourism can strengthen rural livelihoods and contribute to sustainable tourism development in Sawan Village.

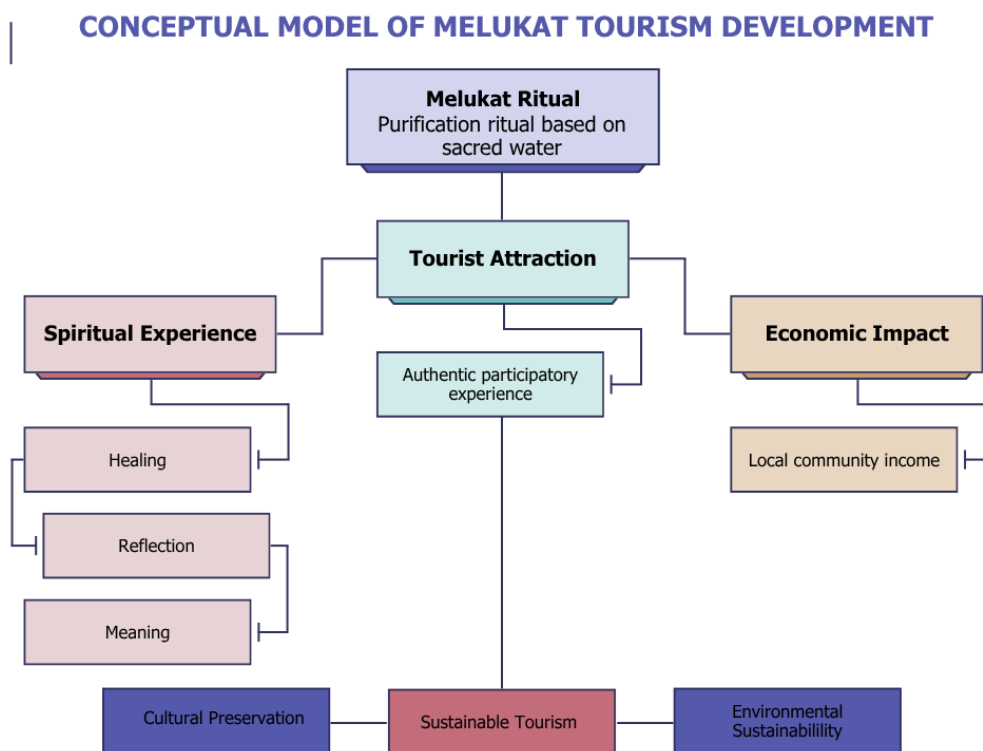
These economic potentials do not emerge independently from the spiritual values of the ritual. On the contrary, the spiritual value of *Melukat* forms the foundation of the tourism experience, which in turn generates destination attractiveness. When this attractiveness is effectively managed, it encourages tourists to engage with local services such as guides, transportation, food, accommodation, and souvenir products. Therefore, the relationship between ritual, experience, attractiveness, economic impact, and sustainability can be understood as an interconnected development pathway. This relationship model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 illustrates that the *Melukat* ritual serves as the starting point for the development of spiritual tourism in Sawan Village. The ritual generates a spiritual experience, as tourists gain opportunities for purification, self-reflection, inner peace, and connection with local cultural values. This spiritual experience subsequently forms a tourist attraction, as visitors not only enjoy the physical setting but also engage in meaningful experiences. This finding aligns with (Şahin & Güzel, 2024), who argue that spiritual tourism experiences encompass dimensions such as transformation, healing, atmosphere, transcendence, escape, and divine connectedness.

The next stage in the model shows that tourist attraction can generate economic impact for the local community. As tourists visit to participate in *Melukat*, the demand for supporting services increases. Local residents can engage as guides, providers of ritual materials, parking attendants, food vendors, homestay operators, transportation providers, and small business actors. (Romanelli et al., 2021) explain that religious and spiritual tourism can contribute to local socio-economic growth when managed through collaboration among stakeholders.

However, these economic benefits can only be sustained if local communities become the primary actors in tourism management. The community should not merely function as a cultural backdrop or supporting labor, but must hold roles as owners, managers, and main beneficiaries. This principle is crucial to prevent economic leakage, external domination, and unequal distribution of benefits. (Choe & Mahyuni, 2023) emphasize that spiritual tourism in Bali should support small enterprises and local communities to ensure more inclusive tourism development.

Figure 2 also emphasizes that economic impact must be directed toward sustainable tourism. This means that increasing community income should not compromise the sacred values of the ritual, local social structures, or the preservation of water resources. If development focuses solely on increasing visitor numbers, *Melukat* risks becoming commodified. (Chen et al., 2024) note that while rituals can shape tourism experiences and meanings, their development requires a clear management framework to prevent them from being reduced to mere tourist consumption. From a promotional perspective, Pura Batu Bolong is still not widely recognized as a spiritual tourism destination. This condition highlights the need for communication strategies that emphasize the uniqueness of the ritual, the significance of holy water, visitation ethics, and benefits for local communities. Promotion should not focus solely on visual appeal but must also convey the meaning of the experience gained by tourists. (Şahin & Güzel, 2024) stress that spiritual tourism marketing should recognize that tourists seek meaning, healing, and transformative experiences, rather than merely physical facilities.



(Source: Author's elaboration, 2026)

**Figure 2.** Conceptual model of *Melukat* tourism development

Figure 2 further clarifies that the development of *Melukat* tourism should be conducted in a gradual and integrated manner. The *Melukat* ritual forms the foundation of the spiritual experience; this experience becomes the tourist attraction; the attraction creates economic opportunities; and these economic impacts must be directed toward sustainable tourism. These findings address the research objective by demonstrating that *Melukat* plays a significant role in supporting tourism development in Sawan Village. However, this role must be managed through a community-based approach, educational promotion, stakeholder collaboration, and the protection of the ritual's sacred values.

## Cultural and Environmental Sustainability in the Development of Melukat Tourism

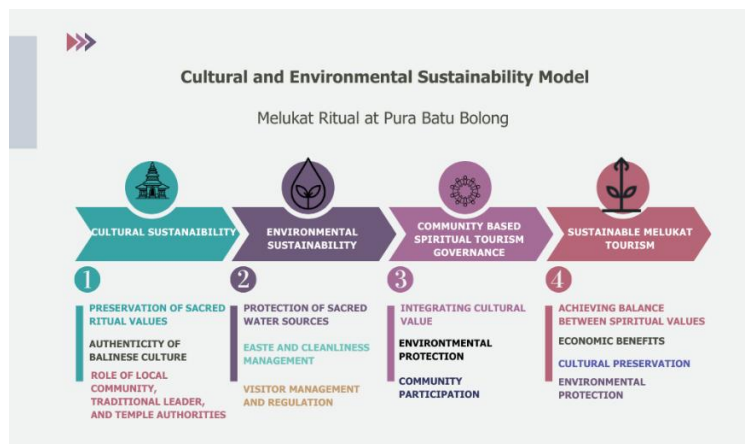
The findings indicate that cultural and environmental sustainability form the primary foundation for the development of *Melukat* tourism at Pura Batu Bolong, Sawan Village. The *Melukat* ritual depends not only on the existence of sacred spaces and religious practices but also on the quality of the natural environment that supports it, particularly the holy water source. Therefore, the development of *Melukat* tourism cannot be solely oriented toward increasing visitor numbers but must also focus on preserving the sacredness of the ritual, cultural authenticity, and environmental sustainability simultaneously (Aulet & Duda, 2020; Yanti et al., 2024). As emphasized by a community leader (R4), "The ritual must continue to follow customary procedures so that its sacred meaning and authenticity are preserved." This statement highlights that cultural preservation involves safeguarding both the practice and the spiritual significance of the ritual.

The historical significance of Pura Batu Bolong further reinforces its cultural value. A traditional figure (R3) explained that "Pura Batu Bolong was originally a place for *nunas tirta*, where people came to request holy water believed to bring purification and spiritual peace." This account demonstrates that the site has long functioned as a sacred space for spiritual cleansing and healing, making its cultural authenticity a critical component of the tourism experience. Preserving this historical and spiritual identity is essential to ensure that *Melukat* remains rooted in Balinese religious traditions rather than becoming a commodified attraction detached from its original meaning.

From an environmental perspective, the holy water at Pura Batu Bolong is the core element that determines both the continuity of the ritual and the attractiveness of spiritual tourism. Water is not merely understood as a natural resource but also as a symbol of purification, healing, and spiritual balance. These findings suggest that the protection of water sources must be a priority in the management of *Melukat* tourism. Any contamination, decline in water quality, or pressure from uncontrolled visitor flows may reduce both the spiritual value of the ritual and the quality of the tourism experience. This aligns with the view that the sustainability of sacred sites largely depends on the ability of stakeholders to preserve the *spirit of place* and the environmental resources that sustain it (Aulet & Duda, 2020; Choe & Mahyuni, 2023). A local resident (R5) stated that "The holy water flowing from the rocks is believed to help heal certain skin diseases." This belief underscores the importance of the sacred spring as both a spiritual and ecological resource. Any decline in water quality, pollution, or overuse caused by uncontrolled visitation could reduce the ritual's healing significance and diminish the authenticity of the spiritual experience.

From a cultural perspective, the transformation of *Melukat* into a tourism attraction must maintain its sacred values, ritual procedures, and the cultural authority of the local community. As part of Balinese Hindu religious practice, the ritual cannot be treated as a conventional tourism attraction. The findings show that cultural preservation involves not only maintaining the external form of the ritual but also safeguarding its meaning, rules, and the social structures surrounding it. In this context, cultural authenticity becomes a crucial factor to ensure that *Melukat* tourism remains rooted in Balinese identity rather than evolving into a commodified product that loses its spiritual significance (Chen et al., 2024; Yanti et al., 2024).

To clarify the relationships among these elements, Figure 3 presents a model of cultural and environmental sustainability in the development of *Melukat* tourism. The model positions the *Melukat* ritual at Pura Batu Bolong as the starting point, which then branches into two main dimensions: cultural sustainability and environmental sustainability. Within the cultural dimension, key elements include the preservation of sacred ritual values, the authenticity of Balinese culture, and the role of customary communities and temple custodians (*pengempon*). Within the environmental dimension, important aspects include the protection of holy water sources, waste and cleanliness management, and the regulation of tourist visits. These two dimensions converge within a community-based spiritual tourism management framework supported by tourist education, cultural interpretation, and stakeholder collaboration, with the ultimate goal of achieving sustainable *Melukat* tourism (Asmoro & Cahyadi, 2022; Ernawati et al., 2022).



(Source: Author's elaboration, 2025)

**Figure 3.** Cultural and environmental sustainability model in the development of *Melukat* tourism

The model presented in Figure 3 emphasizes that the sustainability of *Melukat* tourism requires community-based governance. Local communities, temple custodians (*pengempon*), traditional leaders, village authorities, and tourism village managers must act as the primary stakeholders in determining development directions, visitor limits, ritual regulations, and environmental protection mechanisms. This principle aligns with the concept of community-based tourism, which positions local communities as owners, managers, and primary beneficiaries of tourism. Accordingly, the development of *Melukat* tourism not only strengthens local cultural identity but also prevents external dominance and economic leakage from the village (Ernawati et al., 2022; Romanelli et al., 2021).

Beyond governance, tourist education and cultural interpretation are essential components in ensuring sustainability. Visitors need to understand the meaning of *Melukat*, appropriate dress codes, etiquette within the temple, limitations on documenting rituals, and the importance of maintaining cleanliness in sacred areas. Effective cultural interpretation helps tourists recognize that *Melukat* is not merely a tourism activity but a spiritual experience rooted in the value system of Balinese society. This is consistent with findings in IJASTE-related studies, which highlight that the success of sustainable tourism development is strongly influenced by governance, stakeholder involvement, and the ability of destinations to communicate cultural values responsibly (Asmoro & Cahyadi, 2022; Yanti et al., 2024).

The development of *Melukat* tourism at Pura Batu Bolong must be grounded in a balance between cultural preservation and environmental protection. Figure 3 demonstrates that the sustainability of *Melukat* tourism cannot be achieved solely through promotion or infrastructure development. Instead, it must be built through the protection of holy water sources, preservation of sacred values, active involvement of customary communities, tourist education, and stakeholder collaboration. These findings address the research objective by confirming that *Melukat* can be developed as a sustainable spiritual tourism attraction when managed ethically, community-based, and with respect for the interconnections between ritual, culture, and the environment (Aulet & Duda, 2020; Ernawati et al., 2022; Yanti et al., 2024).

These findings contribute to the broader literature on spiritual tourism by proposing an integrated framework linking ritual authenticity, transformative experiences, community-based governance, and spiritual sustainability as foundations for sustainable rural tourism development.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the *Melukat* ritual in Sawan Village has evolved beyond its traditional religious function and has become a meaningful spiritual tourism experience. The ritual provides opportunities for visitors to engage in spiritual cleansing, self-reflection, and cultural learning while maintaining its sacred values and authenticity. This finding supports previous

studies that identify spiritual tourism as a transformative experience that combines personal well-being, cultural engagement, and spiritual fulfilment.

The study also highlights the important role of local communities in managing and preserving the Melukat ritual. Community participation contributes not only to the protection of cultural traditions but also to the development of community-based tourism initiatives. Consistent with previous research on community-based tourism, the involvement of local stakeholders strengthens local ownership, enhances visitor experiences, and creates opportunities for sustainable economic benefits.

Another significant finding is the integration of cultural preservation and environmental sustainability within the development of spiritual tourism. The continued protection of sacred spaces, customary regulations, and natural resources demonstrates that tourism development can coexist with cultural and environmental conservation. This supports the growing perspective that sustainable tourism should balance economic opportunities with the preservation of cultural heritage and ecological integrity.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on spiritual tourism by demonstrating how traditional religious practices can be transformed into sustainable tourism experiences without diminishing their sacred meaning. The study further proposes an integrated perspective that connects spiritual experience, community participation, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability within the context of rural spiritual tourism development. Practically, the findings provide guidance for local communities, tourism managers, and policymakers in developing spiritual tourism destinations that prioritize authenticity, community participation, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability.

## Conclusions

This study concludes that the *Melukat* ritual at Pura Batu Bolong demonstrates strong potential to be developed as a spiritual tourism attraction in Sawan Village, Bali. The findings reveal that elements such as sacred water, ritual atmosphere, purification meaning, and active visitor participation collectively create a meaningful spiritual tourism experience characterized by healing, reflection, cultural learning, and personal transformation. *Melukat* is therefore not only a religious ritual but also a potential experiential tourism product that offers visitors opportunities for inner peace and self-discovery. This study makes a theoretical contribution by demonstrating how a living ritual can be systematically transformed into a spiritual tourism product that generates transformative tourist experiences while supporting sustainable rural tourism development. Specifically, the findings establish a conceptual link between ritual transformation, spiritual experiences, community-based governance, and rural sustainability. The study also introduces the notion of spiritual sustainability, emphasizing that the long-term viability of spiritual tourism depends on preserving sacred meanings, protecting holy water resources, and maintaining the spirit of place. The study further shows that *Melukat* tourism can contribute to cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and local economic development. From a cultural perspective, *Melukat* supports the continuity of Balinese ritual traditions and reinforces local identity. From an environmental perspective, the sacred water source represents a critical resource that must be protected through responsible, ethical, and controlled tourism management. From an economic perspective, the development of *Melukat* tourism creates opportunities for local communities, including roles as guides, providers of ritual materials, food and beverage operators, accommodation providers, transportation services, and producers of local souvenirs. From a practical and policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for the managers of Sawan Tourism Village to establish a structured community-based governance system involving customary leaders, temple custodians, village authorities, and tourism stakeholders. Operational priorities include the development of standard operating procedures for visitor participation, digital promotion strategies emphasizing healing and transformation, training for local guides and facilitators, and educational interpretation to communicate ritual meanings and ethical conduct. In addition, this study underscores the urgency of local regulations concerning visitor management and carrying capacity to protect the sanctity of the holy water source and the surrounding environment of Pura Batu Bolong. Such regulations should include

limits on visitor numbers, codes of conduct, waste management procedures, and regular monitoring of water quality to ensure that tourism development does not compromise the ritual's sacredness or ecological integrity. From a broader perspective, this study highlights the importance of developing tourism products grounded in local culture, spirituality, and community participation within the Indonesian tourism and hospitality sector. Spiritual tourism presents a meaningful alternative to mass tourism by offering more personal, reflective, and responsible travel experiences. In Bali and other Indonesian destinations, sacred rituals and living traditions can serve as valuable tourism assets when managed with respect, supported by clear cultural interpretation, active community involvement, and strong environmental protection. However, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses specifically on the *Melukat* ritual at Pura Batu Bolong, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other *Melukat* sites in Bali that may differ in cultural context, management practices, and tourism dynamics. Second, the study relies on qualitative data from selected informants and does not quantitatively assess tourist satisfaction, carrying capacity, economic valuation, or environmental impacts. Future research is recommended to address these limitations by adopting mixed-method or quantitative approaches. Subsequent studies may measure tourist satisfaction and transformative outcomes, assess community readiness and infrastructure capacity, evaluate visitor management strategies, and examine the economic and environmental impacts of spiritual tourism. Comparative research across different *Melukat* sites in Bali would also provide a broader understanding of how local variations influence the development of sustainable spiritual tourism.

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