

## Cultural Tourism and Social Dynamics in Bali: A Review of Sociological Perspectives on Identity, Commodification, and Social Sustainability

Loso Judijanto

IPOSS Jakarta

**Corresponding Author:** Loso Judijanto [losojudijantobumn@gmail.com](mailto:losojudijantobumn@gmail.com)

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Cultural Tourism, Bali, Sociological Perspective, Social Dynamics, Social Sustainability, Cultural Commodification, Social Identity, Social Capital, Traditional Institutions, Social Transformation

*Received :* 2 February

*Revised :* 20 March

*Accepted:* 20 April

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### ABSTRACT

Bali's cultural tourism is a complex social phenomenon, growing from the deep interweaving between social systems, cultural values, and the structure of local communities. This article aims to analyze Bali's cultural tourism from a sociological perspective, covering three main dimensions: the sociological foundation of cultural tourism as a social phenomenon, the social dynamics occurring in the practice of cultural tourism, and its relation to the social sustainability of Balinese society. The method used is a Qualitative Literature Review (QLR) with a thematic analysis approach that is interpretative and integrative toward reputable academic literature published mainly since 2020. The study results show that Balinese cultural tourism cannot be understood merely as an economic activity, but rather as a social practice that involves the construction of meaning, negotiation of identity, transformation of values, and continuous changes in social structure. Traditional social institutions such as customary villages, banjar, and subak have been proven to play a central role as social control mechanisms that maintain the balance between openness to tourism and the protection of local values. Cultural commodification, rather than being seen as degradation, is more appropriately understood as an adaptive social strategy that allows Balinese culture to remain alive and relevant amid the pressures of globalization. Nevertheless, social inequality in access to tourism resources, the erosion of community solidarity, and the weakening of customary authority in the face of economic interests remain serious structural challenges to social sustainability

## INTRODUCTION

Bali has long been recognized as one of the most influential cultural tourism destinations in the world, where the uniqueness of its social system, religious rituals, performing arts, and customary institutional structures become the main attractions that distinguish it from other destinations. The distinction of Bali does not lie solely in its natural beauty, but in the deep interweaving between the social life of its people and the cultural expressions that live in daily activities. In this context, cultural tourism is not merely an industry, but a complex social phenomenon that involves processes of interaction, identity negotiation, value transformation, and continuous changes in social structures (Amoiradis et al., 2024; Mudana et al., 2018; Picard, 1993, 1997; Richards, 2018).

Empirically, the development of tourism in Bali shows a trajectory that continues to increase year by year. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Bali Province recorded that international tourist visits to Bali throughout 2024 reached 6,333,360 people, an increase of 20.1 percent compared to 2023, which recorded 5,273,258 visits (BPS Bali, 2025). This figure has even surpassed pre-COVID-19 conditions, which affirms Bali's position as a resilient and continuously growing global tourist destination. This growth not only brings economic benefits but also creates pressures on social order, cultural identity, and the sustainability of local values that have long been the foundation of Bali's uniqueness as a tourist destination (Dwipayana & Sartini, 2023; Mahendra, 2024; Picard, 1993, 1997).

The urgency of sociological studies on Balinese cultural tourism is increasingly strong along with the growing global attention to social sustainability issues in tourism development. The phenomenon of over-tourism experienced by Bali in recent years has caused tangible impacts in the form of ecological pressure, socio-cultural changes, and threats to the sustainability of indigenous communities that have long preserved local traditions and values. On one hand, cultural tourism serves as an economic driver for the Balinese community; on the other hand, it raises a dilemma between preservation and exploitation that challenges the adaptive capacity of local social structures. In this context, a sociological perspective emerges as a relevant and necessary analytical framework to deeply understand the dynamics occurring behind the rapid development of Balinese cultural tourism (Poetra & Nurjaya, 2024; Yamashita & Picard, 1999).

The sociological perspective provides conceptual tools that allow for a more comprehensive understanding of Balinese cultural tourism as a social process involving power relations, meaning construction, identity changes, and value negotiation. Various main sociological theories – namely structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism – each offer complementary viewpoints in analyzing how cultural tourism shapes and is shaped by the social structure of Balinese society. For example, the functionalist approach views cultural tourism practices as mechanisms that contribute to social order and collective solidarity, while symbolic interactionism theory emphasizes how cultural meanings are constructed through social interactions between local communities, tourists, and other tourism actors. Meanwhile,

conflict theory reveals unequal power relations and the potential inequalities that arise in the distribution of tourism benefits at the community level (Aprilia Kumaji et al., 2021; Mudana et al., 2018). Recent studies show that the socio-cultural dimension plays a far more central role in the sustainability of Bali tourism compared to merely economic and ecological variables. In one study, it was found that the sociocultural dimension, particularly social collectivism, is a pivotal factor for the resilience of Bali's tourism communities even amid crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Hanita et al., 2024). These findings affirm that social capital embedded in traditional institutions such as banjar, adat villages, and the gotong royong system is not merely a passive cultural heritage, but an adaptive force that actively supports tourism sustainability. On the other hand, research on the social identity of customary villages amid the development of Bali's cultural tourism shows that the process of identity positioning is ongoing, where customary villages reinterpret their identity in response to the negative impacts of tourism on Balinese culture (Dwipayana & Sartini, 2023; Hakim et al., 2009; Wicaksono Adi, 2021).

The commodification of culture has become one of the most frequently debated sociological phenomena in the context of Bali tourism. In a study published in *LACULTOUR: Journal of Language and Cultural Tourism*, two main impacts of Balinese cultural tourism were identified, namely positive and negative impacts on the local Balinese community, where the commodification process of cultural elements such as dance, rituals, and traditional architecture creates tension between economic interests and the integrity of cultural values (Widhiastuty & Murdana, 2024). The commodification of Bali, which is growing exponentially, not only impacts the environment and spatial planning but also fundamentally changes the self-perception of Balinese society – a shift that directly affects social cohesion and collective identity. Comparative ethnographic studies across Southeast Asian destinations also find that the processes of cultural commodification, identity transformation, and changes in daily practices emerge through the intersections of complex sociocultural pressures, where local communities are not merely passive recipients of global capitalism pressures but active agents negotiating the boundaries of these changes (Indrianto, 2005).

The involvement of local communities in the management of cultural tourism and its relevance to social sustainability has also become an issue that is increasingly receiving academic attention. A study concluded that the role of local communities in realizing sustainable tourism in Bali can be categorized as spontaneous participation and induced participation, both of which contribute significantly to tourism management based on local values (Hanita et al., 2024; Nurrohmah et al., 2024). Moreover, research published in the *USM Law Review Journal* emphasizes the need for a more sustainable tourism management strategy that is sensitive to local culture in order to protect the continuity of Bali's indigenous communities, who have long been the main guardians of local wisdom (Poetra & Nurjaya, 2024; Rahmi, 2016). Studies on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bali tourism have also found systemic gaps, including weak policy enforcement, cultural commodification,

and power imbalances in multi-stakeholder collaborations – all of which are sociological issues that require in-depth study (Laksmi & Saputra, 2025).

With this background, this article appears as an effort to offer a comprehensive sociological understanding of Bali's cultural tourism practices. This study aims to: first, analyze the sociological foundations of Bali's cultural tourism as a social phenomenon born from the interweaving of social systems, cultural values, and societal structures; second, examine the social dynamics occurring in Bali's cultural tourism practices, including social relations, social transformation, cultural commodification, and changes in social identity; and third, explore the relationship between Bali's cultural tourism and social sustainability, including the role of social capital, structural challenges, unequal access, and strategies for strengthening social cohesion in facing the pressures of globalization and tourism modernization. Methodologically, this article uses a qualitative literature review approach that synthesizes various findings from previous studies to build an integrative sociological analytical framework that is relevant for the development of sustainable Balinese cultural tourism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Sociological Foundation of Bali Cultural Tourism

Bali's cultural tourism grows from the long intertwining between the social system, cultural values, and the life practices of its people. This phenomenon not only brings about tourist mobility but also represents complex social relations, where culture functions as a source of meaning, identity, and negotiation of interests. A sociological perspective allows a deeper understanding of these dynamics as a continuously moving social process (Panjaitan & Laia, 2025; Prihantara et al., 2025).

#### 1. Balinese Cultural Tourism as a Social Phenomenon

Bali's cultural tourism can be understood as a social phenomenon because its existence is shaped, carried out, and interpreted through human relations within a societal structure. Tourism activities do not stand merely as economic activities but are tied to patterns of social interaction, value systems, and the division of roles that exist within Balinese society. The presence of tourists, industry actors, and local communities creates a new social space that brings together different interests within a single cultural arena. In this arena, tradition, rituals, and artistic expressions serve as a medium of social communication that bridges the local and global worlds. Cultural tourism then becomes a social practice that involves processes of adaptation, selection, and reinterpretation of cultural meanings so that they can be understood across social backgrounds. This process demonstrates how Balinese society actively manages its cultural image without completely abandoning the social roots that support everyday life. This phenomenon also shows that cultural tourism is not a static reality, but rather the result of social construction that continues to change along with the development of power, economic, and symbolic relations (N. M. Lestari & Ardika, 2023; N. M. P. Lestari et al., 2025).

The understanding of cultural tourism as a social phenomenon positions the Balinese community as an active subject, not merely as an object of observation. The community is involved in the process of producing meaning through traditional institutions, social organizations, and collective practices that regulate how culture is displayed and preserved. Tourism expands the space for social interaction, creating intense intercultural contact, while also generating negotiations of values between local traditions and global expectations. In this context, cultural tourism acts as a social mechanism that mediates change, where the Balinese community maintains social continuity while responding to the demands of modernity. Cultural tourism in Bali develops as a social practice that involves the process of constructing shared meanings between the local community and tourism actors, so that culture is not only displayed but also negotiated within dynamic social relations (Lenak & Simamora, 2026; Purnaya & Runa, 2021).

### **Balinese Culture in the Social Structure of Society**

Balinese culture is deeply rooted in the social structure of the community, which is composed of kinship systems, customary organizations, and religious practices. This structure forms a social framework where cultural values and norms are collectively practiced. Traditional villages, banjars, and religious institutions function as social institutions that regulate communal life while also serving as guardians of cultural continuity. In the context of tourism, this social structure plays an important role in determining how culture can be accessed, displayed, and interpreted by outsiders. Balinese culture does not stand as a separate artifact, but is embedded in social relations that enliven it through ceremonies, performing arts, and daily practices. The social structure provides both boundaries and opportunities, enabling the community to collectively manage cultural tourism in a way that aligns with the communal values they uphold.

The presence of cultural tourism has created new interactions between traditional social structures and modern mechanisms. The Balinese community negotiates its social role as both the guardian of tradition and an actor in the tourism economy. This process demonstrates the flexibility of social structures in responding to changes without losing cultural legitimacy. Culture continues to function as a source of social solidarity, even though it undergoes adjustments in the context of tourism. The social structure of the Balinese community allows culture to adapt within tourism without being uprooted from its social function, because customary values and local institutions remain the foundation for cultural management (Herawati, 2025; Malik, 2017; Sutawan & Windia, 2020).

## **2. Tourism as a Process of Social Interaction**

Cultural tourism is essentially a process of social interaction that involves the meeting of individuals and groups from different social backgrounds. This interaction occurs in various forms, ranging from symbolic communication through art and rituals to economic relationships between local communities and tourists. Bali becomes a social space where local identity meets global perspectives, creating mutually influential social experiences. These interactions shape new perceptions, attitudes, and understandings for both tourists and local communities. Cultural tourism then functions as an arena for social exchange, where cultural meanings are constructed through implicit and explicit dialogue (Amanda & Meltareza, 2025; Herawati, 2025).

Social interaction in cultural tourism also carries implications for power relations and representation. The Balinese community not only interacts passively but also actively manages how they are represented. This process reflects the social ability to direct interactions to align with cultural values and collective interests. Social interaction in Balinese cultural tourism shows a reciprocal relationship between tourists and the local community, where the exchange of cultural meanings occurs dynamically and shapes shared social experiences (Ardika & Wijaya, 2022a; Intan & Septiani, 2022).

## **3. The Role of Values, Norms, and Traditions in Cultural Tourism**

Values, norms, and traditions are social foundations that guide the practice of Balinese cultural tourism. Values such as balance, harmony, and togetherness become principles that regulate how culture is displayed and practiced. Customary norms serve as social guidelines to ensure that tourism activities do not violate cultural order. Traditions, whether in the form of rituals or arts, become concrete expressions of these value systems. In cultural tourism, values and norms function not only as symbols but also as social mechanisms that control change to remain within the cultural framework (Permana & Dewi, 2024).

1. The application of values and norms in cultural tourism demonstrates the ability of the Balinese community to maintain social cohesion. Tourism does not entirely replace tradition, but encourages reinterpretation that remains rooted in local values. Balinese customary values and norms serve as social regulators in cultural tourism, ensuring that tourism practices remain aligned with the principles of harmony and social sustainability (I. N. D. Putra & Suardana, 2023; Rahmi, 2016).

### **2. Balinese Cultural Tourism in the Perspective of Sociological Theory**

Bali's cultural tourism can be analyzed in depth through various sociological theory perspectives that place culture as part of the social system. The functionalism approach views cultural tourism as a mechanism that contributes to social order, where traditions, rituals, and arts function to maintain collective solidarity while also meeting the economic needs of the community. Within this framework, cultural tourism plays a role in strengthening social integration because it involves joint participation between individuals, customary groups, and social institutions. Cultural practices presented to tourists not only serve as an economic means, but also function to maintain the continuity of values and norms that bind Balinese society. Meanwhile, the perspective of symbolic

interactionism emphasizes how the meaning of culture in tourism is constructed through everyday social interactions. Balinese cultural symbols, such as religious ceremonies and performing arts, are interpreted differently by local communities and tourists, yet these meanings are negotiated through direct interaction experiences. This process demonstrates that cultural tourism is a social space where meaning is continuously produced and reproduced (Kurniawan et al., 2021; Permana & Dewi, 2024).

The conflict theory perspective provides a critical view of Balinese cultural tourism by highlighting power relations and the distribution of social benefits. Cultural tourism can create inequalities between actors who have access to capital and indigenous communities who are the custodians of culture. However, Bali's strong social structure allows for the occurrence of social control mechanisms through customary institutions and collective norms. Thus, sociological theory helps to understand cultural tourism as a social process full of interests, negotiations, and adaptations. Cultural tourism cannot be separated from the social dynamics surrounding it, because it develops within a complex and constantly changing network of social relations. A sociological approach to Balinese cultural tourism shows that tourism practices are the result of interactions between social functions, the construction of symbolic meaning, and power relations negotiated within the local community structure (Putri et al., 2025; Suryawan & Astina, 2024).

## METHODOLOGY

This article uses a Qualitative Literature Review (QLR) approach as the main research method. Unlike a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) which requires strict search protocols, standardized inclusion and exclusion criteria, and reproducible reporting procedures such as PRISMA, the QLR approach is more interpretative, flexible, and oriented towards theory building as well as conceptual synthesis of the existing literature. Qualitative literature review allows researchers to selectively choose, analyze, and interpret sources based on conceptual relevance and their contribution to a deep understanding of a phenomenon, rather than solely on the fulfillment of uniform methodological criteria (Snyder, 2019). This approach is highly suitable for complex and interpretive sociological studies such as Balinese cultural tourism, where the depth of analysis and richness of socio-cultural context are far more important than the quantity of studies included. The sources examined in this article include reputable scientific journal articles – both in Indonesian and English that are indexed in Scopus, SINTA, and other academic databases – scholarly books, as well as empirical research reports relevant to the topic of Balinese cultural tourism from a sociological perspective, published primarily from 2020 to 2024 (Ghosh & Choudhury, 2025; Zarei, 2025).

The literature analysis process in this article was carried out through a thematic analysis approach that allows for the identification, grouping, and interpretation of main themes from various sources reviewed. The stages of thematic analysis were conducted iteratively, including: first, reading and in-depth familiarization with the collected literature; second, initial coding to mark

relevant units of meaning; third, grouping codes into broader themes; and fourth, reviewing and finalizing themes as the basis for writing. There is a practical framework for the use of qualitative research practices in the preparation of literature reviews, where rich textual information from various academic sources is treated as primary qualitative data – that is, systematized, coded, and interpreted reflectively to produce a coherent narrative synthesis. This process allows the article to go beyond mere literature summarization, towards the construction of an integrative analytical argument regarding Balinese cultural tourism as a sociological phenomenon (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2021).

The trustworthiness of this study is maintained through several strategies commonly applied in qualitative research. First, credibility is established through source triangulation, which involves referring to a variety of literature – including perspectives from sociology, tourism studies, cultural studies, and social policy – to validate and strengthen each analytical claim presented. Second, transferability is ensured by providing a rich description of the context (thick description) regarding the socio-cultural conditions of Balinese society so that readers can assess the relevance of the findings of this article to a broader context. Third, confirmability is pursued through transparency in presenting citations and references explicitly for every significant statement, so that readers can trace and verify the evidence base used. Thus, although the QLR approach is interpretative and does not require procedural replicability like SLR, methodological rigor is still maintained through practices that ensure intellectual honesty and the depth of sociological analysis in this article (Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Lim, 2024; Sekhon et al., 2024).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Social Dynamics in the Practice of Balinese Cultural Tourism**

The development of cultural tourism in Bali cannot be separated from the social dynamics that grow within its community. Tourism activities create a space for interaction between traditional values and modern interests, giving rise to complex social relations, identity negotiations, and changes in social structure that occur gradually but continuously.

#### ***1. Social Relations between Local Residents and Tourists***

The social relationship between local Balinese residents and tourists is formed through daily interactions that occur in tourism spaces, such as tourist villages, traditional ceremonial areas, art markets, and cultural performance spaces. This relationship is not merely economic in nature but is also rich with social and symbolic dimensions. The local community positions itself as both a guardian of culture and a provider of cultural experiences, while tourists come as parties who bring diverse values, expectations, and behavioral patterns. These interactions form a dynamic pattern of relationships, in which the Balinese community actively engages in social adjustments without completely relinquishing their cultural identity. Traditional social structures such as banjar and customary villages act as mediators that regulate the boundaries of interaction to remain in harmony with collective norms (Mahendra, 2024; Palar & Hewat, 2024).

Tourism practices also give rise to social relations that are asymmetrical, especially in the context of symbolic and economic power. Tourists are often perceived as parties with high purchasing power, which can potentially influence how communities present their culture. This process encourages the emergence of social strategies in the form of cultural packaging that is communicative yet selective. These relations do not always lead to open conflict but present a subtle and ongoing social negotiation process. The Balinese community demonstrates adaptive ability through social mechanisms rooted in the values of togetherness and harmony, the relationship between local communities and tourists in Balinese cultural tourism evolves as a socially negotiated interaction consciously aimed at maintaining a balance between cultural openness and the protection of local values (Permana & Dewi, 2024; Santosa, 2021).

## ***2. Social Transformation Due to Cultural Tourism***

Cultural tourism encourages social transformation in the life of Balinese society, both at the level of structure and everyday social practices. The change of livelihoods from the agrarian sector to the tourism service sector is the most evident indicator of this process. This transformation not only impacts work patterns but also affects the division of social roles within families and communities. The younger generation tends to be more involved in the tourism industry due to the demands for communication skills and work flexibility, while the older generation maintains a symbolic role as guardians of tradition. This change creates a new social configuration that brings together traditional values with modern economic logic.

The ongoing social transformation also touches on the sphere of values and life orientations of the community. Economic success from tourism gives rise to new aspirations related to education, lifestyle, and social mobility. This process does not always mean a radical shift in values, but rather a reinterpretation of old values to make them relevant to the tourism context. The Balinese community demonstrates the ability to integrate changes without eliminating the fundamental principles of communal life. Cultural tourism functions as an agent of social transformation that drives changes in the economic structure and patterns of social interaction of the Balinese community, yet these changes occur through an adaptation process based on local values (Utama & Putra, 2022).

### **Cultural Commodification in Bali Tourism**

The commodification of culture is a phenomenon that is inseparable from the practice of cultural tourism in Bali. Cultural elements such as dance, rituals, traditional costumes, and architecture undergo a packaging process to be consumed by tourists. This process changes the meaning of culture from being originally sacred and contextual to being more representative and communicative. From a sociological perspective, commodification is not always understood as cultural degradation, but rather as a social strategy to maintain the continuity of culture amidst global economic pressures. The Balinese community actively participates in determining the forms of commodification that are considered appropriate and in accordance with local values (Indrianto, 2005; Mahendra, 2024; Prasiasa et al., 2023).

The commodification of culture also gives rise to discourse on authenticity and representation. Cultural performances that are adjusted to the timing and tastes of tourists are often considered a form of simplification of meaning. However, from the perspective of local communities, such practices are understood as a form of social compromise that allows culture to remain alive and widely recognized. This process reflects the ability of the Balinese community to manage cultural symbols reflectively. The commodification of culture in Bali does not completely eliminate the original meaning, but rather produces a new form of cultural expression that is negotiated between economic interests and the social values of the community (Prasiasa et al., 2023; Wahyuni, 2020).

### **1. *Changes in the Social Identity of Balinese Society***

The social identity of Balinese society has undergone changes along with the intensity of interaction with the outside world through cultural tourism. The traditional identity rooted in religion, customs, and local communities now coexists with a new identity as participants in the global tourism industry. This process results in a dual identity that is situational, where the community is able to display different roles according to the social context they face. Identity as farmers, artists, or traditional leaders does not disappear, but transforms with the addition of roles as tour guides, homestay managers, or creative workers (Dwipayana & Sartini, 2023; N. M. Lestari & Ardika, 2023; Windhartoko, 2022). The changes in social identity occur through a process of collective reflection involving indigenous communities. Cultural identity is not detached from local roots, but rather reconstructed to remain relevant and meaningful. Tourism becomes a space for the production of identity, allowing the Balinese society to define themselves in front of global tourists. The changes in the social identity of Balinese society in the context of cultural tourism show a process of hybridization, where local identity is maintained while adopting new roles shaped by global interaction (N. M. Lestari & Ardika, 2023; Mahendra, 2024; Palar & Hewat, 2024).

### **2. *Social Institutions and Their Role in Cultural Tourism***

Social institutions hold a central position in regulating, directing, and maintaining the continuity of Bali's cultural tourism practices so that they remain in harmony with social order and local cultural values. Traditional institutions such as customary villages, banjar, and subak function as social structures that control community participation in tourism activities. The existence of these institutions ensures that tourism practices do not develop individualistically, but remain within the framework of collectivity and social responsibility. Every tourism activity that utilizes space, symbols, or cultural practices generally must obtain social legitimacy through customary deliberation mechanisms. This pattern shows that cultural tourism in Bali does not operate merely as an economic activity, but as a social practice embedded in the traditional institutional system (Astara et al., 2025; Darsana et al., 2026; Diwyarthi et al., 2025; Esta & Wirantari, 2025).

The role of social institutions is also evident in conflict management and the distribution of tourism benefits. When tensions arise due to differences in interests among tourism actors, local communities, and external parties, customary institutions function as social mediators with moral authority. Social institutions become a space for articulating collective interests as well as guardians of the balance between cultural preservation and economic demands. In addition, religious institutions also play a role in preserving the sacred meaning of cultural practices so that they are not reduced to mere spectacles. Traditional social institutions in Bali act as the main pillars in directing cultural tourism practices to remain based on local values, while also serving as social mechanisms to manage changes and conflicts arising from tourism (I. M. E. L. Putra et al., 2024; Saskarawati et al., 2023; Suryawan & Suartika, 2024).

### **Bali Cultural Tourism and Social Sustainability**

Bali's cultural tourism cannot be separated from social sustainability issues concerning relations between individuals, groups, and customary institutions in the context of global change. Social sustainability positions local communities as subjects who experience, interpret, and respond to tourism practices. A sociological perspective provides an analytical framework for understanding how cultural tourism shapes social resilience, community cohesion, and the accompanying structural challenges (Koerniawati, 2022; G. N. M. S. Putra et al., 2025).

#### **1. Cultural Tourism as the Social Capital of Balinese Society**

Cultural tourism in Bali develops on the foundation of social relationships that were established long before the tourism industry existed. Communal bonds in the form of banjar, traditional villages, and cooperative systems become social resources that enable the Balinese community to actively participate in tourism management. This social capital, in addition to functioning as a social adhesive, also serves as a mechanism for distributing roles and responsibilities in cultural tourism activities. Trust among citizens, collective norms, and social participation create a collaborative space that allows tourism practices to take place without completely eroding the local social structure. In this context, cultural tourism operates as a social arena that brings together economic interests with values of togetherness, so that the community does not merely become a service provider, but a social actor with bargaining power in determining the direction of tourism development (Al-Mubaroq et al., 2025; Joniarta et al., 2023; Widyatmaja & Darma Putra, 2020).

The presence of strong social capital also contributes to social sustainability because it is able to mitigate conflicts and strengthen solidarity amid the intensity of interactions with tourists. Community-based cultural tourism practices show that traditional social relations can transform into adaptive strengths without losing their original meaning. Social capital functions as a buffer against excessive commercialization pressure, because collective values are still used as a reference in decision making. The success of cultural tourism in Bali is greatly influenced by the community's ability to utilize social capital as a source of sustainability. The social capital of the Balinese indigenous people becomes an important foundation in maintaining the balance between

tourism interests and the continuity of local social life (Agra Adiaya et al., 2024; Muliadisa & Aprinica, 2022; Suryani & Sunarta, 2021).

## **2. Social Challenges in Cultural Tourism Development**

The development of Bali's cultural tourism presents complex and layered social challenges. The intensity of tourist visits creates pressure on the community's lifestyle, especially regarding the allocation of time between customary activities and economic activities. Changes in the rhythm of social life often lead to tensions between generations, where the younger generation is more adaptive to the demands of the tourism industry compared to the older generation, which is oriented towards preserving traditional values. This challenge is not only individual but also structural because it involves changes in social roles, customary authority, and mechanisms of social control. When tourism becomes the main source of livelihood, a pragmatic orientation has the potential to shift the symbolic meaning of cultural practices that were previously sacred (Muliadisa & Aprinica, 2022; Pradnyawathi & Pitana, 2021; Prasiasa et al., 2023; Susanti et al., 2024).

These dynamics show that social sustainability cannot be understood merely as economic sustainability. Social challenges arise in the form of conflicts of interest, unequal participation, and the erosion of social solidarity if tourism is not managed sensitively to the local social structure. The sociological perspective emphasizes the importance of strengthening community capacity so that it can manage change without losing control over its social space. The development of cultural tourism in Bali faces a dilemma between preservation and exploitation, with the main challenge of Bali's cultural tourism lying in the community's ability to maintain social integrity amid economic pressures and tourism globalization (Ardika & Wijaya, 2022b; Astuti & Sabatia, 2025; Byomantara & Sucipta, 2024; I. M. E. L. Putra et al., 2024).

## **3. Social Inequality and Access to Tourism**

Bali's cultural tourism also raises issues of social inequality related to access to tourism resources. Not all residents have equal opportunities to participate and benefit from tourism activities. Differences in economic capital, education, and social networks cause some groups to be more dominant in tourism management, while other groups are in a marginal position. This inequality is reflected in the distribution of profits, land ownership, and access to strategic tourism spaces. From a sociological perspective, these conditions have the potential to widen social gaps and weaken community cohesion if not balanced with fair redistribution mechanisms (Cole & Browne, 2022; Darmawan, 2025; Santika & Anandari, 2025; Setyaningsih, 2025).

Unequal access to cultural tourism also impacts the perception of social justice at the local level. When tourism is perceived to benefit only a few parties, social legitimacy towards tourism practices can decrease. Social sustainability demands policies and practices that increasingly provide opportunities for participation to vulnerable groups so that tourism does not become a source of social exclusion. Social inequality is a crucial issue in Bali tourism. Unequal access to cultural tourism resources reinforces social stratification in Balinese society and challenges the principles of social sustainability (I. N. D. Putra & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Rasendriya et al., 2025; Wati & Yasa, 2024).

#### ***4. Strategies for Strengthening Social Cohesion through Cultural Tourism***

Strengthening social cohesion is an important prerequisite for the sustainability of Bali's cultural tourism. Social cohesion is formed through fair interactions, recognition of the roles of each group, and collective conflict management. Cultural tourism can be utilized as a medium to strengthen the sense of togetherness if managed with a participatory approach that respects local social structures. The involvement of customary villages, banjars, and other social institutions in tourism decision-making creates a sense of ownership that strengthens social bonds. This strategy allows tourism, in addition to functioning as an economic activity, to also serve as a means of reproducing social values that reinforce collective identity (Saputra & Paramitha, 2024; Suprastayasa et al., 2025; Sutawa & Riana, 2021).

The sociological approach emphasizes that social cohesion does not emerge automatically, but rather through an ongoing process of social negotiation. Strengthening community capacity, critical education, and dialogue among tourism actors become important elements in maintaining the balance between change and sustainability. Community-based strategies are able to strengthen social cohesion while also increasing the community's resilience to the negative impacts of tourism. Participatory-managed cultural tourism has been proven to strengthen social cohesion and increase the chances of social sustainability in Bali (Arvita et al., 2025; Safitri et al., 2026; Utama & Mahadewi, 2023).

#### ***5. Direction of Bali Cultural Tourism Development in Sociological Perspective***

The direction of Bali's cultural tourism development from a sociological perspective places the local community as the center of analysis as well as the main subject of social change. Tourism is not understood merely as an economic sector, but as a social process that shapes patterns of relationships, power structures, and cultural meanings in the daily life of the Balinese people. The development of socially sustainable cultural tourism requires a collective awareness that culture is not merely an asset to be exploited, but a value system that underpins identity and social cohesion. Therefore, the direction of tourism development must be in harmony with the social structure of customary villages, deliberation mechanisms, and the principles of balance that have long guided the life of Balinese society. A sociological perspective helps to read this dynamics by highlighting the relationships between local actors, the state, and the global market in shaping the face of cultural tourism (Agung et al., 2020; Wijaya & Sunarta, 2022).

The development of Bali's cultural tourism in the future cannot be separated from social changes triggered by modernization and globalization. The Balinese community is in a continuous negotiation between maintaining tradition and adapting to the demands of the tourism industry. In this context, the direction of tourism development needs to strengthen the social capacity of the community so that they are able to manage change without losing control over their social and symbolic spaces. Social education, the strengthening of customary institutions, and policies that favor communities are important factors in creating social sustainability. Sociologically sensitive cultural tourism will

encourage a more equitable distribution of benefits, strengthen citizen participation, and maintain cultural integrity as a living social practice, not merely a spectacle (Anom et al., 2020; Widiantara et al., 2025).

The sociological approach also emphasizes the importance of critical reflection on the tourism development model that has been applied so far. The direction of Bali's cultural tourism development needs to shift from a growth orientation to a social sustainability orientation that places collective well-being above short-term economic interests. This includes recognition of the social rights of local communities, protection of cultural spaces, and strengthening community-based social control mechanisms. Socially sustainable cultural tourism will be achieved when communities have space to determine the limits, rhythm, and forms of their involvement in tourism. The future of Bali's cultural tourism is largely determined by the courage to place the social dimension as the main foundation. The direction of Bali's cultural tourism development must be based on social justice, community empowerment, and respect for local social structures so that sustainability can be realized in a tangible way (Pranadji & Suhaeti, 2016; Utama et al., 2024; Yudhistira & Suwena, 2024).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has sociologically outlined that Balinese cultural tourism is a social phenomenon that cannot be reduced merely to an economic activity. Through the perspective of sociology – encompassing structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory – it is evident that the practice of Balinese cultural tourism grows and develops within a complex network of social relations, where culture functions simultaneously as a source of meaning, a medium of social communication, and an arena for negotiating interests between local communities, tourists, industry actors, and the state. The traditional social system of Bali – especially the customary villages, banjar, and subak – has proven to be not merely a static cultural heritage, but a living social institution that actively directs, regulates, and safeguards the sustainability of cultural tourism practices to remain aligned with the values, norms, and principles of harmony that form the foundation of the collective life of the Balinese people. In other words, the uniqueness of Balinese cultural tourism lies precisely in the strong embeddedness – deep rootedness – between tourism activities and the social structures that support them.

The social dynamics that occur in the practice of Balinese cultural tourism show a paradoxical yet adaptive pattern. On one hand, tourism drives significant social transformation: changes in livelihoods, reconfiguration of social roles within families and communities, the emergence of situational dual identities, as well as the intensification of the cultural commodification process that shifts the meaning of cultural symbols from originally sacred to more representational and consumable. On the other hand, the Balinese people demonstrate an extraordinary adaptive capacity – not merely passively accepting change, but reflectively managing the boundaries of that change based on local values. Cultural commodification, which is often seen as degradation, in the context of Bali is more appropriately understood as a social strategy that allows culture to remain alive, widely recognized, and relevant in a global context. The ability of

the Balinese people to maintain social continuity while responding to the demands of modernity is precisely what characterizes and constitutes the main strength of Bali's cultural tourism model in the face of globalization pressures.

Studies on social sustainability emphasize that the long-term success of Bali's cultural tourism is largely determined by how well the local community's social capital is nurtured and empowered. Social capital embedded in communal bonds, trust among citizens, and collective participation is not only a social adhesive but also an adaptive mechanism that enables communities to face the pressures of commercialization and social change without losing cultural integrity. Nevertheless, this study also identifies serious structural challenges: social inequality in access to tourism resources, the erosion of social solidarity due to an economic pragmatic orientation, as well as the potential weakening of the authority of customary institutions when individual interests and outside capital begin to exceed the boundaries of collective norms. The social sustainability of Bali's cultural tourism, therefore, is not a condition that can be considered permanently achieved, but rather a social process that must be continuously negotiated, maintained, and strengthened through policies that are sociologically sensitive and based on respect for the rights and roles of customary communities.

Overall, this article asserts that a sociological approach to Balinese cultural tourism is not merely a complement to economic or ecological analysis, but rather a fundamental perspective that cannot be ignored in any effort to develop responsible tourism. The social dimension – encompassing social structure, power relations, collective identity, community cohesion, and the sustainability of values – must be positioned as the main foundation, not a secondary variable, in the formulation of tourism policies. The future direction of Balinese cultural tourism development should shift from a quantitative growth orientation toward a social sustainability orientation that prioritizes collective well-being, equitable distribution of benefits, and the protection of the social-cultural space of local communities. Only in this way can Bali's cultural tourism continue to grow as a living social practice – not merely a global spectacle – that represents the resilience of local civilization amid the ongoing currents of modernity.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Based on the findings and analysis that have been presented, several relevant and urgent future research agendas can be identified as follows:

1. Empirical field-based study on the perceptions of Bali's youth. In-depth qualitative research is needed that specifically explores how young Balinese involved in the global tourism industry negotiate social identity, value orientation, and their role in the preservation of local culture. Intergenerational value shifts are a critical sociological variable that has not been systematically studied enough in the context of Balinese cultural tourism.
2. Comparative cross-village research on social resilience. A comparative study between traditional villages that have successfully maintained

social cohesion and cultural integrity and those that have experienced significant disruption due to tourism will produce a more precise understanding of the factors determining the social resilience of Balinese communities. A comparative case study approach using qualitative or mixed methods is highly recommended for this purpose.

3. Analysis of power relations and the distribution of tourism benefits based on primary data. The issue of social inequality in access to tourism resources requires empirical research that deeply explores the mechanisms of benefit distribution at the community level, including the role of external actors (investors, international tour operators, and digital platforms) in shaping asymmetric local power structures.
4. Study on the impact of digitalization and the platform economy on Bali's cultural tourism practices. The emergence of platforms such as Airbnb, TikTok, and Instagram has fundamentally changed the way tourists consume and interpret Balinese culture, as well as how local communities represent themselves digitally. The sociological impact of this shift – including its implications for the digital commodification of culture, social identity, and community control over cultural representation – is still very minimally researched and highly relevant to be further explored.
5. Interdisciplinary research on community-based tourism policies. Collaboration between sociology, political science, and public policy studies is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of existing tourism policies in protecting the social rights of Bali's indigenous communities, unraveling structural inequalities, and promoting a more socially just and sustainable tourism model in the long term.

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