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The Value of Local Spirituality in Indonesian Society as the Basis for Managing Religious Ecotourism

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the global ecological crisis, the strengthening of identity politics, and the increasing commodification of religion, local spirituality values form the basis for the management of religious ecotourism. The aim is to develop a conceptual framework that centres local spirituality in religious ecotourism management. This study is positioned as a conceptual study, employing an integrative literature review to compile and critique previous theories and findings systematically. The results conclude that truly sustainable religious ecotourism requires a radical shift from tourism that merely uses local spirituality to governance led by local spirituality as a source of values, direction, and ethical boundaries. The conflict between the sacredness of space and commercialisation can only be resolved if concepts such as Tri Hita Karana, Siri'na Pacce, Sedulur Papat Lima Pancer, and Huma Betang are operated as a framework for decision-making, and if religious rituals are transformed from routine ceremonies into vehicles for education and mobilisation of collective ecological awareness. Thus, religious ecotourism is no longer another face of a sanctified extractive industry, but a concrete path towards Indonesian eco-theology, a practice of faith that binds communities to protect the earth, honour their ancestors, and redefine the meaning of progress in the midst of an ecological crisis.

INTRODUCTION

The development of global tourism over the past two decades has shown a shift in orientation from mere recreation to a search for meaning, inner depth, and transformational experiences. Religious tourism, which includes pilgrimages, visits to sacred sites, and participation in religious rituals, has been revitalised in line with the increasing need for psychological peace, mental health, and the search for spiritual identity amid the upheavals of modernity, ecological crises, and digital technology disruption (Choe, 2025). In Indonesia, this trend is evident in the increase in visits to various religious destinations, ranging from the *Wali Songo* pilgrimage in Java to temples and shrines in Bali and across the archipelago, to interfaith sacred sites that offer a combination of spiritual, cultural, and historical educational experiences.

In Indonesia, religious tourism cannot be separated from religious diversity, local traditions, and the long history of human interaction with nature and the sacred (Soi et al., 2023). Ancient mosques, traditional temples, monasteries, historic churches, the tombs of saints and charismatic figures, and natural landscapes positioned as spaces for contemplation are essential nodes in the archipelago's network of spirituality. However, many religious destinations have developed within a technocratic management framework that emphasises infrastructure, accessibility, and promotion (Mishra et al., 2025). At the same time, the accompanying dimensions of local spiritual values and ecological ethics have not been fully integrated as conceptual and operational foundations.

The tension between the need for environmental conservation, the demands of local economic growth, and the obligation to maintain the sanctity of space is often managed through a fragmentary administrative approach, rather than through deep reflection on local spirituality as a source of ethics and governance. The concept of ecotourism offers a normative framework that is more sensitive to sustainability, emphasising environmental conservation, community empowerment, and ecological education.

When the principles of ecotourism are combined with religious dimensions, the idea of religious ecotourism is born, which is a form of tourism that is not only oriented towards visits to places of worship or sacred sites, but also practises respect for ecosystems, local cultures, and sacred social orders. Studies on the potential of religious ecotourism in coastal, swamp, and forest areas show that the development of religion-based tourism can be an essential instrument for promoting environmental conservation values while increasing community income, provided it is managed in a participatory and sustainable manner (Hanafi et al., 2023). However, if the religious dimension is only used as a label to attract tourists, without transforming the view of nature as part of sacred reality, religious ecotourism risks being trapped in both greenwashing and religious washing, appearing green and pious on the surface but still operating within the logic of exploitation.

Spiritual and religious motivations remain one of the main drivers of global tourism mobility, as well as a battleground between sacredness, commodification, and cultural identity (Timothy & Olsen, 2021). On the one hand, religious tourism can strengthen cross-cultural understanding and preserve spiritual heritage. On the other hand, it can encourage the banality of the sacred when rituals, symbols, and religious spaces are reduced to attractions that must always be Instagrammable and economical. It is at this point that local spirituality becomes crucial, acting as an ethical filter that regulates the boundaries between what can be displayed and what must be preserved, between exploitation and respect, between public access and the protection of sacredness.

Various studies show that local wisdom plays a vital role in environmental conservation and natural resource management, including through customary norms, exploitation taboos, and mystical beliefs that contain ecological dimensions. Analysis of local wisdom as an environmental conservation strategy confirms that almost all ethnic groups in Indonesia have traditions that regulate harmonious relations between humans and nature. However, many of these have been eroded by modernisation and exploitative development policies (Hasbiah, 2015). Local beliefs in guardian spirits, customary rules, and mutual assistance practices form an ecological ethic that is effective in preserving mangrove ecosystems, especially when combined with ecotourism schemes and community-based management. This reality shows that local spirituality is not only a matter of formal religious rituals, but also concerns how communities perceive nature as an integral part of a sacred cosmic order.

A study on the integration of local wisdom values into the management of the West Bali National Park also shows that tourism management grounded in environmental law will be stronger and more deeply rooted when reinforced by local values held by communities surrounding the area (Sugiartha et al., 2023). Another recent study on religious ecotourism shows efforts to bridge the spiritual, cultural, and ecological dimensions (Purnamawati et al., 2022). A quantitative research of religious ecotourism villages in Bali, for example, analysed the influence of technology, commitment, and cultural change on the sustainability of these villages and found that cultural transformation and the use of technology can encourage sustainable development if framed by community values (Iwahara, 2025; Sudiarta et al., 2025).

Another study examining religious ethics in the development of ecotourism around Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia emphasises the role of religious norms in shaping citizen participation, civic ethics, and conservation practices in tourist areas socially and symbolically linked to religious institutions (Amiruddin et al., 2025; Suhartanto et al., 2025; Sumi et al., 2025). In coastal and mangrove forest areas, studies on religious ecotourism development strategies also highlight the importance of noble traditional and spiritual cultural values as a moral argument for preserving the coast and mangrove ecosystems while opening up opportunities for local economic activities. However, in many of these studies, spirituality is often treated as one variable or supporting factor rather than as a conceptual basis that explicitly formulates the principles of religious ecotourism management. This study departs from concerns about fragmentation and the belief that local spiritual values can and should serve as the basis for the management of religious ecotourism.

This study aims to identify and map the forms of local spirituality that are alive and articulated by the community in the context of religious ecotourism destinations by analysing how these values are translated or suppressed in the institutional structure, participation mechanisms, and daily management practices at these destinations. The essence lies in the effort to make local spirituality not merely a descriptive object, but an epistemic and ethical source for designing the governance of religious ecotourism.

METHOD

This study is deliberately positioned as a conceptual study with an integrative literature review approach, rather than an empirical study based on field data collection. This methodological decision stems from the belief that, before religious ecotourism can be designed and managed based on local spiritual values, a solid, interdisciplinary, and integrated theoretical foundation is required. To that end, this study systematically compiles and critiques various theories and previous findings related to religious tourism and pilgrimage studies, ecotourism and sustainable tourism, local wisdom and traditional

knowledge, spiritual ecology and environmental ethics, and community-based tourism destination management. The literature is not only presented descriptively, but also brought together in a critical dialogue to identify common ground, tensions, and opportunities for synthesis, particularly in relation to key concepts such as the sacredness of space, local wisdom, community participation, ecological carrying capacity, and religious commodification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Conflict Between Local Spirituality and the Commercialisation of Ecotourism

The conflict between local spirituality and the commercialisation of ecotourism stems from very different perspectives on what nature, sacred spaces, and the purpose of human travel are. On the one hand, local spirituality interprets nature as a living space that contains a dimension of sanctity, where mountains, forests, seas, rivers, caves, and springs are not merely physical objects but part of a cosmic network that connects humans with their ancestors and the Divine (Kailo, 2025). These spaces are protected by traditional taboos, periodic rituals, offerings, and procedures for entering sacred areas that foster ethical humility. On the other hand, the commercialisation of ecotourism, which is based on the paradigm of tourism as an industry, views destinations as assets and commodities whose selling value must be optimised, measured by the number of visits, length of stay, and amount spent by tourists.

The meeting of these two perspectives creates structural tension: the sacred is forced to submit to market logic, while the spiritual is packaged into short experiences sold and measured in monetary terms. Local spiritual values often place the sacredness of nature above short-term economic interests. In many traditions, certain forests are considered forbidden, springs are seen as gifts from ancestors, and large rocks or old trees are revered as markers of supernatural powers. Around such spaces, there are subtle rules about how to walk, talk, dress, and even breathe, because humans are required to be present with awareness, not merely as admirers of the scenery. However, when these locations are promoted as religious ecotourism destinations, the logic of development is often reversed. For the convenience of tourists, concrete paths, selfie platforms, souvenir stalls, and parking areas are built, expanding the ecological footprint of tourism activities.

The sacred values that previously protected the space from exploitation are suddenly reduced to promotional narratives, such as myths, legends, and ancestral stories presented as interesting stories to add appeal, rather than as ethical guidelines that regulate behaviour (Warren, 2022). Harmony with ancestors, deeply rooted in local spirituality, is expressed through rituals of respect, communal prayers, and cooperation in caring for sacred spaces. In the context of tourism, this is often reduced to nothing more than cultural attractions that are performed on a specific schedule.

Ceremonies that were originally sincere communication with ancestors and nature are slowly being adjusted to the arrival times of tourist groups, with their duration shortened and elements considered less interesting removed to improve viewing efficiency (Chen et al., 2024). Local communities, once the subjects of rituals, have become a tourist attraction. Switched roles to become spectators holding cameras, more preoccupied with recording than experiencing this situation; harmony with ancestors is threatened by becoming a superficial harmonisation designed for market satisfaction; and local spirituality loses its performative depth, becoming an aesthetic decoration of identity disconnected from its original ethical and cosmological function.

The commercialisation of ecotourism also clashes with religiously-based ecological awareness, which in many local traditions arises not from scientific discourse on climate change or biodiversity, but from the understanding that nature is a trust and a gift (Efendi & Swarga, 2025). The relationship between humans and nature is understood as a relationship of responsibility, maintained by a fear of violating sacred prohibitions, not merely because of the threat of administrative sanctions. When these holy natural areas are opened up to mass tourism, indicators of success are often measured by an increase in visitor numbers and local economic growth (Arifin et al., 2025; Nurizka, Islami, et al., 2025). In contrast, indicators of ecological damage and moral erosion are ignored or placed on the back burner. Paradoxically, ecotourism, which rhetorically promises sustainability, can actually become a gateway to excessive pressure on the ecosystem, especially when religiously based awareness is not given space to regulate the rhythm, capacity, and procedures for the present tourist.

The paradigm of tourism as an industry reinforces this tension because it brings with it a very distinctive set of logic, namely efficiency, growth, market segmentation, and scalability. Religious or ecological destinations are mapped as products that must be branded, packaged, and marketed to increase competitiveness. Tourists are portrayed as consumers whose preferences must be satisfied, while local communities are treated as service providers expected to be friendly and adaptable (Abdou et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the government acts as a facilitator, preparing regulations conducive to investment. Within this framework, local spirituality has space only to the extent that it can be transformed into added value that increases the destination's selling price.

The sacredness of nature, harmony with ancestors, and ecological awareness are reconfigured into storytelling that polishes the destination's image, while strategic decisions remain determined by economic cost-benefit calculations. This paradigm should be challenged because, epistemologically, it places tourism as an end in itself, rather than as a means towards human transformation and the preservation of life. Within the framework of tourism as an industry, travel is understood as the consumption of experiences that are packaged concisely and instantly because success is measured by how many destinations are visited and how unique the content is that can be shared, not by how profoundly one's perspective on oneself, others, and nature has changed.

This paradigm not only ignores the spiritual dimension that should be at the core of religious tourism and ecotourism, but also has the potential to normalise exploitative practices wrapped in the language of empowerment and local economic development (Nurizka, Jamil, et al., 2025; Rembulan et al., 2025; Riandi et al., 2025). In the long term, uncontrolled commercialisation can erode the spiritual and social capital that is the main attraction of a destination, causing it to lose its spirit and its future.

As an antithesis to the paradigm of tourism as an industry, there is tourism as an ecological pilgrimage. Ecological pilgrimage views travel not merely as a recreational activity or consumption of experiences, but as a spiritual process of entering, respecting, and caring for the web of life that includes humans, nature, ancestors, and the Divine (Cugini, 2021). Within this framework, religious ecotourism is no longer positioned as a commodity sold to tourists, but as a pilgrimage that invites pilgrims to experience an ecological and ethical conversion from an initially dominant and consumptive attitude to one of humility, gratitude, and responsibility. Tourists are no longer consumers but pilgrims invited to enter sacred spaces with the awareness that every step has an ecological and spiritual impact.

The approach to tourism as an ecological pilgrimage requires organising the entire tourism value chain. Destination management no longer asks how to increase visitor numbers,

but rather how to create a meeting space that restores relationships among humans, nature, and ancestors. Tour packages are not designed solely to maximise activities in a short period of time, but to provide space for pause, contemplation, and genuine involvement in environmental conservation practices and local rituals of respect. Tour guides are transformed into pilgrimage companions whose main task is not to sell stories but to guide visitors in understanding customs, symbolic meanings, and sacred boundaries that must be respected (Karacaoğlu, 2024). Local communities are not merely service providers but guardians of narratives and ethics, with the power to determine what can and cannot be commodified.

From a theoretical perspective, ecological pilgrimage integrates ideas from spiritual ecology, pilgrimage studies, and sustainable tourism. Local spirituality is understood as an environmental epistemology that teaches that nature is not a dead object but a partner in a cosmic covenant. Pilgrimage studies show that true pilgrimage always contains elements of self-transformation and moral learning, not just geographical movement. Meanwhile, sustainable tourism theory reminds us that ecological and social carrying capacities must serve as hard limits for destination planning.

By combining the three, ecological pilgrimage becomes a spiritual-ecological practice, with journeys that consciously limit themselves to avoid damaging the landscape or the landscape of meaning (Watanabe, 2023). This approach also criticises the common practice of commodifying religious destinations without considering the moral dilemmas that accompany it. When the tombs of saints, temples, sacred caves, or holy springs are turned into backdrops for mass selfies, the question is not only how much this benefits the local economy, but also what is lost from the spiritual experience and the community's relationship with sacred spaces when they are treated as visual property. Moral dilemmas arise when the economic needs of the community conflict with tourists' desire to experience spirituality in a quick, easily digestible form.

Ecological pilgrimage does not reject economic needs, but places them within a broader ethical framework, recognising that gain is legitimate as long as it does not sacrifice environmental sustainability, the dignity of local communities, and the depth of spiritual meaning (Karimullah, 2024). In practice, ecological pilgrimage requires the courage to say no to forms of commodification that violate the boundaries of sacredness (Shinde & Olsen, 2022). This means establishing camera-free zones, limiting visitor numbers at certain times, or even rejecting the construction of tourist facilities that are considered to disturb the spiritual and ecological space. Such decisions may seem irrational in an industrial logic that prioritises growth, but they. Still, they're rational about local spirituality, which considers the destruction of coharmony to be an tolerable loss.

If progress is measured solely by improvements in physical facilities and visitor statistics, then local spirituality will always be in a disadvantage, forced to adapt to market needs. However, if progress also includes maintaining ecological integrity, preserving rituals, and strengthening intergenerational relationships within the community, then industrial logic must be corrected and subordinated to the logic of environmental pilgrimage. By positioning tourism as an ecological pilgrimage, the paradox between preserving spiritual meaning and achieving economic gain does not immediately disappear; instead, it is processed within a broader ethical horizon. Financial gain is still recognised as a fundamental need of the community, but it is not the only measure of success.

The sacred value of nature, harmony with ancestors, and religiously-based ecological awareness serve as a moral compass that determines the direction, boundaries, and rhythm of religious ecotourism development. Within this framework, tourism no longer stands on the

ruins of spirituality, but walks alongside spirituality as partners who admonish, remind, and enrich each other. It is precisely at this tense meeting point between economic needs and spiritual calling that ecological pilgrimage offers itself as a new paradigm, that human journeys to sacred spaces should not merely be journeys to tourist attractions. Still, it journeys home to the awareness that we are part of a holy and fragile web of life, which can only continue to survive if it is respected, protected, and loved.

Reinterpreting Nusantara Spirituality as a Model for Sustainable Ecotourism

Reinterpreting Nusantara spirituality as a model for sustainable ecotourism stems from the awareness that the ecological crisis and the failure of exploitative tourism development models are not merely technical management issues, but also the result of a knowledge paradigm that treats nature as an object to be measured, calculated, and exploited. In the Western-oriented, technocratic modern paradigm, ecotourism is often reduced to a strategy for exploiting nature in an environmentally friendly manner, yet still within the logic of economic growth and profit maximisation.

Forests, beaches, rivers, and mountains are seen as resources to be managed for sustainable profit. At the same time, the sacred dimensions, emotional relationships, and cosmological connections of local communities to these spaces are often used only as complementary narratives in promotional materials. Here, the spirituality of the archipelago offers a necessary epistemological provocation by proposing another way of seeing nature, not as a passive object, but as a partner in dialogue, a fellow creature, even as part of human beings themselves. This reinterpretation of spirituality is not a romantic nostalgia but an active effort to explore, modernise, and position local wisdom as the foundation of ecological ethics and truly sustainable religious ecotourism management.

The concept of *Tri Hita Karana* in Bali, for example, is traditionally formulated as the harmony of three relationships: *Parahyangan* (the relationship between humans and God), *Pawongan* (the relationship between humans), and *Palemahan* (the relationship between humans and nature). *Tri Hita Karana* is not just a cultural slogan but an ontological structure that holds that damage to any of these relationships will disrupt the entire order of life. In the context of religious ecotourism, the reinterpretation of *Tri Hita Karana* requires that destination management not only meet economic targets and tourist comfort, but also maintain the integrity of religious rituals, social justice for residents, and the ecological health of the landscape used as a tourist space.

If *Tri Hita Karana* emphasises cosmic harmony as the ideal order, the concept of S*iri'na Pacce* from Sulawesi presents a more confrontational ethical dimension because S*iri'na Pacce* refers to self-esteem, honour, and dignity. In contrast, S*iri' na Pacce* refers to a deep sense of pain for the suffering of others (Reski et al., 2021). In the context of ecotourism management, the reinterpretation of *Siri'na Pacce* can be understood as an ethic that rejects all tourism practices that demean the dignity of local communities or disregard the ecological suffering caused by the exploitation of destinations. When customary forests are cut down to build resorts, when communities become mere contract workers in the tourism industry on their own land, or when rivers are polluted by waste from tourism activities, Siri' na Pacce teaches that these are not merely side effects of development, but forms of moral violence that wound collective honour.

Sedulur Papat Lima Pancer in Javanese tradition also offers another way of imagining the subjects involved in ecotourism. This concept, with its various interpretations, often describes humans as the centre (*pancer*) who are always connected to four supernatural siblings or

cosmic elements that have accompanied them since birth. Sedulur papat is not merely a mystical entity, but a cosmological metaphor that affirms that human identity is always related to the cardinal directions, natural elements, and broader cosmic rhythms. In its reinterpretation for sustainable ecotourism, *Sedulur Papat Lima Pancer* can be read as a radical critique of modern individuals who are understood as autonomous subjects, separate from their surroundings.

Tourists, managers, and policymakers should not be viewed as free agents who pursue only private interests, but as partners whose existence always influences and is influenced by their ecological *sedulur-sedulur*, such as soil, water, air, and other living things. From this arises an ethic of presence, whereby entering a religious ecotourism destination means entering a space where subtle relationships with sedulur papat must be maintained. Polluting rivers, damaging vegetation, or disturbing wildlife are not only violations of the rules but also betrayals of *sedulur,* who should be respected.

Huma Betang, known as the philosophy of life of the Dayak people in Kalimantan, offers a model of communality that is tightly relevant to ecotourism management (Ibrahim et al., 2025). *Huma Betang,* as a longhouse, is not only a physical building but also a symbol of communal life where various families, clans, and generations live in a social structure that prioritises deliberation, tolerance, and togetherness in managing living spaces. In the context of ecotourism, the reinterpretation of *Huma Betang* inspires a governance model that does not place local communities merely as stakeholders invited to consultations, but as the main subjects who collectively determine the direction of destination development.

Huma Betang's orientation challenges the top-down management model imported from Western technocratic approaches, which tend to separate planners, implementers, and beneficiaries. Within the *Huma Betang* framework, planning, implementation, and utilisation are integrated into a continuous dialogue among the inhabitants of the longhouse of life, where economic calculations do not solely determine decisions regarding the management of forests, rivers, and land, but also by considerations of relationships between citizens, ancestors, and guardian spirits of nature.

The integration of these four concepts, namely *Tri Hita Karana, Siri'na Pacce, Sedulur Papat Lima Pancer,* and *Huma Betang*, makes it possible to formulate a model of Nusantara ecological ethics that far exceeds the concept of best practice in ecotourism as defined in technocratic manuals. Instead of viewing local spirituality as a collection of traditional values to be preserved as cultural heritage, this reinterpretation positions it as an alternative epistemological source offering a different way of knowing, understanding, and managing reality. In modern Western-oriented epistemology, valid knowledge is knowledge that can be measured, objectified, and predicted. Nature is discussed in terms of data, graphs, and indicators. In contrast, the spirituality of the archipelago offers knowledge born of living with nature as a fellow being, not merely as an object (Karimullah, 2023). Ecological signs are read not only as environmental data but as messages that demand an ethical response to prolonged drought, the loss of particular species, or changes in rainfall patterns, which are interpreted as signals of a disturbance in the cosmic balance that must be answered by improving one's way of life, not merely with technical projects.

Placing local spirituality as an epistemological source means daring to acknowledge that local knowledge, manifested in myths, rituals, and symbols, has a valid internal rationality, not superstition, to be immediately replaced by modern science. In the management of religious ecotourism, this means that the decision-making process must open equal space for the language of data and the language of signs. At this point, spirituality is no longer seen as

an add-on requested to formalise a project, for example, through traditional ceremonies at the inauguration of a destination. Still, it is present from the early stages of planning, guiding discussions about whether an area is indeed suitable for tourism, at what pace, and with what restrictions.

The reinterpretation of Nusantara spirituality also intervenes in the logic of time in ecotourism. Technocratic models tend to think in the short to medium term, with measurable targets for years or 5 years; upward growth graphs measure success. In contrast, many local spiritualities operate within a much longer time horizon, connected to ancestral heritage and responsibility towards future generations. *Tri Hita Karana, Siri' na Pacce, Sedulur Papat,* and *Huma Betang* all hold that actions in the present always have repercussions in the future, not only in ecological terms but also in karmic and cosmological terms.

Sustainable ecotourism in this framework is not merely understood as a business that does not damage nature, but as a practice of keeping promises to ancestors and descendants. This requires the courage to hinder or even reject tourism projects that promise quick profits but threaten the integrity of sacred spaces. This decision is often difficult to accept by short-term investment logic. However, the reinterpretation of Nusantara spirituality as a model for sustainable ecotourism must not fall into romanticism that disregards the internal dynamics of local communities. Local wisdom is not a static entity that is always harmonious and ecological because it can also be commodified, politicised, and exploited for the interests of regional elites and external actors. Therefore, this approach must be critical, acknowledging the potential ambivalence of spirituality.

Tri Hita Karana can be reduced to a resort sales slogan; S*iri'na Pacce* can be used to silence criticism of injustice in the name of maintaining community honour; Sedulur Papat can be packaged as a mystical attraction; and *Huma Betang* can be used as an advertising image without changing the unequal power structure (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). Making spirituality an epistemological source also means opening the possibility of criticising manipulative claims about spirituality and ensuring that interpretations of these concepts involve diverse voices within the community, not just a single representation from a particular authority.

In the context of religious ecotourism, the reinterpretation of Nusantara spirituality proposes a radical shift in the definition of success. Success is no longer measured by how many tour packages are sold or how much tourism contributes to the Regional Gross Domestic Product, but by how intact the relationships between *Parahyangan, Pawongan,* and *Palemahan* are maintained, how strongly *siri'* and *pacce* guide solidarity with the weak and with wounded nature, how aware each tourism actor is of living as a pancer who is constantly negotiating with sedulur papat, and how far the spirit of *Huma Betang* is realised in inclusive and equitable governance. Quantitative indicators are not discarded; instead, they are placed within a broader ethical evaluation framework.

Ecotourism destination sustainability reports are insufficient if they contain only data on emissions, waste management, and the number of local workers, because they must also include reflections on how rituals, ancestral narratives, and sacred spaces are preserved or eroded by the flow of tourism. This approach challenges the dominance of modern ecotourism management models that claim to be value-neutral. By placing local spirituality at the centre, religious ecotourism governance is openly recognised as a value-laden practice that cannot be 'neutral'. Every decision to open a new trekking route, allow the construction of a hotel, determine operating hours, or regulate a dress code is a moral decision that reflects a particular position towards nature, the community, and the Divine.

The Transformation of Religiosity into Collective Ecological Awareness

The transformation of religiosity into collective ecological awareness stems from the understanding that religion and spirituality never exist in a vacuum, but are always embedded in concrete ecological landscapes, social structures, and historical contexts. In Indonesia, religious practices and local rituals such as *selamatan bumi* (earth celebrations), *ziarah makam wali* (pilgrimages to saints' tombs), and *nyadran* ceremonies have tremendous potential as educational and social mechanisms capable of fostering environmental awareness, long before the terms ecological crisis and climate change became global discourse. However, this potential is often buried beneath ritual routines carried out without critical reflection, or even reduced to ceremonial traditions maintained solely for the sake of custom.

Earth celebrations, known in various regions as *bersih desa, wiwitan, sedekah bumi,* or other local terms, are concrete examples of how communities in the archipelago forge relationships with the land and nature through religious and cultural language. In the practice of *selamatan bumi,* people gather to pray, bring offerings, prepare food together, and symbolically return a portion of the harvest to the earth as a form of gratitude and respect (Hastuti et al., 2021). Theologically, this ritual can be interpreted as an acknowledgement that the world is not merely an object of exploitation, but a cosmic partner that sustains life. However, in contemporary practice, earth celebrations are often carried out simply as a tradition passed down from generation to generation without elaborating on their ecological meaning, as if the ritual were only a cultural obligation to ward off supernatural disturbances or accidents. The transformation of religiosity towards ecological awareness requires a critical reinterpretation of earth celebrations, such as prayers, offerings, and communal feasts, which are not enough unless followed by concrete actions such as stopping land burning, reducing the use of chemical pesticides, preserving water sources, and responsible waste management, as a consequence of such expressions of gratitude.

The nyadran ceremony, which in many Javanese communities takes place before Ramadan or on certain days in the Javanese-Islamic calendar, also has an ecological dimension that can be actualised. *Nyadran* usually takes the form of a mass pilgrimage to the graves of ancestors, cleaning of graves, communal prayers, and communal meals. On a symbolic level, nyadran connects three dimensions of time: the past (ancestors), the present (community), and the future (grandchildren) in a series of ritual actions. It is this intergenerational bond that can serve as the basis for ecological ethics, because damaging the environment today means betraying the legacy of our ancestors and mortgaging the future of generations to come.

The cleaning of graves, which was initially only understood as the physical act of clearing weeds and tidying gravestones, can be expanded into a collective programme of caring for the public space around the graves, improving drainage, planting shade trees, and turning the grave complex into a community green space. Nyadran can thus function as a social laboratory where residents learn that respect for ancestors does not stop at prayers and flower offerings, but also includes a commitment to protecting the environment, the living space of their ancestors' descendants.

Pilgrimages to the tombs of saints, especially in the rich tradition of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, with its practice of visiting the tombs of saints, clerics, and charismatic figures, open up a space for religious transformation that is no less important. Until now, pilgrimage has often been understood as a form of seeking blessings, strengthening faith, and seeking inner peace through symbolic closeness to holy figures. However, the tombs of saints are often located in distinctive ecological landscapes: hilltops, near springs, riverbanks, or areas that were once centres of the spread of Islam as well as of agrarian and maritime life.

In many locations, the pressure of mass tourism, the commercialisation of the area, and insensitive infrastructure development have transformed pilgrimage sites into crowded, noisy religious markets prone to pollution. The transformation of religiosity towards collective ecological awareness presupposes pilgrimages that not only revive spiritual connections with the saints, but also with the nature that was the context of their preaching (Liutikas, 2025). Narratives about the piety and struggles of the saints can be enriched with stories about how they treated nature, managed water, organised agricultural land, and built communities that respected the environment.

For these religious practices to truly become educational mechanisms, a change in perspective towards the rituals themselves is needed. As long as rituals are seen solely as obligations that must be fulfilled to obtain protection or rewards, their educational-ecological dimension will remain marginal. Theological and cultural reinterpretation is key for religious leaders, traditional leaders, and educators to explicitly articulate how earth celebrations, nyadran, and pilgrimages to the tombs of saints contain ecological messages. Reminders about our responsibility towards water, soil, and air can accompany prayers. In contrast, sermons and recitations accompanying the rituals can include reflections on environmental damage as a form of collective disobedience. Ritual symbols such as water, flowers, and crops can be explained not as magical objects, but as representations of fragile ecological abundance.

The transformation of religiosity also requires a practical dimension that goes beyond symbolism (Barrett, 2023). Earth celebrations without ecological behavioural change are like promises without commitment. This is where spirituality serves as a social tool, binding individuals in a network of shared meaning and obligations. In a community context, rituals always involve physical meetings, coordination, task division, and consensus building. These moments can be directed towards developing a collective ecological agenda. For example, after an earth blessing prayer procession, the community can plant trees, clean river channels, repair footpaths without damaging the land's contours, or develop new customary regulations prohibiting land clearing in landslide-prone areas. These actions are given religious legitimacy by being positioned as an expression of gratitude and responsibility to the Creator and to the ancestors. In this framework, spirituality no longer stops at the inner self, but becomes a social energy that drives action.

On the other hand, it is essential to realise that religiosity always has ambivalent potential. It can be a liberating force as well as a tool of conservatism that actually hinders change. Local rituals can be used to perpetuate unjust power structures or commodified as tourist attractions for the benefit of a small elite. The transformation of religiosity towards collective ecological awareness must therefore be critical, sensitive to the dynamics of power and economics that surround ritual practices. The question is no longer how to revive tradition, but whose version of tradition is being revived, for whose benefit, and with what ecological impact? Indonesian eco-theology, which seeks to integrate faith, culture and the environment, cannot simply accept all religious practices as good, but must engage in selection, criticism and interpretative renewal, so that the aspects of tradition that support ecological and social justice are retained. At the same time, elements that normalise environmental destruction and inequality must be abandoned or transformed (Insani & Karimullah, 2023).

Local spirituality can be understood as a reservoir of values that unites three dimensions, namely the relationship with the Divine, the relationship between humans, and the relationship with nature (Agung et al., 2024). When religiosity is only emphasised in the first dimension, a form of piety emerges that is disconnected from ecological and social reality because individuals are diligent in worship but do not care about the rubbish, pollution, and

destruction of nature around them. The transformation of religiosity towards collective ecological awareness requires the reintegration of these three dimensions, in which praying to God must be intertwined with concern for others and the earth. This is where Indonesian eco-theology finds its footing, reading sacred texts, religious traditions, and ritual practices through the lens of the ecological crisis, so that old verses and symbols take on new meanings relevant to the context of environmental destruction.

Spirituality as a social tool shows its power when it binds individuals into a collective imagination of a shared future. Amid a global ecological crisis often perceived as abstract and distant, local rituals present it in a familiar form: floods that destroy rice fields, landslides that cut off access roads, rivers that turn black, and unpredictable seasons. If, during ritual gatherings, religious and traditional leaders can articulate that these disasters are not merely fate, but also the result of human greed and negligence, and that God's desired response is not only resignation, but also ecological repentance in the form of changes in consumption patterns, planting patterns, and ways of treating nature, then religiosity is transformed into a keen environmental awareness. Ecological solidarity arises when communities realise that damage to one part of the landscape will affect everyone, including farmers, traders, children, and even those who feel distant from environmental issues (Moyano-Fernández, 2022).

Indonesian eco-theology, as an integrative model of faith, culture, and the environment, is essentially both a hermeneutical and a practical project (Cholil & Parker, 2021). Hermeneutically, it attempts to reinterpret the teachings of religions in Indonesia, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and local religions, in the context of the land, water, forests, and seas that constitute the people's real living environment. In practice, it seeks to re-establish the relationships among places of worship, public spaces, and the ecological landscape. Mosques, churches, temples, monasteries, and traditional halls are no longer seen only as formal places of worship, but also as centres of ecological education and environmental action. Sermons, catechism, recitations, and traditional lessons can be designed to connect verses or ancestral stories with concrete actions, such as planting mangroves, restoring forest functions, reducing plastic consumption, and fighting for public policies that protect ecosystems.

The transformation of religiosity into collective ecological awareness challenges the way the state and the market view religion. Until now, religion has often been treated as a private matter or merely a neutral source of moral legitimacy for development policies. Local rituals can be included in the tourism calendar as cultural events, but they are rarely taken seriously as a source of criticism of development models that damage the environment. If Indonesian eco-theology is allowed to grow, it has the potential to become a political force that disrupts the comfort of extractivist logic, because deforestation, large-scale mining, and infrastructure projects that destroy sacred areas can be questioned not only based on positive law, but also as a collective sin that kills the spiritual covenant with the homeland. Here, spirituality is no longer merely a consolation for victims, but a language of resistance and advocacy to defend the earth and the communities that depend on it.

However, to avoid this potential turning into exclusive ecological fundamentalism, Indonesian eco-theology must be built based on interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Earth salvation rituals, *nyadran,* or pilgrimages to the tombs of saints, can be read alongside ecological traditions in other religions, so that an awareness is formed that theological differences do not prevent encounters in the fight for the same earth. Ecological solidarity across faiths and cultures becomes possible when each community brings its spiritual treasures to the dialogue table, not to compete, but to enrich one another (Samsul Hady et al.,

2025). In this situation, local spirituality does not become a closed identity, but rather a gateway to a universal ecological ethic rooted in the Indonesian context. The transformation of religiosity towards collective ecological awareness is thus not a project of homogenisation, but an orchestration of spiritual diversity in a shared commitment to caring for our typical home, the earth.

CONCLUSION

The future of religious ecotourism in Indonesia can only survive if it is managed with a new paradigm that treats local spirituality as a source of value and knowledge, rather than merely a cultural ornament or ethnographic label. The conflict between local spirituality and the commercialisation of ecotourism proves that when the sacred is commodified, tourism loses its soul and communities lose their moral compass. A reinterpretation of the spirituality of the archipelago shows that concepts such as *Tri Hita Karana, Siri'na Pacce, Sedulur Papat Lima Pancer,* and *Huma Betang* are not romanticised traditions but epistemological tools that guide the management of destinations grounded in ecological ethics and spiritual solidarity. Meanwhile, the transformation of religiosity into collective ecological awareness teaches that faith and culture are not separate entities but social forces capable of shaping society's ecological behaviour through rituals, symbols, and concrete actions. Thus, local spirituality is no longer peripheral, but rather the new centre of sustainable tourism decision-making that unites cosmic harmony, human welfare, and nature conservation, because true sustainability is not the result of green technology or administrative regulations, but the fruit of a revolution in consciousness that shifts tourism from an industry to an ecological pilgrimage. Religious ecotourism rooted in local spirituality must dare to reject exploitation disguised as development, while pioneering the birth of Indonesian eco-theology that unites faith, culture, and the environment within a single moral horizon.

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