

THE ROLE OF TRI HITA KARANA IN SUSTAINABLE AGRITOURISM GOVERNANCE: ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN WEST BALI SUBAK SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT – This study explores how the Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* (THK) – the harmony among the divine, humans, and nature – functions as an ethical foundation for sustainable agritourism governance in West Bali’s Subak system. Using an interpretive-ethnographic approach, data were collected through non-participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with 11 key informants, and document analysis in Subak Munduk Nangka, Jembrana Regency. Findings reveal that THK operates as a living ethical paradigm shaping ritual practices, decision-making, and ecological management. *Parahyangan* (divine harmony) regulates the temporal and ritual organization of tourism; *Pawongan* (social harmony) fosters participatory governance grounded in reciprocity and moral responsibility; and *Palemahan* (ecological harmony) guides environmentally respectful practices such as organic farming, waste reduction, and water conservation. Together, these dimensions transform agritourism governance from a technocratic system into a moral ecology where sustainability is enacted through spiritual and ethical commitments rather than external regulation. Theoretically, the study positions THK as a functional ethical paradigm and a decolonial framework that integrates local cosmology into sustainable tourism governance. It challenges neoliberal and instrumental sustainability models by redefining environmental stewardship as a sacred and communal duty. The study concludes that integrating indigenous ethical systems like THK can enhance epistemic justice, cultural integrity, and ecological resilience within tourism development.

Keywords: ecological resilience; environmental ethics; subak system; sustainable agritourism; THK

1. INTRODUCTION

Agritourism has emerged as a crucial interface between sustainable agriculture and responsible tourism (Shen et al., 2020; Ammirato et al., 2020), especially in regions where cultural traditions and environmental ethics are deeply interwoven with community livelihoods. In Southeast Asia, and particularly in Bali, Indonesia, the governance of agritourism is increasingly shaped by indigenous ecological knowledge systems (Zen et al., 2024; Ardana et al., 2024). The Balinese *Subak*—a centuries-old communal irrigation and farming organization—represents a unique case in which water management, agrarian practices, and spiritual beliefs coalesce under the philosophical framework of *Tri Hita Karana* (THK), the “Three

Causes of Harmony” that govern human relationships with nature, society, and the divine (Qodim, 2023).

At the global level, discussions around sustainable tourism governance have been dominated by frameworks that often neglect localized environmental ethics and epistemologies. For instance, Zagonari (2020) compares religious environmental ethics across major world religions and highlights their relevance in supporting policy decisions, yet such frameworks rarely inform local tourism governance. Aaltola (2021) further emphasizes how emotional responses to climate change—such as shame—are deeply tied to ethical engagement, but often remain unaddressed in institutional practices. Although environmental ethics have been widely explored in religious and philosophical contexts (Sayem, 2023), few studies integrate these insights into the operational dynamics of rural tourism systems grounded in local cosmology. In Indonesia, policy interventions around tourism development tend to emphasize economic growth while marginalizing cultural integrity and ecological sustainability (Koerner et al., 2023; Damiasih, 2023). This results in fragmented governance, particularly in ecologically sensitive and culturally sacred areas such as Subak in West Bali.

A growing body of literature on agritourism governance underscores the need for models that not only promote sustainability but are also embedded within local belief systems. For example, Hernández-Morcillo, et al. (2013) argue that ecosystem services in cultural landscapes must be interpreted through both ecological and sociocultural lenses. Similarly, Govers & Go (2004) and Tavallae et al. (2014) stress the importance of cultural sustainability and heritage governance within tourism development. However, most current studies focus on regulatory frameworks, stakeholder roles, or economic valuation, without critically engaging with indigenous ethical systems like THK. Moreover, although THK has been invoked rhetorically in policy and tourism discourse, its operationalization within agritourism governance remains poorly understood (Roth & Sedana, 2015; Sudama, 2020).

This research addresses a significant gap by critically examining how THK informs agritourism governance in Bali’s *Subak* system. It investigates the extent to which this cosmological philosophy shapes stakeholder interactions, institutional arrangements, and environmental decision-making within the framework of living heritage and ecological tourism. The study draws from ethnographic fieldwork and non-participatory observation conducted in Subak Munduk Nangka Jembrana in West Bali to reveal how environmental ethics rooted in THK offer an alternative logic to neoliberal models of tourism governance.

The primary objectives of this study are: (1) To examine how THK principles are integrated into agritourism governance; (2) To explore the potential of THK as an ethical paradigm for sustainable tourism, offering an alternative to instrumental and neoliberal approaches to environmental governance.

The novelty of this research lies in its theoretical synthesis and empirical grounding. While prior research has discussed THK as a cultural concept, this study reframes it as an actionable framework for environmental governance in the tourism

sector. It contributes a decolonial and culturally embedded perspective to agritourism literature by foregrounding local environmental ethics as foundational rather than supplementary. This approach not only enriches the theoretical discourse on sustainable tourism governance (Aaltola, 2021; Sayem, 2023; Zagonari, 2020) but also provides practical insights for policy design and stakeholder engagement in heritage-based tourism (Hernández-Morcillo et al., 2013; Tavallae et al., 2014).

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study applied a qualitative interpretive-ethnographic design to explore how THK functions as an ethical foundation in agritourism governance. The approach sought to understand lived moral practices and governance mechanisms within the Subak system rather than to test hypotheses. Following Aaltola's (2021) notion of environmental virtue ethics and Escobar's (2018) decolonial ethics, the study emphasized moral meaning, relational ontology, and cultural context as integral to sustainability inquiry. The research was conducted in *Subak Munduk Nangka*, Jembrana Regency, West Bali (Figure 1), an exemplary Subak community integrating ritual agriculture and agritourism. The landscape features terraced rice fields, irrigation networks (*telabah*), and water temples (*pura subak*), representing the three ethical dimensions of THK: *Parahyangan* (divine harmony), *Pawongan* (social harmony), and *Palemahan* (ecological harmony). This setting offered a living model of ethical-environmental governance rooted in Balinese cosmology.

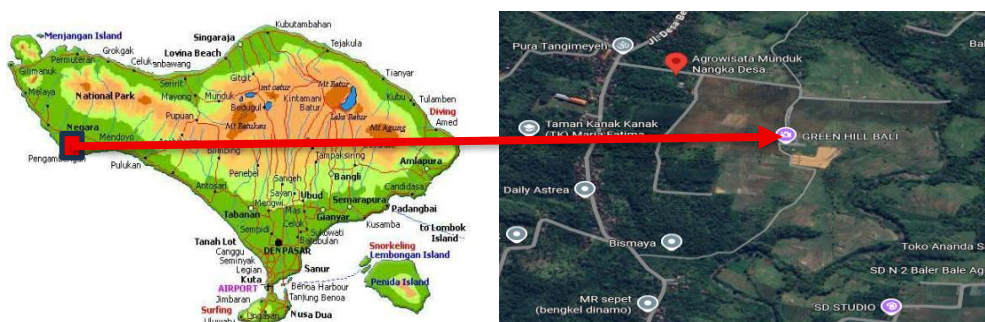


Figure 1. Study Site at Subak Munduk Nangka, Jembrana, West Bali

Purposive sampling was employed to select 11 key informants, consisting of members of the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*, 3 persons), *Prajuru Subak* (Subak officials, 3 persons), Village Government representatives (2 persons), officers from the Jembrana Tourism and Cultural Office (2 persons), and an academic expert (1 person), for a total of 11 informants. The selection emphasized active involvement in agritourism activities, Subak governance, or expertise in Subak-based agritourism management. The sampling process continued until thematic saturation was achieved, ensuring comprehensive representation of ethical and institutional perspectives.

Data were collected from April to October 2025 through three complementary techniques: (1) Non-participatory observation – Governance meetings (*sangkepan*

subak), ritual events, and agritourism activities were observed without researcher interference to ensure analytical neutrality Aaltola (2021). Field notes documented moral interactions, ecological practices, and spatial organization; (2) Semi-structured interviews – Conducted in Balinese and Indonesian, lasting 20-44 minutes, focusing on ethical reasoning, sustainability practices, and tourism governance; (3) Document analysis – Subak regulations, local tourism documents, and community meeting records were reviewed to contextualize institutional ethics and governance frameworks. All data were collected with informed consent and adherence to local customary protocols.

Data were analyzed using thematic coding manually, as can be seen in **Figure 2**. Transcripts and field notes were coded around THK’s ethical triad (*Parahyangan, Pawongan, Palemahan*), linking emergent patterns to environmental ethics theory (Zagonari, 2020; Sayem, 2023) and biocultural governance concepts (Hernández-Morcillo et al., 2013). Triangulation of observations, interviews, and documents enhanced validity, while iterative coding ensured interpretive depth and reflexive consistency.

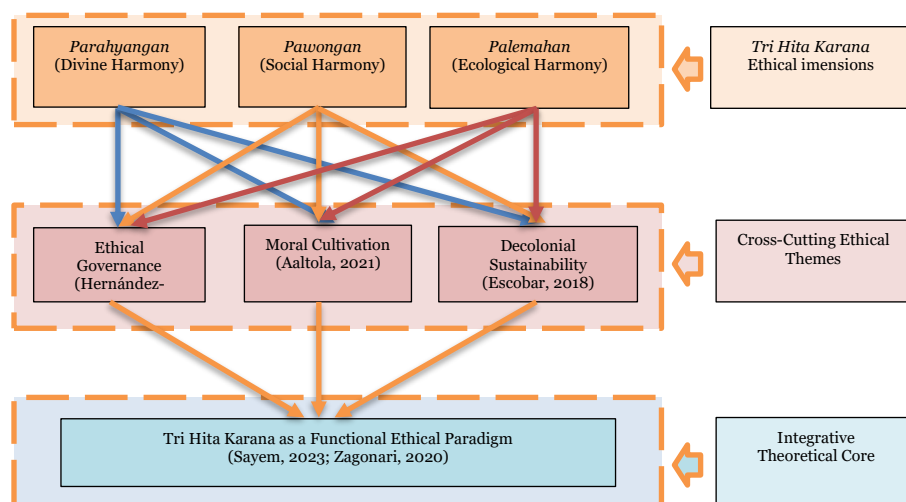


Figure 2. Thematic Coding Framework of the Study

Ethical approval was granted by the researcher’s institution. The study followed Escobar’s (2018) *ethics of care*, maintaining respect for sacred boundaries—particularly by not participating in restricted rituals (*melasti, ngendag tirta*). Access was negotiated through community gatekeepers, and confidentiality was preserved throughout. Methodological rigor was maintained through triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity. A detailed audit trail of coding and analysis was kept to support transparency. While context-specific, the methodological framework is replicable for studying indigenous environmental ethics in other Subak or agritourism contexts, with attention to local variations in ritual and governance structures.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Enacting THK in Agritourism Governance

Field observations in *Subak Munduk Nangka*, Jembrana, reveal that the enactment of THK in agritourism governance is not merely rhetorical but manifests through everyday decision-making, spatial organization, and ritual practice. Local stakeholders—particularly *pekaseh* (subak leaders) and farmer households involved in agritourism—frame governance as a moral responsibility rather than a bureaucratic task. During interviews, one subak member (Bpk. IMWA, interviewed on August 18, 2025) emphasized, “*Subak punika daging ajengan ring jagat, dados uliané ajengan punika prasida ngametuangang jagat sane ayu*” (“Subak is the body that feeds the world; thus, from this food, the world must remain beautiful and harmonious”). This expression underscores the ethical dimension of THK as a lived philosophy that binds production, ecology, and spirituality (Singh, 2013; Wanadjaja & Samputra, 2021).

Empirically, the practice of agritourism in the subak landscape follows a ritualized rhythm that aligns economic activity with sacred temporality (Diarta & Sarjana, 2019). Tourist visits are organized around agricultural calendars (*sasih*) and water rituals (*melasti, ngendag tirta*), thereby situating tourism within the cyclical cosmology of the Balinese agroecosystem. This ritual synchronization demonstrates a governance mechanism grounded in *Parahyangan* (harmony with the divine), where tourism is not a secular intrusion but a participatory extension of sacred stewardship. A younger farmer-entrepreneur (Bpk. IKDA, interviewed on September 7, 2025) described this integration: “*Wisatawan sing ngancurin, asal ngertiin aturan subak*” (“Tourists do not harm, as long as they understand subak’s rules”). This reflects a localized model of co-management in which visitors are governed through cultural etiquette rather than formal regulation.

Ritual synchronization in Balinese governance functions as a spiritually grounded system that regulates decision making and resource use through obligatory ceremonies (an approach clearly manifested in the agritourism management of *Subak Munduk Nangka*). Every activity, from water allocation to tourist engagement, is preceded by rituals that sanctify collective intentions and align them with THK values, ensuring harmony among divine, human, and natural realms (Suarya et al., 2019; Widiastini et al., 2023). Temples within the subak serve as ritual and governance centers, facilitating communal coordination and moral accountability in agritourism development. Similar to the *Gadaa* system in Guji society, where ecological stewardship is enforced through sacred taboos and ritualized environmental ethics (Wahyuni et al., 2025; Roba, 2025), *Subak Munduk Nangka* embeds sustainability within a framework of spiritual responsibility. Facing modernization pressures, the community has developed hybrid governance mechanisms that combine ritual oversight with formal tourism policies, exemplifying *epistemic disobedience* against secular management while maintaining spiritual sovereignty (Sebola-Samanyanga, 2025). This hybrid system enables *Subak Munduk Nangka* to sustain ecological integrity and community participation while positioning agritourism as an extension

of sacred stewardship rather than a break from tradition

From an institutional perspective, the subak's decision-making structure embodies *Pawongan* (harmony among people), emphasizing collective deliberation and social reciprocity. Meetings (*sangkepan subak*) often include discussions not only on irrigation schedules but also on the ethical boundaries of tourism development, such as limits on homestay construction or the use of organic fertilizers. This participatory governance reflects communal rationality rather than instrumental efficiency, aligning with the concept of environmental virtue ethics (Aaltola, 2021) where moral cultivation, rather than rule compliance, guides sustainability actions. Here, shame (*malu*) and collective pride (*ajeg*) operate as informal sanctions ensuring ecological respect and social cohesion. In agritourism governance at Subak Munduk Nangka, *sangkepan* meetings reflect what (Bolis et al., 2021) call "substantive rationality," where decisions are grounded in collective moral and ecological values rather than individual profit. Through this approach, community members deliberate on irrigation schedules, land use, and tourism limits to align agritourism with agricultural sustainability and social harmony. This collective reasoning contrasts with the instrumental logic of modern tourism economies, emphasizing reciprocity, care, and the interdependence of humans and nature (Bolis et al., 2021; Fonseca et al., 2022). Thus, the *sangkepan* serves as an ethical mechanism that sustains agritourism development in harmony with the THK philosophy and long-term ecological balance (Fonseca et al., 2022).

Finally, the dimension of *Palemahan* (harmony with nature) is operationalized through ecological stewardship embedded in subak-based tourism activities. Field evidence shows that waste management, organic farming, and landscape preservation are not externally imposed sustainability measures but extensions of traditional ethics of balance (*rwa bhineda*). As one farmer noted, "*Nenten ngelah sampah ring sawah, sami kauripang ring tanah sareng toya*" ("There should be no waste in the rice fields; everything must return to earth and water"). Such statements resonate with Zagonari's (2020) comparative model of religious environmental ethics, affirming that THK functions as an indigenous moral ecology capable of guiding contemporary governance. In the context of Subak Munduk Nangka agritourism, the *palemahan* dimension functions as an applied form of ecological stewardship that integrates Balinese environmental ethics into sustainable land and water management. Farmers and tourism managers optimize irrigation and cultivate rice fields that follow natural contours, maintaining ecological balance by treating nature as a partner rather than a resource (Safitri Zen et al., 2019; Risna et al., 2022). *Palemahan* further extends to community-based programs promoting waste reduction, plastic control, and water conservation that engage visitors in participatory ecological education (Prihadi et al., 2024). These efforts are complemented by "green business practices" emphasizing responsible waste management and the preservation of environmental authenticity (Sumantri et al., 2022; Rosilawati & Mulawarman, 2019). Collectively, these practices demonstrate how *palemahan* guides Subak Munduk Nangka's agritourism governance toward a model of harmony between ecological sustainability, cultural

integrity, and tourism development.

Theoretically, these empirical dynamics demonstrate how THK transcends its symbolic use in policy discourse to become a performative system of governance. Within agritourism, THK operates as what (Sayem, 2023) terms a “functional ethical model,” integrating cosmological values with practical regulation. This integration challenges neoliberal governance frameworks that separate the economy from ecology and spirituality. Instead, THK enacts what Hernández-Morcillo et al. (2013) describe as a *biocultural governance model*, where ecological stewardship, cultural meaning, and livelihood strategies are co-constitutive. Through its emphasis on relational harmony, the subak system exemplifies a *decolonial governance logic*—one that resists external managerial rationalities and situates sustainability within lived cosmology. Thus, the enactment of THK in agritourism governance in West Bali offers a paradigmatic shift: from sustainability as policy compliance to sustainability as ethical communion.

3.2 THK as an Ethical Paradigm for Sustainable Tourism

Fieldwork in *Subak Munduk Nangka* Jembrana in West Bali, reveals that THK operates not merely as a cultural symbol but as a living ethical paradigm that informs sustainability practices across ecological, social, and spiritual domains (Arsana et al., 2025). The everyday enactment of THK in agritourism manifests through the alignment of livelihood activities with moral obligations toward the environment and community. In *Subak Munduk Nangka*, environmental stewardship is a key motivation for agritourism operators who use their farms as platforms to share ethical principles of land care and sustainability. Agritourism here functions as a medium for expressing pre-existing stewardship values through practices such as permaculture education, resource conservation, and participatory learning (Peroff et al., 2022). These activities reflect peasant-based ethics emphasizing reuse, moderation, and collective responsibility, fostering both ecological awareness and meaningful cultural exchange with visitors (Cheteni & Umejesi, 2023). Overall, this approach reinforces a community-oriented model of agritourism where environmental consciousness and traditional values are mutually strengthened (Peroff et al., 2022; Cheteni & Umejesi, 2023).

Farmers and local tourism operators often interpret sustainability not as an abstract global norm but as a reflection of harmony (*nuju keseimbangan*) among humans, nature, and the divine. As one *pekaseh* (subak head, Bpk SDN, interviewed on September 7, 2025) explained, “*Yen jagat sampun rusak, nyanan dosa ring Hyang Widhi. Jagat punika daging Ida Sang Hyang Widi.*” — “When the world is damaged, it is a sin before God, because nature itself is the body of the divine.” This statement encapsulates a theocentric ecological ethic, wherein environmental care is understood as a sacred duty rather than an economic instrument. In the context of Balinese Hinduism, environmental care as a sacred duty is deeply embedded in the philosophy of THK, which emphasizes harmonious relations between humans, nature, and the divine. This worldview positions environmental stewardship not merely as a moral

act but as a *dharma*, a sacred obligation to maintain balance (*rwa bhineda*) and cosmic order (*rita*) through reverence for the natural world (Lansing, 2012). Within Subak Munduk Nangka, this ethic manifests in the ritualized management of water, temple offerings, and cooperative labor systems that express gratitude to *Dewa Wisnu* as the preserver of fertility and ecological harmony (Sutawan, 2004). Environmental protection thus operates as both spiritual devotion and practical governance, where caring for rice terraces, irrigation channels, and surrounding forests sustains not only the ecosystem but also the community's moral and ritual integrity. In this way, Tri Hita Karana transforms sustainability in Subak Munduk Nangka's agritourism into a living embodiment of sacred ecology—an interdependence between human livelihood, divine order, and the wellbeing of the land.

Empirically, tourism practices in the subak landscape are carefully embedded within ethical boundaries set by THK. Community leaders regulate tourist activities, such as walking tours, farming participation, or photography, through customary norms that prioritize spiritual purity and ecological respect. One local farmer (Bpk. INS, interviewed on July 27, 2025) noted, "*Wisatawan ten dados ke sawah pas odalan*" ("Tourists are not allowed to enter the rice field during temple ceremonies"). This ethical restriction illustrates how local actors apply THK as a moral compass to maintain balance between cultural sanctity and touristic experience. In contrast to technocratic models of sustainable tourism that rely on regulatory compliance, THK embeds sustainability within moral responsibility and relational accountability. The THK framework provides a holistic foundation for managing agritourism in Subak Munduk Nangka sustainably. It harmonizes spiritual, social, and ecological values through community-based governance, ensuring that tourism development respects local sanctity and traditions (Litvin Valeryia, 2024; Wijaya & Priantara, 2024). By aligning spiritual, human, and environmental relations, THK prevents cultural commodification and preserves the integrity of Subak's landscape (Agustina et al., 2024; Veliah et al., 2025). Rooted in its three pillars—*parhyangan*, *pawongan*, and *palemahan*—THK guides agritourism practices that uphold cultural identity and ecological balance (Arsa et al., 2024; Liestiandre et al., 2024). Empowering farmers to represent their heritage inclusively, it fosters cross-cultural respect and meaningful visitor experiences, ensuring that agritourism in Subak Munduk Nangka advances both conservation and community welfare (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021; Sorea et al., 2022).

The implementation of *Pawongan* (harmonious social relations) becomes evident in community-based tourism management. Decisions regarding tourism revenue distribution, infrastructure development, and visitor quotas are made collectively through the *sangkepan subak* (subak council meetings). These meetings are often infused with ritual expressions and consensus-building, reflecting an ethic of *menyama braya*—the principle of kinship and mutual respect. One participant (Bpk. INS, interviewed on July 27, 2025) explained, "*Sing ada menang, sing ada kalah, sami ngaturang suksma ring subak*" ("No one wins or loses; we all offer gratitude to the subak"). This statement underscores a form of ethical collectivism consistent with

Aaltola's (2021) notion of moral cultivation, wherein virtue and emotional engagement (such as gratitude or shame) reinforce ethical behavior toward sustainability. In the context of agritourism in Subak Munduk Nangka, emotional engagement acts as a vital bridge connecting environmental understanding with ethical agricultural practices. The cultivation of emotions such as gratitude, humility, and reverence toward nature strengthens farmers' intrinsic motivation to safeguard ecological balance and uphold sustainable farming traditions. These emotional bonds transform environmental awareness into genuine moral commitment, encouraging community members to act responsibly, not because of external enforcement but through internalized ethical consciousness (Hua, 2021). Within the Subak system, this affective connection manifests in collective rituals, water-sharing cooperation, and respectful engagement with the land, actions that reflect both ecological reverence and moral discipline. Thus, the integration of knowledge, emotion, and intention in Subak Munduk Nangka creates a holistic moral ecology where environmental protection emerges naturally from emotional attachment and shared community values (Hua, 2021).

In terms of *Palemahan* (harmony with nature), local agricultural practices—organic fertilization, integrated pest management, and water-sharing rituals—reflect a holistic ecological consciousness. Farmers describe their relationship to land as *ngelestariang jagat* (“to sustain the world”), suggesting that sustainability is not an external goal but an intrinsic moral stance. This aligns with Zagonari's (2020) comparative study on religious environmental ethics, which recognizes that non-Western traditions often conceptualize sustainability through relational cosmologies rather than utilitarian frameworks. THK, in this sense, operates as what (Sayem, 2023) calls a “functional ethical paradigm,” one that bridges metaphysical beliefs with practical environmental governance.

In the agritourism context of Subak Munduk Nangka, the philosophical divide between Western and Indigenous sustainability paradigms is evident. Western agritourism models, grounded in anthropocentric and technocratic logic, treat nature as a managed resource for economic optimization and tourist satisfaction (Abdallah, 2024), reflecting an individualistic pursuit of productivity and profit (Zelenski et al., 2023). Conversely, the Subak system embodies an Indigenous relational worldview rooted in THK, where harmony among humans, nature, and the divine transcends material utility (Zelenski et al., 2023). This cosmology challenges utilitarian rationality by positioning agritourism as a cultural practice of coexistence and stewardship. However, global sustainability frameworks such as the UN SDGs often marginalize such Indigenous eco-cosmologies, reducing them to local curiosities rather than valid epistemologies (Guzy, 2022). The Subak Munduk Nangka case demonstrates that neglecting these spiritual-ecological principles risks destabilizing long-standing ecological balance, despite their potential for guiding sustainable agritourism governance (Guzy, 2022).

Moreover, THK provides a counter-narrative to neoliberal sustainability discourse, which frequently instrumentalizes culture for market gain. In the subak

context, tourism is reframed as *dharma wisata*, a sacred journey of mutual learning, rather than consumption of cultural landscapes. This framing corresponds with Hernández-Morcillo et al. (2013) argument that sustainability in cultural landscapes depends on recognizing *biocultural heritage* as both moral and material capital. Through THK, sustainability becomes a relational and participatory ethic, where human well-being (*pawongan*), ecological balance (*palemahan*), and divine order (*parahyangan*) are interdependent spheres of governance. In Subak Munduk Nangka agritourism, the concept of *dharma wisata* rooted in Tri Hita Karana offers a transformative alternative to neoliberal tourism's commodification of culture and nature. Rather than treating the subak landscape as a consumable product, *dharma wisata* reframes tourism as a sacred and reciprocal encounter, fostering mutual learning and spiritual connection between visitors and local farmers. In this model, tourist participation becomes an educational and spiritual engagement that sustains subak's sacred ecology and communal values while reinforcing harmony among humans, nature, and the divine. By rejecting the market logic that assigns worth based solely on economic gain, the *dharma wisata* framework preserves the subak as a living system of cultural resilience, positioning tourism as a force that supports rather than erodes traditional life.

Conceptually, positioning THK as an ethical paradigm for sustainable tourism challenges the epistemological dominance of Western-centric sustainability models. It advances a *decolonial environmental ethic* Escobar (2018) that situates sustainability within indigenous cosmologies rather than global technocratic standards. Within this paradigm, ethics precede economics, and sustainability is understood as a *lived moral order* rather than an externally imposed policy framework. Thus, THK functions not merely as a cultural philosophy but as an ontological foundation for reimagining sustainability in tourism, rooted in reverence, reciprocity, and relational balance.

3.3 Implications

The findings from Subak Munduk Nangka imply a fundamental reorientation of sustainability governance through THK as an indigenous ethical framework. Rather than functioning as cultural symbolism, THK operates as a normative system that integrates moral, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of sustainability. This challenges the dominance of technocratic and neoliberal tourism models, positioning sustainability as an ethical communion grounded in relational harmony rather than regulatory compliance (Sayem, 2023; Escobar, 2018). At the theoretical level, THK demonstrates the viability of what Sayem (2023) terms a *functional ethical paradigm*, translating metaphysical values into concrete environmental governance. This stands in contrast to Western-centric frameworks that separate ecology from spirituality. Through the relational ontology of *Parahyangan*, *Pawongan*, and *Palemahan*, sustainability becomes a lived moral order—aligning with Escobar's (2018) vision of *pluriversal sustainability*, where diverse ontologies coexist as legitimate pathways to ecological balance. Institutionally, the subak exemplifies a model of *biocultural governance* (Hernández-Morcillo et al., 2013), where cultural ethics and communal

deliberation regulate tourism and resource use. This indicates that local moral systems can function as self-regulating governance structures, reducing dependency on external bureaucratic control. Emotional and moral cultivation, expressed through gratitude, restraint, and collective responsibility, further supports sustainability as a virtue-based practice (Aaltola, 2021). Hence, policy frameworks should integrate ethical education and community rituals as central instruments of sustainability, not mere cultural accessories.

Ecologically, the THK principle of *Palemahan* provides an indigenous precursor to circular and regenerative sustainability. Practices such as organic farming and ritualized water sharing illustrate that environmental stewardship in the subak is sustained by moral obligations rather than market incentives, supporting Zagonari's (2020) thesis that religious ethics can underpin effective ecological governance. Globally, these findings advance a *decolonial perspective* in environmental ethics, affirming that indigenous epistemologies like THK constitute legitimate alternatives to global sustainability orthodoxy. Incorporating such frameworks into tourism governance enhances epistemic justice by recognizing plural moral systems as valid foundations for sustainability policy (Escobar, 2018). In essence, the implications of this study are threefold: (1) THK redefines sustainability as ethical interdependence among humans, nature, and divinity; (2) it establishes moral cultivation as a key mechanism of environmental governance; and (3) it provides a decolonial template for integrating indigenous cosmologies into global sustainability discourse. These insights underscore that the path to sustainable tourism lies not in technocratic control, but in the ethical revitalization of local wisdom systems that harmonize ecology, culture, and spirituality.

3.4 Limitations

Methodologically, the research applied non-participatory observation combined with semi-structured interviews to maintain analytical neutrality and minimize observer interference. While this approach enhanced objectivity and allowed systematic documentation of governance practices, it limited access to the *experiential and affective* dimensions of THK. Ethical engagement within the subak, such as emotional expressions of reverence, gratitude, or shame, was observed externally rather than lived experientially. According to Aaltola (2021) environmental virtue ethics depends on *moral cultivation* through emotional participation; thus, detachment may obscure the inner moral consciousness driving sustainability actions. Contextually, the study focused on one site (Subak Munduk Nangka in Jembrana Regency) representing a single expression of THK-based governance. Variations across subaks in ritual calendars, leadership, and exposure to tourism imply that THK may manifest differently elsewhere. As noted by Hernández-Morcillo et al. (2013), biocultural governance is context-dependent, and its expressions are deeply tied to local socio-ecological arrangements. Consequently, while the study offers a rich cultural account, it cannot claim broad generalizability across Bali's subak networks or agritourism systems in other regions.

Another limitation concerns the linguistic and epistemological translation of THK concepts into English academic terminology. Core notions such as *menyama braya* (kinship) and *rwa bhineda* (dual balance) embody cosmological depth that resists direct translation. Sayem (2023) highlights that indigenous ethical categories often undergo *contextual untranslatability* when reframed within Western theoretical vocabularies. Hence, describing THK as a “functional ethical paradigm” risk simplifying its ontological and spiritual complexity. The interpretive distance between emic (insider) meaning and etic (academic) framing thus remains a structural limitation of this research. Temporal and socio-economic conditions also shaped the findings. Fieldwork was conducted during the post-pandemic tourism recovery, when communities were renegotiating their engagement with tourism. Economic uncertainty and fluctuating visitor flows may have influenced community attitudes toward sustainability, rendering certain ethical practices adaptive rather than structural. Longitudinal or comparative studies are needed to examine whether THK-based governance endures beyond transitional contexts Zagonari (2020).

Finally, ethical and cultural access restrictions constrained direct observation of sacred rituals such as *melasti* and *ngendag tirta*. The researcher’s non-participatory stance respected customary prohibitions, aligning with Escobar’s (2018) *decolonial ethics of care*, which affirms that respecting cultural boundaries is integral to ethical knowledge production. However, this also limited a deeper understanding of the ritual-spiritual dimensions underpinning environmental ethics in the subak. In sum, the study’s limitations lie not in empirical weakness but in the epistemic complexity of studying a living moral cosmology through academic frameworks. Recognizing these boundaries reinforces the study’s central argument: that sustainable tourism must be approached as an ethical negotiation between local cosmologies and global sustainability discourses. Future research integrating multi-sited and phenomenological approaches could further bridge the gap between observation and lived ethical experience, advancing a more plural and decolonial understanding of sustainability.

4. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that THK is effectively integrated into agritourism governance within the *Subak Munduk Nangka* system through the interconnection of its three ethical dimensions. *Parahyangan* (harmony with the divine) shapes the ritual and temporal organization of tourism, embedding it within the sacred agricultural calendar. *Pawongan* (harmony among people) governs decision-making through collective deliberation and reciprocity, ensuring that social relations remain equitable and cooperative. *Palemahan* (harmony with nature) guides ecological practices such as organic farming, waste management, and water sharing. Together, these dimensions establish a moral ecology in which sustainability is enacted through ethical responsibility rather than administrative control.

Furthermore, the findings affirm THK as a functional ethical paradigm that offers an alternative to neoliberal and technocratic models of sustainability. It

positions environmental stewardship as a moral and spiritual obligation, transforming sustainability from a policy framework into a lived ethical order. Within this paradigm, human well-being, ecological balance, and divine harmony form a relational governance system consistent with biocultural and decolonial theories of sustainability. Thus, THK provides not only a local philosophy but also a viable ethical foundation for reimagining sustainable tourism through indigenous environmental ethics.

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