



## Realizing Sustainable Development Through the Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi Ritual in Liyangan Hamlet

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### ABSTRACT

The Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi ritual in Liyangan Hamlet, Temanggung, reflects local wisdom in maintaining harmony between humans, nature, and God. As an expression of gratitude for water and earth, the ritual includes prayers, offerings, and processions that strengthen social unity and preserve cultural identity. It also supports sustainable development through a balance of social, environmental, and cultural values. However, modernization and tourism commercialization pose challenges that risk reducing the ritual to mere performance, threatening its spiritual and historical essence at the Liyangan archaeological site. Using a case study approach, this research employs observation, interviews with 25 local informants, and documentation to analyze the ritual's role in sustainable development. Cultural preservation theory guides the analysis, focusing on perception, adaptation, and the ritual's core meaning amid commercialization. Data analysis involves reduction, display, and conclusion drawing with source triangulation for validity. The study aims to propose a sustainable cultural tourism model that maintains Liyangan's spiritual and historical values while providing economic benefits for locals. This research is significant for developing cultural tourism policies rooted in preservation and community participation.

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## Introduction

Sustainable development has now become an important global agenda (Scown et al., 2023; Scholte & Söderbaum, 2017). This agenda emphasizes the balance between social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects (Litasari, 2018; Salsabillah et al., 2023). This concept is not only rooted in modern thought but is also widely reflected in the practices of traditional communities through local wisdom (Taufan Madiasworo, 2009; Sagajoka & Fatima, 2023; Arifin & Ardiansyah, 2020). Local wisdom is the product of customs that have developed within indigenous communities and is applied in social and kinship life (Hazim et al., 2023). In Indonesia, these values have remained strong and enduring from the past to the present (Salim, 2016).

Indonesia is a country rich in languages, customs, and cultures (Peter & Simatupang, 2022). It is recorded that around 805 regional languages are spread across all provinces (BPS, 2023). In addition, Indonesia also possesses 2,200 intangible cultural heritages (WBTh) (Kemdikbudriste, 2024). These cultural heritages consist of oral traditions, customs, performing arts, and traditional crafts, which are reflected in the behaviors and practices of society (Primadesi, 2013). These various traditions also reflect the principles of sustainability,

particularly through customary rituals that have been passed down from generation to generation (Prasetyo, 2024). These rituals are not merely ceremonial but are imbued with symbolic meanings that affirm the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and God (Hutajulu et al., 2024).

One enduring tradition that has remained sustainable to the present is *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi*, celebrated in Liyangan Hamlet, Temanggung Regency. This ritual represents the community's expression of gratitude for the blessings of water and the earth as sources of life. The procession involves various community elements through prayers, offerings, parades, and social activities that foster a sense of togetherness. *Merti Tirta* is not only understood as a spiritual ceremony but also as a means of preserving the environment, strengthening social cohesion, and safeguarding the cultural identity of the Liyangan community. Thus, this ritual holds significant potential in supporting the achievement of sustainable development goals at the local level.

However, amid the currents of modernization and social change, the sustainability of cultural traditions faces various challenges (Dhani et al., 2024; Akhiroh et al., 2025). Shifts in values, the declining interest of younger generations, and environmental exploitation often undermine the original meaning of local traditions (Jumiati, 2021; Febriansyah, 2024; Hetharion et al., 2025). Therefore, it is essential to conduct academic studies to understand how the *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* ritual contributes to sustainable development. Through this research, it is expected that ecological, social, economic, and cultural values embedded within the tradition can be identified, while also offering a model for the preservation of local culture as part of sustainable development strategies.

## Theoretical Framework

### Sustainable Development Theory

The theory of sustainable development serves as the main foundation of this research, viewing development not merely as a process of economic growth but as a holistic strategy that integrates environmental, social, and economic aspects in a balanced manner (Depari, 2024; Parmadi et al., 2025).

According to (Brundtland, 1987), the former Prime Minister of Norway who chaired the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), also known as the Brundtland Commission, a United Nations body that in 1987 launched a landmark report entitled *Our Common Future*. This work became a pivotal milestone in mainstreaming the idea of sustainable development, which later evolved into the foundation of global agendas,

including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition emphasizes the need for a balance between inclusive economic growth, social justice through community participation, and the preservation of natural resources for long-term sustainability (Brundtland, 1987).

In the context of the study entitled '*Realizing Sustainable Development through the Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi Ritual in Liyangan Hamlet*', the theory of sustainable development holds strong relevance. The *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* ritual is not only understood as a sacred procession (Ningsih et al., 2023) but also embodies sustainability values that are consistent with the sustainability framework. From an environmental perspective, ritual activities such as the collection of holy water, the offering of offerings, and the planting of seedlings reflect efforts to conserve resources and rehabilitate the ecology in the aftermath of disasters, thereby supporting the availability of natural resources for future generations (Kompas.Id, 2023). From a social perspective, this ritual strengthens solidarity, mutual cooperation, and the communal identity of the Liyangan Hamlet community, in line with the principle of social inclusion as a pillar of sustainable development (Ginting, 2023; Novianti, 2024). Economically, the ritual fosters opportunities for ecotourism, enhancing local livelihoods without jeopardizing ecological integrity.

Thus, local cultural practices such as *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* not only carry symbolic meaning but also serve as concrete instruments for the application of sustainable development theory. Moreover, in the Indonesian context, culture can be regarded as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, as it functions to maintain harmony between humans, nature, and communal values passed down across generations

## Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach with an interpretative paradigm to explore the symbolic meanings, communal practices, and impacts of the *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* ritual in Liyangan Hamlet, Temanggung Regency, on sustainable development. This approach is aligned with the theory of sustainable development (Brundtland, 1987). Which emphasizes the integration of environmental, social, economic, and cultural aspects. This study adopts an ethnographic case study design, focusing on the *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* ritual as a representation of local wisdom.

## Research Location and Time

The research was conducted in Liyangan Hamlet, Purbosari Village, Ngadirejo Subdistrict, Temanggung Regency, Central Java, which serves as both the center of the ritual and the Liyangan archaeological site. The study commenced in early June 2025, with data collection concentrated on the annual ritual period (October–November) in order to obtain longitudinal insights.

### Population and Sample

The population of this study comprises the community of Liyangan Hamlet who are involved in the ritual, including customary leaders, participants, younger generations, and local stakeholders such as village authorities and ecotourism actors. The sample was determined using purposive sampling, involving 12 key informants consisting of 10 ecotourism practitioners and 2 village authorities, until data saturation was achieved

### Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through methodological triangulation:

- **Observation:** Observing the ritual site conditions to document human–nature interactions and social cohesion.

*Figure 1: Observastion*



Source: Researcher's Documentation

- **Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews:** Exploring the meanings of the ritual, its contributions to the SDGs, and the challenges of modernization based on the pillars of sustainable development.

*Figure 2: interview Seasson*



Source: Researcher's Documentation

- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** Conducted in 3–5 sessions with 11 participants per session to facilitate collective discussions on cultural preservation

*Figure 3.* FGD



Source: Researcher's Documentation

## Results

### *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* Tradition

*Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* is a customary ritual regularly practiced by the community of Liyangan Hamlet, Purbosari Village, Ngadirejo Subdistrict, Temanggung Regency, Central Java. Beyond its function as an expression of gratitude for the availability of water and agricultural produce, the ritual also reflects the community's commitment to preserving cultural heritage, particularly the Liyangan Archaeological Site. The symbolic meaning embedded in the practice emphasizes that human life is inseparable from two fundamental elements—water and earth—that must be cared for to ensure ecological continuity. Furthermore, the tradition embodies respect for the ancestors, who are believed to have safeguarded the village's well-being and prosperity. From an academic perspective, this ritual can be interpreted as a living form of local wisdom that integrates ecological, spiritual, and social values, thereby resonating strongly with the principles of sustainable development. This ceremony is held annually on Friday *Pahing* between October and November, following the tobacco harvest season. The procession of the *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* ritual is as follows:

#### 1. Joint Prayer

The ritual begins with a joint prayer offered by the community of Liyangan Hamlet at a sacred site known as *Tuk Tempurung*, a spring that holds significant spiritual and ecological value for the local residents. *Tuk Tempurung* is located to the west of the Liyangan Site and has traditionally served as one of the main water sources for daily life, while also being regarded

as a blessed place. This joint prayer serves as a form of homage to nature and the Creator for the abundance of water, which is a vital resource utilized for various human needs (Astriani et al., 2020). Following the prayer procession, the activities continue with a *selamatan*, a communal meal tradition that begins with the presentation of *ingkung ayam* (a whole chicken cooked with traditional spices, symbolizing prayers and hopes). The entire ceremony is usually held in the morning to create a solemn atmosphere imbued with spiritual significance.

## 2. Collection of Holy Water (*Warih Purba Nirmala*)

The procession for collecting holy water, known as *Warih Purba Nirmala*, begins with a symbolic activity of planting a *Kalpataru* tree. This tree is not merely an ordinary plant but carries philosophical significance as a symbol of life, hope, and environmental sustainability (Prahardana, 2022). The planting of the *Kalpataru* tree reflects the community's commitment to environmental conservation and maintaining ecosystem balance as a valuable legacy for future generations. This act also reinforces the collective awareness that customary rituals are inseparable from human responsibility toward the universe (Esdarwati et al., 2024).

After the tree planting, the procession continues with the collection of holy water from *Tuk Tempurung*, a spring regarded as sacred by the Liyangan community. This task is performed by a customary leader, who is spiritually considered to have a close connection with nature and a strong sense of religiosity. The water collection process is rich in symbolic meaning, signifying that the universe is a form of divine blessing, providing abundant life-sustaining resources such as water to support human continuity. However, humans are not merely recipients; they also bear a moral responsibility to protect, nurture, and preserve nature to ensure the sustainability of life for future generations. Thus, this ritual serves not only as a form of homage to nature but also as a reminder of the importance of harmony between humans and the environment (Yulisinta et al., 2024).

*Figure 4: The Head of Purbosari Village pouring the ritualized water*



Source: Jawa Pos Radarmagelang.id

### 3. Beksa Hayu Langgen Nirmala

As part of the holy water ritual in Liyangan, a sacred dance known as *Beksa Hayu Langgen Nirmala* is performed. This dance is presented by four female dancers, each wearing a cloth in white, yellow, red, and black. The colors are not chosen arbitrarily but carry profound philosophical meanings, representing the four elements of life, water (white), air (yellow), fire (red), and earth (black). This symbolism reflects the local community's cosmological understanding of universal balance and the harmony between humans and the fundamental elements of life (Wiyani, 2024).

*Figure 5: The Sacred Dance Beksa Hayu Langgen Nirmala.*



Source: Antaranews.com

Through graceful yet meaningful movements, this dance serves as an expression of gratitude to the Creator and as a medium to convey prayers for safety, smoothness, and blessings in life as well as in fulfilling divine mandates. The holy water, spiritually processed during the dance, is believed to carry prayers and positive energy, which the dancers then bring to the steps where the community gathers. There, the water is poured into a special container and subsequently distributed to the villagers as a form of blessing and a symbolic hope for a harmonious and sustainable life.

### 4. Tumpeng Agung

The ritual procession concludes with the *Tumpengan Agung*, which serves as both the climax and the closing of the entire customary ceremony. In this sacred moment, a large *tumpeng* is presented, made from a variety of agricultural products such as rice, vegetables, tubers, fruits, and traditional side dishes. The arrangement of the *tumpeng* is not merely symbolic but also represents a tangible expression of the community's gratitude to the Creator for the abundant sustenance and fertility of nature provided throughout the year (Kiftiyah, 2020). The agricultural products arranged in the *tumpeng* reflect the community's closeness to

the land and nature, as well as their awareness that all blessings received originate from divine power.

*Figure 6: Parade of the Tumpeng Agung Harvest*



Source: Antaranews.com

Beyond being a mere offering, the *Tumpengan Agung* is also understood as a spiritual medium, serving as a reminder that all forms of sustenance are not only to be enjoyed but should also be a means of devotion and worship to God. The presence of the *tumpeng* in this rite reinforces religious and collective ethical values, emphasizing that humans have a responsibility to use the blessings of nature wisely, share with others, and continually return to the Creator with gratitude, devotion, and prayers (Putra & Idam, 2023).

## Discussion

According to the sustainable development theory formulated by Brundtland (1987), development should meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This requires a balance among the three main pillars: environmental, social, and economic. When linked to the practice of the *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* ritual, it is evident that this tradition reflects the practical application of these principles.

From an environmental dimension, the *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* ritual emphasizes respect for nature, particularly water and earth as sources of life. The procession of collecting holy water from *Tuk Tempurung* and the planting of the *Kalpataru* tree symbolize the community's commitment to preserving natural resources. This demonstrates a collective awareness that human survival heavily depends on a balanced ecosystem (Yulisinta et al., 2024). Thus, this ritual internalizes conservation values that align with the principles of sustainable development, namely maintaining environmental quality for future generations (Lestari et al., 2025; Deng et al., 2023).

From a social dimension, this ritual strengthens solidarity, mutual cooperation, and the cultural identity of the Liyangan Hamlet community. The participation of all residents in joint prayers, *selamatan*, and the presentation of the *Tumpeng Agung* reflects strong social bonds and a spirit of togetherness. The sacred dance *Beksa Hayu Langgen Nirmala*, with its symbolism of the four elements of life, also serves as a medium for preserving local cosmological values. In this way, the *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* tradition not only safeguards cultural heritage but also reinforces the community's social capital in adapting to changing times, in line with sustainable development goals that emphasize social harmony.

Meanwhile, from an economic dimension, this ritual has the potential to serve as a cultural tourism attraction that can provide added value for the local community. The presence of visitors interested in observing the customary procession can create opportunities for creative economic activities, such as traditional cuisine, handicrafts, and performing arts. Additionally, the agricultural products displayed in the *Tumpeng Agung* can serve as a means to promote local agricultural potential. With proper management, the economic aspects of this ritual can be developed without diminishing its sacred value, thereby supporting community welfare while preserving cultural sustainability.

*Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* represents a model of sustainable development based on local wisdom, realized concretely in community life. This tradition emphasizes that development should not be limited to material aspects but must also encompass spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions. Through respect for water and earth, the community demonstrates ecological awareness, aiming to preserve the environment as a valuable legacy for future generations. At the same time, collective participation in the ritual procession strengthens social bonds, fosters solidarity, and reinforces cultural identity as the foundation of community cohesion. Furthermore, the economic potential arising from tourism appeal and local creativity offers opportunities for improving welfare without compromising the sacredness of the tradition. Thus, *Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi* is not merely an annual ritual but also a reflection of harmony between humans, nature, culture, and economy oriented toward sustainability.

## Conclusion

The Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi ritual in Liyangan Hamlet represents a practice of sustainable development grounded in local wisdom, manifested through environmental, social, and economic dimensions. From an environmental perspective, the ritual emphasizes the importance of preserving natural resources, particularly water and land, as essential

sources of life to be passed on to future generations. From a social standpoint, the tradition strengthens community cohesion, fosters a spirit of mutual cooperation, and preserves cultural identity as a social adhesive amid the currents of modernization. Economically, Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi holds significant potential for the development of cultural tourism and creative economies, enhancing community welfare without diminishing the sacred value of the tradition. Thus, Merti Tirta Amerta Bhumi is not merely an annual ritual but an important instrument that reinforces the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the Creator, while also serving as a contextual model for applying sustainable development rooted in local wisdom.

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