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Sacred Service, Cultural Transformation, and Sustainable Religious Tourism in Labuan Bajo

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Abstract

Religious tourism is an evolving form of cultural and spiritual mobility that connects faith, community identity, and sustainable destination development. Despite its growing significance, few studies have examined service quality in pilgrimage contexts using the 4A framework (attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services), particularly in developing regions. This qualitative study explores how the 4A dimensions shape service experiences and sustainability practices in religious tourism across three Catholic pilgrimage sites in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia: Goa Maria Golo Koe, Goa Maria Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with ecclesiastical leaders, including a diocesan priest and the Archbishop; key informant interviews with government and tourism actors; focus group discussions with local communities; and non-participatory field observations. The findings show that spiritual attraction remains the primary driver of pilgrim motivation, reinforced by local traditions and collective devotion. However, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services are constrained by inadequate infrastructure, fragmented governance, and limited service standards. Despite these challenges, community voluntarism and the Church's moral leadership help preserve the sanctity and authenticity of visitor experiences. This study introduces a Sacred Service Framework that integrates faith-based ethics with the 4A model to support sustainable, inclusive, and spiritually grounded religious tourism management.

Keywords: 4A framework; service quality; religious tourism; pilgrimage; sustainability; Labuan Bajo; community-based tourism

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1. Introduction

Tourism has long been recognized as one of the most dynamic sectors, contributing to cultural exchange, community development, and global economic growth [1–3]. Within this vast field, religious tourism, encompassing pilgrimage, spiritual retreats, and faith-based journeys, has emerged as a resilient and meaningful niche that combines spiritual fulfilment and socioeconomic empowerment [4–6]. Religious tourism represents a distinctive form of human mobility in which spiritual devotion, cultural identity, and social interaction intersect [7,8]. Unlike mass tourism, pilgrimage travel is often motivated by faith-based meaning, moral obligation, and communal belonging, making it a socially embedded practice rather than a purely economic activity [9,10]. As religious destinations increasingly

interact with tourism systems, questions of service quality, governance, and sustainability become critical to understanding how sacred spaces are managed without eroding their spiritual significance [11,12]. These dynamics position religious tourism as an important field of inquiry within the broader study of society, culture, and institutional practice.

Scholarship on religious tourism has examined pilgrimage motivations, spiritual experiences, and socioeconomic impacts across diverse cultural contexts [13–15]. Recent studies have expanded this focus to include sustainability, community participation, and ethical governance, highlighting the tension between preservation of sacred meaning and the pressures of tourism development [16,17]. However, much of this literature remains either conceptually oriented or quantitatively driven, often privileging visitor satisfaction metrics over lived religious practice and local meaning-making. As a result, the everyday religious life surrounding pilgrimage sites—and the voices of those who sustain them—remain underrepresented.

In Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, religious tourism research has largely focused on major Islamic or Hindu pilgrimage destinations, while Catholic pilgrimage practices in eastern regions remain understudied [18–20]. Labuan Bajo, widely recognized as a global tourism gateway due to its proximity to Komodo National Park, also hosts an active network of Catholic pilgrimage sites—Goa Maria Golo Koe, Goa Maria Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas—that function as centers of devotional life for local communities [21–23]. Despite their social and spiritual importance, these sites have received limited scholarly attention, especially regarding how service quality and sustainability are negotiated within faith-based and community-led governance structures [18,19].

Service quality is a central determinant of visitor experience in tourism studies, yet its application in religious contexts requires careful reinterpretation [24–26]. In pilgrimage settings, service encounters are often shaped by moral responsibility, spiritual empathy, and voluntary service rather than standardized commercial practices [27–29]. Conventional service quality models, while useful, do not fully capture these faith-driven dynamics. This gap calls for analytical frameworks that can accommodate both tangible service dimensions and the intangible spiritual values embedded in religious tourism [30–32].

To address this complexity, we employ the 4A framework—attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services—as an interpretive lens for examining service quality in religious tourism [33,34]. Rather than treating the 4A components as purely infrastructural elements, we apply them contextually to explore how spiritual meaning, communal care, and ethical stewardship shape pilgrimage experiences. This framework provides a structured yet flexible approach for linking service quality with governance and sustainability in faith-based destinations [35–37].

Adopting an ethnographically informed qualitative approach, we prioritize the perspectives of the clergy, community members, and local stakeholders involved in pilgrimage life [38–40]. By focusing on lived religious practices, volunteer service, and site-specific governance, this research foregrounds how pilgrimage sites function as social and spiritual spaces rather than tourist products [2,41]. This orientation responds directly to calls for more interpretive and context-sensitive research in religious tourism studies [1,33,34].

Accordingly, in this study, we aim to explore the experience and management of service quality and sustainability in Catholic pilgrimage tourism in Labuan Bajo. Specifically, we seek to (1) examine how the 4A dimensions are manifested in the management of pilgrimage sites; (2) understand how religious leaders, community members, and local authorities perceive and attend to service quality; and (3) identify governance practices that support the sustainability of faith-based tourism without compromising spiritual authenticity.

This study offers several novel contributions to the scholarship on religious tourism and societal governance. First, it advances an ethnographically grounded analysis of service

quality in religious tourism, foregrounding lived religious practices, community participation, and clergy leadership dimensions that are often underrepresented in quantitatively driven tourism research. By incorporating informant voices and aspects of site-specific religious life, this study moves beyond abstract models to capture how pilgrimage destinations function as socially embedded and spiritually sustained spaces [42,43].

Second, we reinterpret the 4A framework (attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services) through a faith-based and ethical lens, demonstrating that service quality in pilgrimage contexts is enacted as a moral and communal practice rather than a purely technical or commercial function. This contextual adaptation extends the application of the 4A model beyond conventional destination management and introduces a novel perspective on how tourism frameworks can be meaningfully applied to sacred settings [29,32,44].

Third, this research proposes a Sacred Service Framework, derived inductively from empirical findings, that integrates service quality, community stewardship, and faith-based governance. This framework bridges tourism studies with sociological and religious perspectives, offering a transferable analytical approach for examining sustainable religious tourism in developing regions. Collectively, these contributions position the study as an original addition to interdisciplinary debates on religion, tourism, and sustainable societal practices [45–47]. This study contributes to global scholarship by bridging the conceptual gap between tourism management and theology, demonstrating how sacred spaces can serve as laboratories for sustainability, inclusion, and cultural resilience. The proposed Sacred Service Framework provides policymakers, destination managers, and ecclesiastical institutions with actionable insights that can be leveraged to enhance service quality while safeguarding spiritual integrity collaboratively.

While researchers have examined religious tourism, service quality, and sustainability largely as separate domains, few studies have integrated these perspectives within a faith-based governance context. We therefore propose the Sacred Service Framework, which extends the conventional 4A destination model by embedding spiritual ethics, community stewardship, and moral responsibility as core determinants of service quality in pilgrimage settings. Unlike conventional tourism service models that emphasize efficiency, infrastructure, and commercial service delivery, the Sacred Service Framework conceptualizes service quality as a faith-driven moral ecosystem, where spiritual authenticity, communal participation, and ecclesiastical leadership collectively shape visitor experiences and destination sustainability. By situating service provision within religious values and community practices, this framework advances existing tourism models and offers a new analytical perspective for understanding sustainable religious tourism in developing regions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Religious Tourism as a Social and Cultural Practice

Religious tourism has long been examined as a form of mobility driven by faith, devotion, and spiritual obligation rather than solely leisure consumption [12,47–49]. Early studies conceptualized pilgrimage as a ritualized journey that reinforces religious identity, social cohesion, and symbolic meaning [50–52]. More recent scholarship has extended this perspective by framing religious tourism as a socially embedded practice shaped by local culture, institutional authority, and community participation [53–55]. From this perspective, pilgrimage sites are understood not merely as destinations but as lived religious spaces sustained through everyday practices and moral commitments.

Despite this conceptual development, much of the literature continues to prioritize visitor motivations and economic impacts, often overlooking the perspectives of local religious actors and host communities [49,50,56]. As a result, the lived religious life surrounding pilgrimage sites, particularly in non-Western and peripheral regions, remains

underexplored. This gap highlights the need for qualitative and ethnographically informed research that centers informant voices and contextual meaning-making processes.

2.2. Global Research Trends: Insights from Bibliometric Analysis

To contextualize this study within global scholarship, a bibliometric mapping analysis was conducted using VOSviewer 1.6.20 based on the Scopus database (2020–2025). Figures 1–3 visualize the evolution and thematic interconnections of research in the fields of sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, and service quality.

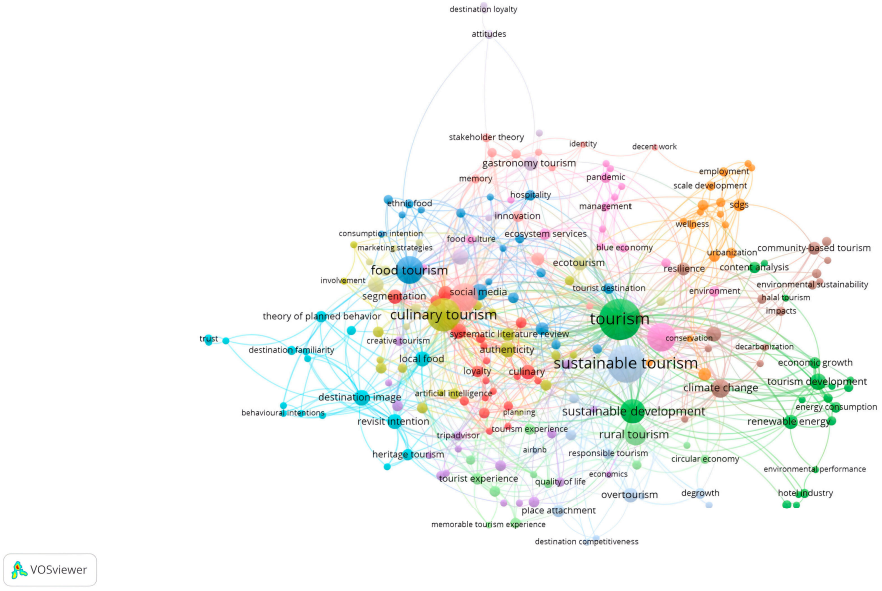


Figure 1. Keyword Co-Occurrence Network Visualization of Tourism Research (VOSviewer Analysis). Different colors represent distinct thematic clusters identified through bibliometric mapping. The green cluster focuses on tourism and sustainable tourism, including sustainability, climate change, and renewable energy. The red cluster represents culinary tourism, encompassing gastronomy, local food, and tourist experience. The blue cluster highlights food tourism and hospitality innovation, including ecosystem services and stakeholder theory. The yellow cluster relates to consumer behavior and marketing, such as consumption intention and segmentation. The purple cluster reflects tourism experience and destination attachment, including memorable tourism experiences and quality of life. The light blue (cyan) cluster emphasizes destination image and behavioral intention, including revisit intention and theory of planned behavior. The orange cluster captures tourism development and employment-related themes, including community-based tourism and economic development. Node size indicates keyword frequency, while link thickness reflects the strength of co-occurrence relationships.

The network visualization (Figure 1) of global tourism research from 2020 to 2025 identifies five dominant clusters: a green cluster linking "sustainable tourism," "sustainable development," and "climate change"; an orange cluster focused on "community-based tourism," "resilience," and "environmental sustainability"; a blue cluster emphasizing "culinary tourism" and "destination image"; a yellow cluster centering on "food tourism" and "segmentation"; and a pink cluster reflecting "hospitality," "innovation," and "management." Although sustainability predominates in current scholarship, the near absence of "religious tourism," "pilgrimage," and "spiritual tourism" as major nodes underscores a persistent research gap. This gap indicates that while sustainability debates are flourishing, the ethical and spiritual dimensions of tourism remain peripheral to mainstream inquiry, suggesting a need to reposition religious and spiritual tourism as integral to discussions of sustainable destination management.

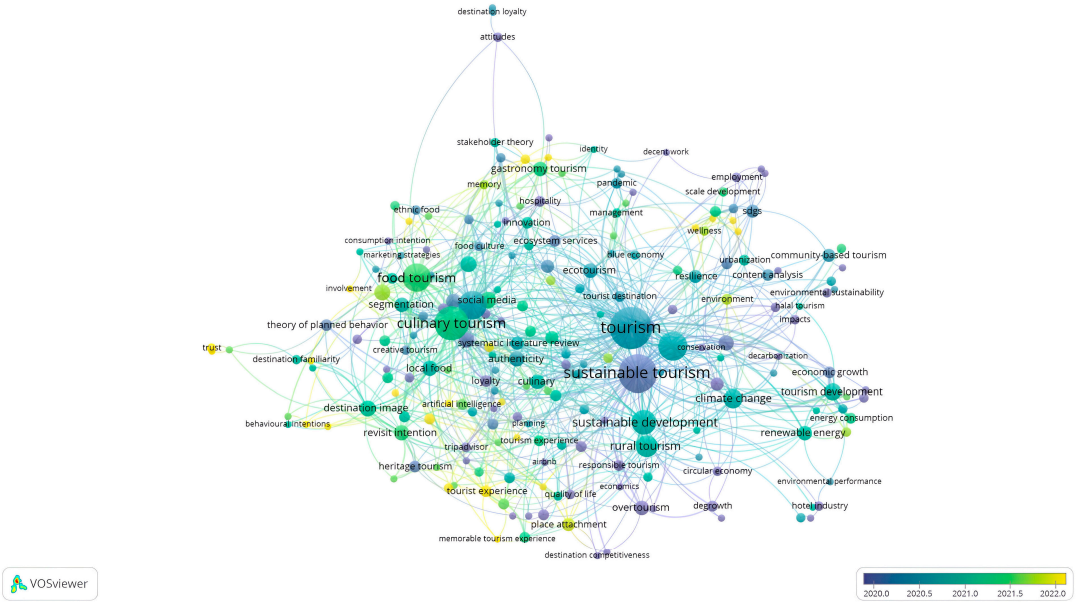


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization of Keyword Co-Occurrence in Tourism Research (VOSviewer Analysis). Overlay visualization. Colors represent keyword density, where yellow indicates high concentration, green indicates moderate concentration, and blue indicates low concentration of keyword co-occurrence within the network.

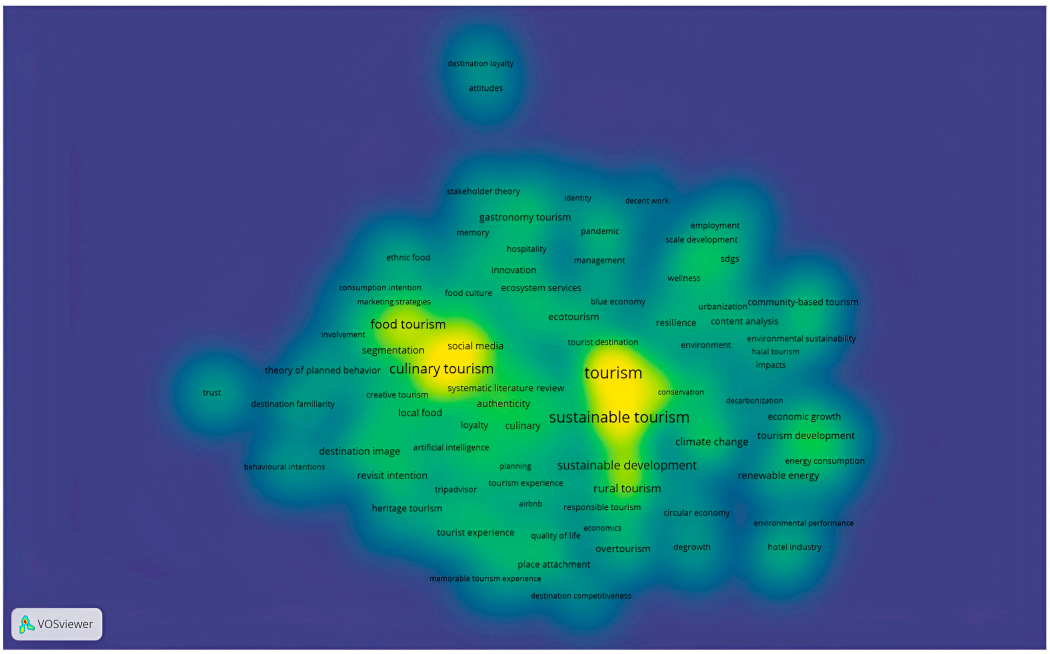


Figure 3. Density Visualization of Keyword Co-Occurrence in Tourism Research (VOSviewer Analysis). The color gradient represents the density of keyword occurrence and co-occurrence intensity within the research network. Areas shown in yellow indicate the highest density, reflecting keywords that appear most frequently and have strong co-occurrence relationships (e.g., *tourism*, *sustainable tourism*, and *culinary tourism*). Regions in green represent moderate density, indicating relevant but less dominant themes such as *food tourism*, *sustainable development*, and *tourism development*. Areas displayed in blue to dark blue indicate low density, corresponding to less frequently occurring or more peripheral keywords. The density visualization highlights the concentration of research focus, with brighter areas signifying core topics and darker areas representing emerging or less explored themes.

The overlay visualization (Figure 2) traces the chronological evolution of research themes, revealing that recent years (2022–2024) have seen intensified attention to "re-

silience," "SDGs," and "community-based tourism," as shown in the bright-yellow nodes. Yet, the lack of emerging keywords such as "faith-based tourism," "spiritual authenticity," and "pilgrimage experiences" highlights the continued marginalization of religious perspectives within sustainability discourse. This temporal gap implies that while sustainability thinking increasingly values inclusivity and resilience, it has not yet incorporated the moral, ritual, and transcendent aspects central to faith-based travel. This divergence demonstrates how global tourism scholarship often privileges material and ecological sustainability while overlooking its spiritual analog—ethical stewardship and communal spirituality.

The density visualization (Figure 3) further confirms this imbalance. High-density yellow zones correspond to the dominant clusters "tourism," "sustainable tourism," and "culinary tourism," while religious tourism is located in peripheral green areas alongside "heritage tourism" and "rural tourism." The visualization shows that spirituality-based tourism occupies only a marginal intellectual space in global debates. This study, therefore, responds directly to this underrepresentation by positioning religious and spiritual tourism as a critical dimension of sustainable tourism, particularly in developing contexts such as Labuan Bajo. By integrating service quality and the 4A destination framework (attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services) into an analysis of faith-based pilgrimage management, this research bridges the divide between the physical infrastructures of tourism and the intangible ethics of spirituality, offering a new interpretive lens for sustainable destination governance.

The bibliometric findings therefore provide an important justification for this study. While sustainability and community-based tourism dominate global discussions, the relative absence of keywords related to religious tourism and pilgrimage indicates that spiritual dimensions remain marginal within mainstream tourism scholarship. This study addresses this gap by empirically examining how service quality, spirituality, and governance intersect within Catholic pilgrimage tourism in Labuan Bajo. Previous studies emphasized that pilgrimage tourism must balance spiritual authenticity with destination management practices to ensure sustainable development [57–60].

2.3. Religious Tourism and Spiritual Authenticity

Religious tourism is commonly understood as travel motivated wholly or partially by faith-based purposes, including pilgrimage, devotional visits, and participation in sacred rituals [61,62]. Within this field, pilgrimage is frequently distinguished from leisure tourism because it is oriented toward meaning-making, spiritual transformation, and communal belonging rather than consumption and entertainment [51,54]. Scholars have emphasized that pilgrimage experiences are socially embedded and shaped by religious institutions, local communities, and ritual practices that structure visitors' encounters with sacred spaces [6,45]. As religious destinations become more connected to broader tourism economies, the challenge for many sites is to accommodate visitors while preserving the spiritual integrity that gives pilgrimage its distinctive purpose [11,47].

Spiritual authenticity has emerged as a central construct for understanding why pilgrims continue to visit sacred sites despite limited material facilities and tourism services [63]. In religious tourism contexts, authenticity is often less about historical accuracy or staged cultural representation and more about perceived holiness, the devotional atmosphere, and the emotional intensity of religious experience [64–66]. Research on pilgrimage settings suggests that pilgrims evaluate authenticity through cues such as prayerful silence, ritual discipline, reverent behavior, and the presence of religious symbols and practices that confirm sacred meaning [67–70]. In this sense, spiritual authenticity functions as a form of experiential value grounded in transcendence, moral orientation, and the feeling of closeness to the divine [71,72].

Spiritual authenticity is not merely a fixed attribute of a destination but a socially produced condition maintained through collective religious practices. Ethnographic studies of pilgrimage sites have shown that clergy leadership, volunteer service, and community stewardship are critical in sustaining the sacred atmosphere and regulating the boundaries between worship and tourism [73,74]. This view aligns with broader theoretical perspectives that treat authenticity as relational and performative, shaped by interactions among pilgrims, hosts, and institutional actors [65,73]. Consequently, maintaining spiritual authenticity often depends on informal governance and moral authority rather than commercial management systems.

In destinations experiencing rapid tourism growth, the pursuit of economic opportunities can intensify tensions between religious meaning and the commodification of tourism [65,75]. Scholars have noted that when sacred sites are framed primarily as products through aggressive promotion, entertainment-oriented services, or excessive commercialization, pilgrims may perceive a sense of spiritual dilution and reduced reverence [76,77]. Conversely, when local actors prioritize ethical stewardship, ritual integrity, and respect for sacred norms, pilgrimage tourism can contribute to cultural continuity, social cohesion, and sustainability [77,78]. This highlights the need for analytical approaches that treat spiritual authenticity as a core resource for religious tourism development and a key determinant of service quality and destination resilience [69,70].

The literature suggests that spiritual authenticity functions as the central "pull" factor in pilgrimage tourism and is sustained through faith-based ethics, community participation, and governance practices that protect sacred meaning [79,80]. This study builds on these insights by examining how spiritual authenticity is enacted and safeguarded in Catholic pilgrimage tourism in Labuan Bajo and how it shapes service quality across destination dimensions, including attraction, accessibility, amenities, and institutional coordination.

2.4. Service Quality in Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism

Service quality is a central construct in tourism studies that is traditionally associated with efficiency, satisfaction, and standardized service delivery [81,82]. In religious tourism contexts, however, service quality takes on distinct characteristics shaped by spiritual values, moral responsibility, and voluntary service [83,84]. Studies have shown that pilgrims often evaluate service encounters based on empathy, sincerity, and respect for sacred norms rather than material comfort or service speed [85,86].

Recent research has emphasized that service quality in pilgrimage settings is closely intertwined with religious ethics and community stewardship [87,88]. Volunteerism, hospitality as devotion, and collective responsibility frequently replace formalized service management systems. Nevertheless, existing models of service quality have rarely been adapted to account for these faith-based dynamics, creating a conceptual mismatch between theory and practice in religious tourism research [89,90].

2.5. Sustainability, Community Participation, and Faith-Based Governance

Sustainability has become a prominent concern in tourism research, encompassing environmental protection, socio-cultural continuity, and economic viability [91,92]. In religious tourism, sustainability is closely linked to the preservation of sacred meaning and the well-being of host communities. Scholars have argued that faith-based destinations require governance approaches that balance tourism development with ethical stewardship and cultural integrity.

Community participation plays a critical role in sustaining pilgrimage sites, particularly where formal institutional support is limited [93,94]. Local religious leaders, volunteers, and community groups often function as informal governance actors, regulat-

ing visitor behavior and maintaining sacred spaces. However, governance arrangements in religious tourism are frequently fragmented, with limited coordination between religious institutions and public authorities. This fragmentation underscores the importance of collaborative and context-sensitive governance models grounded in local religious values.

2.6. The 4A Framework as an Analytical Lens for Viewing Religious Tourism

The 4A framework, comprising attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services, has been widely used to assess destination readiness and service provision in tourism studies [95,96]. Traditionally applied to secular and commercial destinations, the framework provides a structured approach for evaluating both tangible and intangible service components [89,97]. Recent studies have demonstrated that the 4A framework can be meaningfully adapted to alternative forms of tourism, including cultural, community-based, and value-driven tourism contexts [98,99].

In this study, the 4A framework is employed not as a prescriptive management model but as an analytical lens to interpret how service quality is enacted within religious tourism settings [100–102]. Applied to ethnographic data, the framework enables analysis of how spiritual authenticity shapes attraction, communal care mediates accessibility, ethical simplicity informs amenities, and faith-based governance influences ancillary services [95,96]. This contextual application extends the analytical usefulness of the 4A framework beyond conventional destination management approaches [103,104].

While previous studies have examined religious tourism, service quality, and sustainability as separate domains, few have integrated these perspectives through ethnographic analysis [21,22]. In particular, Catholic pilgrimage tourism in eastern Indonesia remains underrepresented in the literature, despite its growing integration into global tourism flows. Moreover, limited attention has been paid to how service quality in pilgrimage settings is understood and enacted by religious actors themselves. Responding to these gaps, this study positions itself at the intersection of religious tourism, service quality, and faith-based governance. By combining ethnographic insight with the 4A framework, this research offers a contextually grounded understanding of how pilgrimage sites are managed as social, spiritual, and ethical spaces, providing the conceptual foundation for the empirical analysis that follows.

Although the 4A framework has traditionally been applied to evaluate destination infrastructure and visitor services, its application in religious tourism remains limited. Recent scholarship highlights that pilgrimage destinations require analytical approaches capable of capturing both tangible service elements and intangible spiritual values (e.g., authenticity, devotion, and ethical stewardship). Building on these insights, this study reconceptualizes the 4A framework through a faith-based perspective, integrating service quality dimensions with religious values and community governance practices. This theoretical extension provides the conceptual basis for the Sacred Service Framework, which positions service quality in religious tourism as a relational and moral process shaped by spirituality, collective participation, and ethical responsibility.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

We employed a qualitative case study design to explore the management and service quality of religious tourism within the framework of sustainable destination development. This qualitative approach was chosen for its capacity to capture rich, contextualized, and interpretive insights into participants' lived experiences [105,106]. Religious tourism, as a social and spiritual phenomenon, is deeply embedded in faith-based practices, community participation, and symbolic meaning; thus, qualitative inquiry fosters an understanding of

the interplay between spirituality, governance, and service quality that quantitative metrics cannot capture.

A multiple-case-study strategy was employed, encompassing three major Catholic pilgrimage sites in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia: Goa Maria Golo Koe, Goa Maria Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas. These three sites were selected because they represent the diversity of sacred spaces in the region—varying in scale, accessibility, and community engagement—yet share a common religious tradition and spiritual orientation.

We integrated the 4A destination framework (attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services) as a guiding analytical model. This model served as both a conceptual and an empirical lens for examining how service quality manifests across different dimensions of destination management. The integration of the SERVQUAL approach (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles) with the 4A framework provided a holistic view of how tangible infrastructure and intangible spiritual values interact to shape visitors' experiences.

3.2. Study Site Context

Labuan Bajo, situated in West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, has been designated as one of Indonesia's "Super-Priority Tourism Destinations." While internationally recognized for its marine and adventure tourism—particularly as the gateway to Komodo National Park—Labuan Bajo also serves as a spiritual center for Flores Island's predominantly Catholic population. The three pilgrimage sites chosen for this research are integral to the spiritual identity of local communities and function as annual destinations for thousands of pilgrims:

1. Goa Maria Golo Koe, located near Labuan Bajo's urban center, serves as the diocesan symbol of Marian devotion. It offers moderate accessibility and a well-developed infrastructure but faces overcrowding during feast days.
2. Goa Maria Golo Kaca, located in a hilly rural area, is known for its panoramic views and community-based management but struggles with limited amenities and poor transport access.
3. Goa Maria Rekas, situated further inland, represents the most traditional and spiritually immersive site, where faith practices are integrated with local cultural rituals.

The diversity among these sites provided comparative insights into how the 4A dimensions are expressed differently within faith-based tourism systems, ranging from urban to rural contexts.

3.3. Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholders directly involved in or affected by religious tourism management. We engaged four participant groups:

1. Ecclesiastical leaders, including one diocesan priest -Romo and the Archbishop of the Diocese.
2. Local community members, organized through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) of approximately 25 participants representing parish volunteers, youth groups, and residents living near the pilgrimage sites.
3. Government and tourism officials, including three key informants from the West Manggarai Tourism Office and local tourism operators.
4. Pilgrims and visitors, who were observed during six field visits conducted at different times of the liturgical year (e.g., the Easter season and during the Marian feasts).

The final study population included 30–35 individuals, providing diverse perspectives on the interrelation between faith, service, and tourism management.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection took place between February and October 2025 and involved three complementary methods:

1. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ecclesiastical leaders (Romo and the Archbishop), government officers, and tourism practitioners. Each interview lasted 45–90 min and followed a structured guide based on the 4A dimensions and SERVQUAL principles. The questions explored the management of attractions, challenges relating to infrastructure, perceptions of service quality, and integration of religious values into tourism practice.
2. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 25 local community members to capture collective experiences, community engagement patterns, and perspectives on sustainability. The FGDs allowed the participants to reflect on how religious tourism impacts social cohesion, livelihoods, and local culture.
3. Non-participatory observation was carried out by a researcher through six site visits—two at each pilgrimage site—to document visitor flows, service interactions, physical infrastructure, and environmental management. Observations were recorded through field notes and photographs for triangulation with interview data.

All interviews and discussions were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and then transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Ethical clearance was obtained from the local diocesan office and the university's research ethics committee. Participant consent was secured verbally and in writing, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted according to the thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke [107]. The process involved six steps:

1. Familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes.
2. Coding of significant statements related to service quality, governance, and spiritual meaning.
3. Theme generation aligned with the 4A dimensions—attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services.
4. Reviewing themes to ensure internal coherence and alignment with sustainability theory.
5. Defining and naming themes, leading to the identification of core constructs such as "spiritual empathy," "communal service," and "faith-based governance."
6. Interpretation, linking empirical patterns to the literature and developing the Sacred Service Framework as an emergent conceptual model.

NVivo 14 software was used for assistance with data organization, coding frequency analysis, and visualization of thematic relationships. The triangulation of interviews, focus groups, and observations strengthened the credibility of the findings. The final phase of analysis integrated the 4A framework with insights from SERVQUAL and sustainable tourism theory to form the Sacred Service Framework. This analytical synthesis interprets the pilgrimage sites not as merely physical destinations but as spiritual ecosystems, where attraction (faith), accessibility (pilgrimage), amenities (ethical hospitality), and ancillary services (community stewardship) collectively determine service quality. The framework thus positions religious tourism as a moral and communal enterprise rather than a purely economic one, aligning with the broader discourse on spiritual sustainability [108].

4. Findings

4.1. Overview of Findings

The results of this study reveal that the management of religious tourism in Labuan Bajo—particularly across Goa Maria Golo Koe, Goa Maria Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas—is sustained primarily by community faith, ecclesiastical leadership, and voluntarism. Despite infrastructural limitations and the absence of formal governance, these sites continue to attract pilgrims due to their spiritual authenticity and capacity to inspire emotional resonance and communal devotion. The findings indicate that service quality in this context transcends material facilities and is instead embedded in spiritual empathy, ethical hospitality, and collective stewardship.

These findings support global discussions that identify faith-based tourism as an ethical alternative to mass tourism, emphasizing meaning-making, moral consciousness, and sustainability. However, the study also reveals clear challenges: weak institutional coordination, inadequate infrastructure, and the risk of losing authenticity if commercialization expands in an unchecked manner. Thus, the following subsections discuss each of the 4A dimensions in relation to the international literature, leading toward the synthesis of the Sacred Service Framework. The findings are organized thematically according to the 4A framework—attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services—to ensure analytical clarity and traceability between empirical data, discussion, and conclusions. Across the three Catholic pilgrimage sites in Labuan Bajo—Goa Maria Golo Koe, Goa Maria Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas—religious tourism is sustained primarily through spiritual authenticity, ecclesiastical leadership, and community voluntarism. While material infrastructure and formal governance structures remain limited, pilgrims continue to visit these sites due to the perceived sacred atmosphere, emotional resonance, and moral hospitality embedded in local faith practices. Service quality in this context is thus experienced less as a transactional encounter and more as a form of sacred service grounded in empathy, devotion, and collective stewardship.

4.2. Attraction: Spiritual Authenticity as the Core Service Value

Empirical data indicate that attraction with regard to Labuan Bajo's pilgrimage sites is defined predominantly by spiritual authenticity rather than physical or aesthetic grandeur. The interviewees consistently emphasized that pilgrims are drawn by the sacred atmosphere, silence, and devotional meaning embedded in the sites. A diocesan priest provided the following explanation:

> *"People do not come here because of facilities or buildings. They come because they feel peace, prayer, and closeness to God. If the spiritual atmosphere disappears, the pilgrimage loses its meaning."* (Priest Interview)

Field observations conducted during Marian feast days revealed collective prayers, voluntary silence, and ritual discipline maintained by both visitors and local parish volunteers. These practices reinforce the perception of the sites as sacred spaces rather than touristic attractions. Community members echoed this view, noting that maintaining spiritual authenticity is considered a moral responsibility rather than a managerial task.

This finding aligns with the concept of attraction within the 4A framework as a spiritual encounter, where emotional depth and religious symbolism constitute the primary pull factors. The data confirm that in religious tourism contexts, attraction is inseparable from moral meaning and communal faith expression.

4.3. Accessibility: Pilgrimage as a Physical and Spiritual Journey

Accessibility emerges as a multidimensional concept encompassing physical, emotional, and symbolic access. While Goa Maria Golo Koe benefits from relatively good

road connectivity and proximity to urban Labuan Bajo, access to Goa Maria Golo Kaca and Goa Maria Rekas remains constrained by steep terrain, limited public transport, and inadequate signage.

However, the interviews revealed that these physical challenges are not universally perceived as negative. Several participants framed accessibility difficulties as being integral to the pilgrimage experience itself. As one community participant stated,

> *"The journey is part of the prayer. If everything is easy, people may forget why they are coming."* (FGD Participant)

The field observations revealed elderly pilgrims being assisted by volunteers along difficult paths, reflecting a collective ethic of care. Government informants acknowledged infrastructural gaps but emphasized that religious tourism development has not yet been prioritized within regional planning frameworks.

These findings suggest that accessibility in religious tourism must be interpreted beyond infrastructure alone, incorporating spiritual preparedness and communal support as core components of the pilgrimage.

4.4. Amenities: Ethical Simplicity and Volunteer-Based Hospitality

Amenities across the three sites vary considerably but are uniformly characterized by ethical simplicity rather than commercial comfort. Goa Maria Golo Koe offers basic sanitation, seating areas, and prayer spaces maintained through parish coordination. In contrast, the amenities at Golo Kaca and Rekas rely almost entirely on volunteer labor.

FGD participants emphasized that service provision is motivated by faith rather than economic exchange:

> *"We clean, prepare water, and help pilgrims because serving others is part of our devotion, not because we are paid."* (FGD Participant)

The field observations confirmed that consistent cleanliness practices were carried out despite limited resources, particularly during major pilgrimage events. The corresponding amenities are deliberately modest, reflecting a theological emphasis on humility, reflection, and environmental harmony.

Within the 4A framework, amenities in this context function as ethical extensions of spirituality. Comfort is not defined by luxury but by dignity, cleanliness, and respect for sacred space.

4.5. Ancillary Services: Fragmented Governance and Informal Coordination

Ancillary services—including information provision, visitor management, and institutional coordination—remain the weakest dimension across all three sites. The interviews revealed fragmented governance involving the Church, community groups, and local government actors, with limited formal collaboration.

A tourism office informant noted that

> *"Religious tourism exists, but it is not yet integrated into official tourism planning. Most activities are handled informally by the Church and community."* (Government Interview)

Our observations confirmed the absence of standardized visitor information, formal guiding systems, or coordinated promotional strategies. While this informality helps preserve spiritual authenticity, it also limits scalability, accessibility for vulnerable pilgrims, and long-term sustainability.

These findings highlight the need for faith-based collaborative governance that aligns moral authority with institutional capacity.

4.6. Sacred Service as Moral Practice

Across all dimensions, a unifying theme emerged: service quality is perceived as a moral and spiritual practice rather than a managerial function. Empathy, assurance, and responsibility are expressed through religious commitment and communal identity.

The participants repeatedly described service as "pelayanan iman" (service of faith), where hospitality becomes an act of worship. This cross-cutting theme underpins the proposed Sacred Service Framework, positioning religious tourism as a moral ecosystem in which service excellence is measured in terms of spiritual integrity, communal care, and ethical stewardship.

5. Discussion

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings contribute to tourism scholarship by demonstrating that service quality in pilgrimage destinations operates within a moral and spiritual governance system rather than a purely managerial structure. The proposed Sacred Service Framework extends existing destination and service models by integrating the 4A framework with faith-based ethics and community stewardship. From this perspective, attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services are not only operational components of tourism systems but also expressions of religious values and collective responsibility. This conceptualization advances previous studies on pilgrimage tourism by positioning service quality as a relational process embedded in spiritual authenticity and community participation.

5.1. Attraction and Spiritual Authenticity as Empirically Grounded Service Value

The findings demonstrate that attraction with regard to Labuan Bajo's pilgrimage sites is not primarily defined by physical infrastructure or aesthetic enhancement but by spiritual authenticity and emotional resonance. The interview data from ecclesiastical leaders and community members consistently emphasized that pilgrims are drawn to Goa Maria Golo Koe, Goa Maria Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas for the perceived sacred atmosphere, collective prayer practices, and the sense of peace experienced during worship. These empirical insights confirm that in religious tourism, attraction operates as a sacred encounter rather than a market-oriented destination feature.

The field observations further revealed that devotional rituals, norms of silence, and voluntary service practices actively reinforce this spiritual attraction. As reported, such practices are consciously protected by parish volunteers and the clergy, indicating that attraction is maintained through moral stewardship rather than formal management strategies. This supports the argument that pilgrimage destinations succeed when authenticity is preserved through lived religious practice rather than symbolic representation alone (as presented in [61,63,65]). Attraction represents the spiritual and cultural essence that draws pilgrims to these sites. In Labuan Bajo, the combination of Catholic devotion and Manggarai cultural identity forms a unique spiritual landscape. The sacred atmosphere of Goa Maria Golo Koe, Golo Kaca, and Golo Rekas embodies emotional authenticity and spiritual symbolism rather than physical grandeur. This notion resonates with the work conducted by [70–73], who emphasize that the success of pilgrimage destinations depends on spiritual authenticity and moral experience rather than material display. Thus, attraction in this model is conceptualized as a sacred encounter in which faith, nature, and community values coalesce.

The empirical evidence from this study aligns with the work conducted by [50,55,109], who argue that spiritual authenticity serves as the core experiential value in pilgrimage tourism. However, the findings extend this research by demonstrating that, in Labuan Bajo, authenticity is collectively produced through faith-based service, communal respon-

sibility, and ecclesiastical leadership. Thus, attraction within the 4A framework must be reconceptualized as an outcome of moral and spiritual governance rather than a static destination attribute.

5.2. Accessibility as an Empirically Grounded Pilgrimage Experience

The findings indicate that at Labuan Bajo's pilgrimage sites, accessibility operates as both a physical condition and a spiritual experience. The interview data and focus group discussions revealed that while Goa Maria Golo Koe benefits from relatively adequate road infrastructure and proximity to urban services, access to Goa Maria Golo Kaca and Goa Maria Rekas remains constrained by challenging terrain, limited transportation options, and minimal directional signage. These empirical conditions shape how pilgrims—particularly elderly visitors and those travelling in groups—experience the journey.

The field observations revealed that accessibility challenges are frequently mitigated through communal support mechanisms. As described, parish volunteers regularly assist pilgrims along steep paths and organize collective transport during major liturgical events. The participants interpreted these practices not merely as logistical solutions but as expressions of faith and solidarity. This finding supports the argument that accessibility in religious tourism cannot be assessed solely through infrastructural metrics, as the social and spiritual dimensions of access must also be considered.

Accessibility in this framework extends beyond physical infrastructure to include digital and symbolic access. While Golo Koe enjoys good transport connectivity, Golo Kaca and Rekas are hindered by challenging road conditions and limited information systems. The model emphasizes that sustainable religious tourism must ensure both physical reachability and spiritual approachability, allowing pilgrims to connect emotionally with the journey itself. The integration of digital pilgrimage maps and virtual guide systems, as proposed in this study, supports the calls made by [107–109] for integrated information systems that enhance both mobility and meaning. Accessibility, therefore, becomes an ethical responsibility, enabling all pilgrims, including those with physical or financial limitations, to participate in faith-based travel.

The empirical evidence from this study aligns with [110], which emphasizes the importance of inclusive access in community-based tourism governance. However, the findings extend the existing literature by demonstrating that, in faith-based contexts, accessibility is embedded in moral responsibility and communal care [111,112]. Thus, within the 4A framework, accessibility should be reconceptualized as a pilgrimage process shaped by both material infrastructure and collective spiritual commitment.

5.3. Amenities and Ethical Simplicity in Faith-Based Service Provision

The empirical findings presented in Section 4.4 demonstrate that amenities across the three pilgrimage sites are intentionally modest and largely sustained through volunteerism. The interview and FGD data revealed that Goa Maria Golo Koe provides basic facilities such as sanitation, seating, and prayer spaces, while Goa Maria Golo Kaca and Goa Maria Rekas rely heavily on community-led maintenance and temporary facilities during peak pilgrimage periods. The participants consistently emphasized that amenity provision is guided by ethical and spiritual considerations rather than commercial objectives.

The field observations further confirmed that cleanliness, order, and environmental care are maintained despite limited financial resources. As reported, volunteers perceive their service as a religious duty, reinforcing the roles of empathy and assurance as central dimensions of service quality. This empirical pattern supports the assertion made by [27,29,31,113] that service quality in spiritually oriented destinations is driven by moral commitment rather than formal standards alone.

Amenities are the supportive facilities that allow comfort, hygiene, and contemplation during a pilgrimage. The findings show that Goa Maria Golo Koe possesses basic yet well-maintained amenities, while Golo Kaca and Rekas rely heavily on volunteerism. This finding aligns with the research conducted by [7,114,115], who observed that many religious destinations in Indonesia depend on community stewardship rather than formal policy. The model introduces the concept of ethical amenities, emphasizing simplicity, cleanliness, and environmental harmony over luxury. Through the adoption of eco-religious design principles [116], amenities become extensions of spiritual spaces that support reflection, inclusivity, and ecological awareness.

The findings contribute to the literature by illustrating that amenities in religious tourism function as extensions of spiritual practice. Rather than enhancing comfort through luxury, ethical simplicity fosters contemplative environments aligned with sacred values. Within the 4A framework, amenities should therefore be understood as spaces of dignity, humility, and ecological responsibility, grounded in faith-based service ethics.

5.4. Ancillary Services and the Need for Faith-Based Collaborative Governance

The findings reveal that ancillary services represent the most structurally constrained dimension of religious tourism management in Labuan Bajo. The interview data from government officials and church representatives indicated the absence of formal coordination mechanisms, standardized visitor information, and integrated promotional strategies. The observational evidence further confirmed that signage, guiding services, and visitor flow management remain informal and site-specific.

Despite these limitations, empirical evidence demonstrates that informal governance structures, overseen by ecclesiastical authorities and community volunteers, play a crucial role in sustaining pilgrimage activities. As reported, this informal system helps preserve spiritual authenticity but simultaneously restricts scalability and policy integration. These findings resonate with the study conducted by [84], who identified governance fragmentation as a common challenge in faith-based destinations.

Ancillary services encompass governance, promotion, and institutional coordination that sustain the tourism ecosystem. Our study reveals fragmented management among the Church, government, and community actors. In response, the model proposes faith-based collaborative governance inspired by the Penta-Helix framework [60,117], integrating the roles of the Church (moral authority), government (policy support), academia (research and training), the private sector (funding and innovation), and the community (execution and stewardship). These partnerships ensure that religious tourism is not only sacred but also economically viable and administratively sound. Furthermore, integrating digital policy tools aligns with the recommendations made by [117] regarding ethical religious tourism promotion. This model demonstrates that sustainable religious tourism cannot rely solely on physical development or marketing innovation. Instead, it requires a moral ecology—a balance between sacred authenticity, inclusive governance, and community well-being.

Building on the empirical findings, we argue that ancillary services require a faith-based collaborative governance approach that aligns moral authority with institutional capacity [118,119]. By integrating the Church, local government, community groups, and academic institutions, ancillary services can evolve from informal coordination to sustainable governance mechanisms. Within the 4A framework, ancillary services thus emerge as the critical bridge between spiritual authenticity and long-term destination sustainability.

The conceptual model (Figure 4) illustrates the integrated system of faith-based and collaborative governance underpinning sustainable religious tourism in Labuan Bajo. The model positions the Sacred Service Framework (4A, SERVQUAL, and Penta-Helix) at

the center of destination development, emphasizing the synergy between spirituality, community empowerment, and institutional partnership.

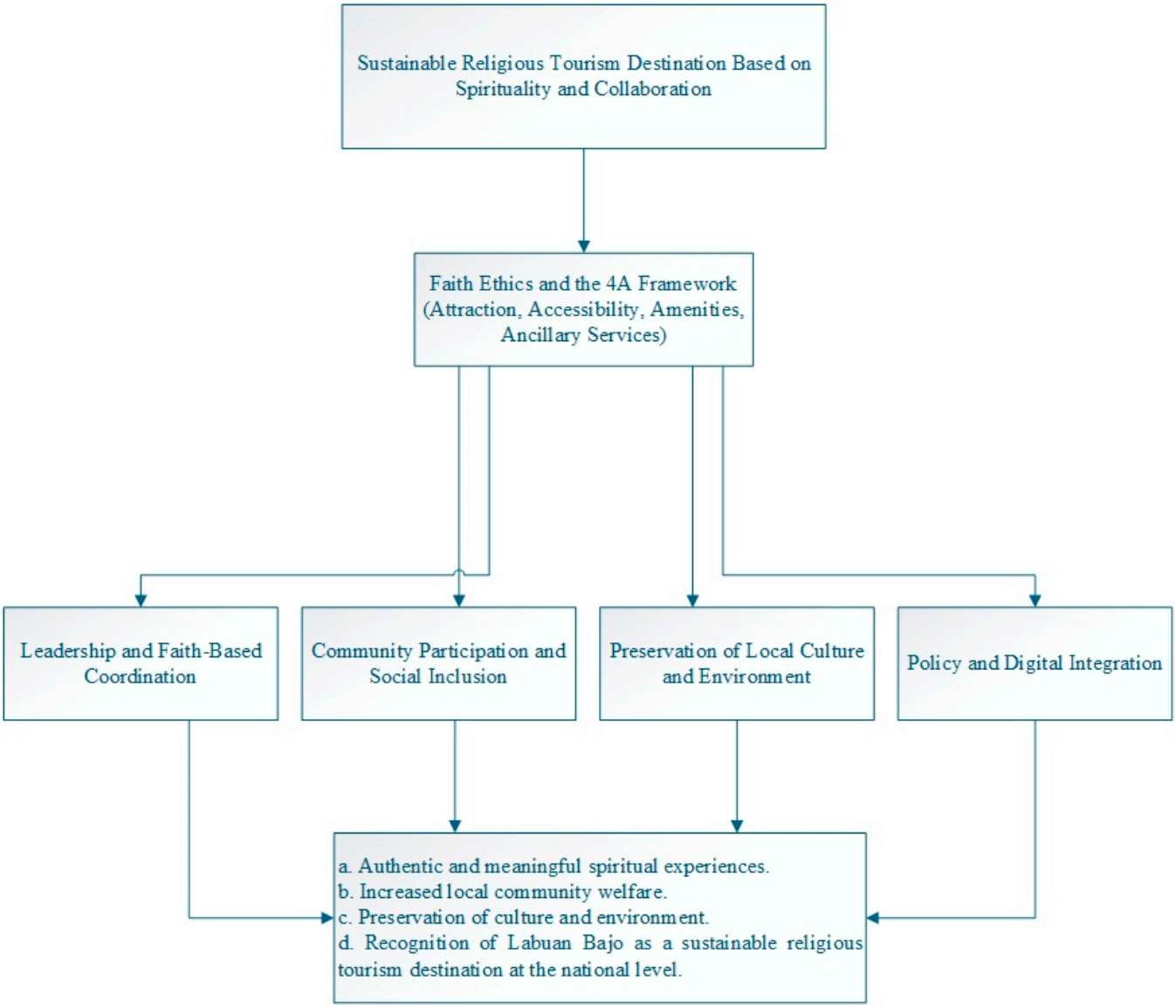


Figure 4. Conceptual model of sustainable religious tourism based on spirituality and collaboration.

The 4A dimensions serve as the model's structural backbone, each interacting through spiritual values and collaborative practices. At the center lie faith, ethics, and community participation, symbolized by the green node in Figure 4, which connects all dimensions to the higher goal of "Sustainable Religious Tourism Based on Spirituality and Collaboration."

Figure 4 conceptualizes a multidimensional framework that transforms Labuan Bajo's pilgrimage network into a living model of collaborative spirituality, where sacred values, socioeconomic benefits, and sustainability coexist harmoniously. The model bridges the spiritual and operational dimensions of tourism, offering an actionable pathway for integrating religion, governance, and sustainability in emerging faith destinations. Through the synergy of the 4A framework and spiritual collaboration, Labuan Bajo emerges as a prototype of eco-religious stewardship, aligning directly with the principles of the SDGs [8,11,12,17].

The Conceptual Model of Sustainable Religious Tourism in Labuan Bajo illustrates how integrating spirituality, community participation, and collaborative governance creates a holistic system of destination management. The model is structured around

the 4A dimensions—attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services—which form the operational foundation of religious tourism services. Each dimension interacts dynamically with social, cultural, and policy components, resulting in a faith-based sustainable ecosystem.

The findings from Labuan Bajo reveal that the most profound attraction for pilgrims lies in the spiritual authenticity embedded in Catholic devotion and Manggarai cultural traditions. This sacred value, expressed through communal prayers, volunteer service, and eco-spiritual rituals, serves as both the core experience and the moral compass for destination management. However, the rapid growth in tourism, infrastructure expansion, and digital promotion poses an emerging threat of commercializing the sacred.

This tension between spirituality and market orientation aligns with [120], who emphasized the critical need to "balance growth and tradition" in community-based tourism models. They found that modernization should not displace local moral systems but rather integrate traditional values as a foundation for sustainable growth. Similarly, in Labuan Bajo, managing the Goa Maria sites requires policies that prevent "ritual commodification" while encouraging economic participation through faith-aligned principles of modesty, stewardship, and reverence.

Therefore, the sacred–commercial equilibrium must be maintained through spiritual governance frameworks, ensuring that tourism modernization enhances—and does not erode—the sacred essence of pilgrimage [10,68]. Faith-based leadership by the Diocese and collaborative policy support from local government are crucial aspects of safeguarding this equilibrium.

The concept of experiential value co-creation offers a compelling lens for interpreting pilgrims' lived experiences in Labuan Bajo. Drawing on [54], who demonstrated that co-created value significantly influences behavioral intention among digital travelers, we note that the same logic applies to physical pilgrimage contexts. In Goa Maria Golo Koe, Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas, spiritual value is co-created through collective rituals, empathy-driven hospitality, and community-led stewardship.

The field interviews revealed that pilgrims perceive value not merely in physical facilities but also in relational and emotional connections—shared prayers with locals, welcoming gestures from parish volunteers, and collective maintenance of the sacred environment. These interactions generate spiritual capital, reinforcing the social and emotional bonds among pilgrims, the clergy, and residents.

This study extends the concept of experiential co-creation into the faith-based tourism domain, proposing that spiritual empathy and communal service are essential co-creators of value, unlike in conventional tourism, where co-creation centers on consumer participation [121,122]. In religious contexts, it becomes an act of worship and stewardship—an offering of shared meaning rather than market exchange. This perspective contributes to the emerging discourse on sacred-service ecosystems, where relational ethics define the success of the tourism experience.

The research findings also align with the research conducted by [123], who argued that community empowerment and resilience are the core pillars of sustainable tourism in rural Indonesia. Their study highlighted that tourism resilience arises when communities exercise autonomy in decision-making, ensuring equitable benefit-sharing and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Similarly, in Labuan Bajo, the local Catholic communities surrounding the three pilgrimage sites demonstrate strong communal participation but lack institutionalized frameworks for financial and managerial inclusion. The reliance on volunteer labor, though admirable, risks burnout and inequality if not complemented by structured mechanisms for empowerment.

We recommend establishing Parish-Based Tourism Committees as formal units under diocesan supervision, integrating economic management, environmental responsibility, and spiritual guidance. This structure would transform community involvement from voluntary labor into an empowered partnership, ensuring equitable distribution of social and economic benefits. This concept also resonates with the Penta-Helix governance model, in which faith institutions, local government, academia, private actors, and community organizations collaborate to build resilience. Thus, empowerment in religious tourism is not only economic but also moral and spiritual, reinforcing identity, dignity, and collective agency.

Table 1 presents a structured synthesis of the empirical foundations underlying the Sacred Service Framework proposed in this study. The table links key components of the framework to qualitative evidence derived from interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations conducted at Catholic pilgrimage sites in Labuan Bajo. By organizing the findings according to faith ethics and the 4A framework's four dimensions (attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services), the table demonstrates that service quality in religious tourism is enacted through moral values, communal practices, and faith-based governance rather than through purely managerial or commercial mechanisms.

Table 1. Empirical foundations of the Sacred Service Framework.

Framework Component	Empirical Basis	Illustrative Evidence from the Field	Analytical Interpretation
Faith, Ethics, and the 4A Framework	Cross-cutting empirical insights	Interview and focus group data consistently framed service quality as pelayanan iman (service of faith), emphasizing devotion, empathy, and moral responsibility rather than managerial efficiency.	Faith ethics mediate how attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services are managed, forming the core logic of the Sacred Service Framework.
Attraction—Spiritual Authenticity	Pilgrims' motivations and religious practices	Pilgrims listed sacred atmosphere, prayer, silence, and emotional closeness to God as the main reasons for visiting the sites as opposed to facilities or physical grandeur.	Attraction operates as a spiritual encounter rooted in moral meaning and communal faith expression.
Accessibility—Pilgrimage as Journey	Community support and lived experience regarding access	Difficult terrain was frequently interpreted as part of devotion, with volunteers assisting elderly pilgrims, reflecting collective care and inclusion.	Accessibility extends beyond physical infrastructure to include social inclusion, spiritual preparedness, and communal responsibility.
Amenities—Ethical Simplicity	Volunteer-based service provision	Amenities were modest and maintained through voluntary labor motivated by faith, with strong attention to cleanliness and environmental care despite limited resources.	Amenities function as ethical extensions of spirituality, emphasizing dignity, humility, and harmony with the environment rather than comfort or luxury.
Ancillary Services—Governance and Coordination	Institutional and community arrangements	Informants described fragmented governance and reliance on informal coordination between the Church and community, with limited policy integration.	Informal governance preserves spiritual authenticity but constrains scalability, indicating the need for collaborative faith-based governance.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Framework Component	Empirical Basis	Illustrative Evidence from the Field	Analytical Interpretation
Leadership and Faith-Based Coordination	Role of clergy and parish leadership	Clergy and parish leaders were central in maintaining ritual discipline, guiding volunteer service, and coordinating pilgrimage activities.	Leadership functions as moral stewardship, ensuring alignment between service practices and spiritual values.
Community Participation and Social Inclusion	Volunteerism and communal engagement	Strong community involvement was observed in assisting pilgrims, maintaining sites, and organizing religious events.	Community participation is a key driver of inclusive and socially sustainable pilgrimage experiences.
Preservation of Local Culture and Environment	Theological values and daily practices	Cultural humility, respect for sacred spaces, and environmental care were consistently emphasized by informants and observed during pilgrimage events.	Cultural and environmental preservation are embedded within faith-based service practices rather than imposed externally.
Policy and Digital Integration	Institutional gaps and future needs	Limited use of digital information systems and weak integration into formal tourism policy frameworks were identified.	Supportive policy and digital integration are needed to enhance sustainability while safeguarding sacred values.
Sustainability Outcomes	Shared perceptions of impact	Informants highlighted authentic spiritual experiences, improved community welfare, preservation of culture and environment, and growing recognition of Labuan Bajo as a religious destination.	The Sacred Service Framework generates sustainability outcomes that integrate spiritual integrity, social well-being, and destination resilience.

The table further illustrates how leadership, community participation, cultural preservation, and policy integration function as enabling conditions that shape sustainable religious tourism outcomes. Importantly, Table 1 explicitly outlines the analytical progression from empirical observations to conceptual interpretation, showing that spiritual authenticity, ethical simplicity, and collective stewardship collectively produce meaningful spiritual experiences, social inclusion, and destination sustainability. As such, the table serves as an integrative bridge between the empirical findings and the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 4, reinforcing the inductive and evidence-based nature of the Sacred Service Framework.

At the core, faith, ethics, and the 4A framework (attraction, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services) drive the holistic management of religious tourism. These elements interact dynamically with four key governance pillars:

1. Leadership and faith-based coordination—The Diocese and parish leadership serve as moral anchors, ensuring the sacred character of pilgrimage remains authentic and protected from excessive commercialization.
2. Community participation and social inclusion—Active involvement of parishioners and residents sustains the daily operations of pilgrimage sites through volunteerism and shared responsibility, reflecting community-based stewardship [124,125].
3. Cultural and environmental stewardship—The model integrates eco-religious ethics by promoting clean, sustainable environments and preserving Manggarai traditions, aligning with the SDGs [11,12,15].

4. Digital and policy integration: Strengthening digital access, promoting ethics, and aligning regulatory frameworks ensures connectivity between government policy, church initiatives, and visitor information systems [126,127].

The convergence of these four domains produces tangible and intangible outcomes:

a. Authentic and meaningful spiritual experiences that strengthen individual and collective faith.
b. Improved local community welfare through inclusive participation and equitable benefit-sharing, and improved cultural and environmental preservation via sustainable practices.
c. Preservation of culture and the environment, ensuring harmony between tradition and sustainability.
d. Elevation of Labuan Bajo's reputation as a national model for faith-based sustainable destinations.

6. Conclusions

This study examined the experience and management of service quality and sustainability in Catholic pilgrimage tourism in Labuan Bajo through an empirical application of the 4A framework. Drawing directly on interview data, focus group discussions, and field observations conducted at Goa Maria Golo Koe, Goa Maria Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas, the findings demonstrate that religious tourism in this context is sustained less by formal infrastructure or market-driven strategies than by spiritual authenticity, community participation, and ecclesiastical leadership.

Empirical evidence shows that attraction is primarily defined by sacred atmosphere, devotional practices, and emotional resonance rather than physical amenities. Pilgrims and local stakeholders consistently emphasized that the perceived holiness of the sites, reinforced through collective prayer and ritual discipline, constitutes the core value of the pilgrimage experience. These findings indicate that spiritual authenticity functions as the principal driver of visitation and satisfaction in religious tourism settings.

The findings regarding accessibility reveal that physical limitations, such as difficult terrain and limited transport infrastructure, are partially offset by communal support and faith-based solidarity. The interview and observational data show that accessibility is experienced as part of the pilgrimage journey itself, where assistance from volunteers and shared hardship reinforce the spiritual meaning of the journey. This suggests that accessibility in religious tourism extends beyond infrastructural adequacy to include social and moral dimensions of inclusion.

Concerning amenities, we found that service provision is intentionally modest and largely sustained by volunteer labor. The empirical data indicate that cleanliness, order, and environmental care are maintained not through formal standards but through ethical motivation and religious commitment. These findings demonstrate that empathy and assurance, key service quality dimensions, are enacted as expressions of faith rather than as managerial compliance, shaping a distinctive form of ethical hospitality in pilgrimage contexts.

Our analysis of ancillary services highlights governance fragmentation as a central challenge. While informal coordination led by the Church and community groups helps preserve spiritual authenticity, interview data from government and institutional actors confirm the absence of integrated planning, standardized visitor information, and formal policy support. These findings underscore the need for collaborative governance mechanisms that align moral authority with institutional capacity to ensure long-term sustainability.

Synthesizing these empirical insights, we conclude that service quality in religious tourism operates as a moral and communal practice as opposed to serving a purely technical or economic function. The proposed Sacred Service Framework emerges inductively

from the data, integrating the 4A dimensions with faith-based ethics and community stewardship. This framework conceptualizes religious tourism destinations as spiritual ecosystems, where attraction, access, amenities, and governance are collectively shaped by devotion, responsibility, and ethical care.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that sustainable religious tourism development in Labuan Bajo requires policy recognition of faith-based destinations, institutionalized collaboration between the Church and local government, and capacity-building initiatives that respect spiritual values. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes empirical evidence to the growing body of literature that positions spirituality and ethics as central components of sustainable tourism governance.

7. Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings from interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations across Goa Maria Golo Koe, Goa Maria Golo Kaca, and Goa Maria Rekas, authorities responsible for religious tourism development in Labuan Bajo should prioritize the protection of spiritual authenticity as the core service value, contributing directly to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by safeguarding cultural and spiritual heritage. Since pilgrims consistently identify sacred atmosphere, devotional practices, and moral hospitality as the primary attractions, Church authorities and local stakeholders should formally safeguard the sanctity of pilgrimage sites through a Code of Ethical Pilgrimage Practice that regulates visitor behavior, photography, commercialization, and digital promotion. Accessibility improvements should integrate both infrastructural support and faith-based assistance systems, as empirical evidence shows that communal care and volunteer support are central to inclusive pilgrimage experiences, aligning with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 by ensuring inclusive access for elderly and vulnerable pilgrims. Similarly, amenity provision should continue to emphasize ethical simplicity, cleanliness, and environmental care, supported through structured community-based management to sustain volunteer engagement without commodifying sacred services, thereby advancing SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through environmentally and ethically responsible tourism practices.

To address the governance limitations identified in the findings, we further recommend establishing a faith-based collaborative governance mechanism involving the diocese, local government, community representatives, tourism practitioners, and academic institutions. Such coordination would strengthen ancillary services, including visitor information, site maintenance standards, capacity building, and long-term planning, while aligning institutional capacity with ecclesiastical moral authority, directly supporting SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Formal integration of religious tourism into the Regional Tourism Development Plan (RIPPDA) of West Manggarai would enable policy support and infrastructure investment while respecting the autonomy of Church-managed sites, contributing to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through ethical, community-based economic participation. Finally, sustained partnerships with universities and seminaries are recommended to support continuous research, training, and monitoring of social, environmental, and spiritual impacts, ensuring that religious tourism development remains evidence-based, ethically grounded, and responsive to the evolving needs of pilgrims and host communities in alignment with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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