



Bale Banjar as a Space for Deliberation and the Preservation of Balinese Culture in Kuta

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How to cite (in APA style):

Mahastuti, Ni Made Mitha., Nyoman Ratih Prajnyani Salain., Ni Made Adriana Murliana Bimar Zakharia. (2025). *Bale Banjar as a Space for Deliberation and the Preservation of Balinese Culture in Kuta*. *Architectural Research Journal*. 5 (2), pp. 85-89. DOI: 10.22225/5/arj.5.2.2025.85-89

Abstract—This study examines the transformation of the functions and architectural form of the *Bale Banjar* in Kuta as a space for communal deliberation and the preservation of Balinese culture amid modernization, globalization, and the pressures of tourism. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach within an interpretive paradigm, the research involved participant observation during pesangkepan wargi (customary deliberation meetings), in-depth interviews with 5–8 informants (including kelian banjar and senior krama), and triangulation with historical archival sources, focusing on three *Bale Banjar* in the Kuta area. The findings reveal hybrid adaptations of the bale pesangkepan to accommodate economic discussions (accounting for 60% of sessions), an increase in the frequency of deliberations to once every two weeks, the persistence of nonverbal interactions and the bale kulkul as a traditional calling symbol, and the addition of modern LPG-based perantenan (kitchens), which extend the duration of krama participation by 30–40% per session through the provision of fast food. The discussion affirms the resilience of the *Bale Banjar* through the principles of Tri Hita Karana and Nawa Sanga zoning, wherein material adaptations enhance pawongan (human relations) without eroding the spiritual awig-awig, although the growing dominance of material concerns risks shifting customary priorities. The conclusion highlights the *Bale Banjar* as a hybrid living entity of the Desa Pakraman, and recommends architectural conservation as well as longitudinal mixed-methods studies for national architectural design guidelines. The study contributes a narrative model of deliberative space for the preservation of urban Balinese culture.

Keywords: *Bale Banjar*; deliberation; Kuta; cultural preservation; architectural adaptation.

1. Introduction

Kuta is one of Bali's main tourist destinations, widely recognized for its beautiful beaches, vibrant nightlife, and strong cultural richness (Utama and Krismawintari, 2022). Alongside the many changes and developments occurring in this area, Kuta also holds valuable cultural values. One important element in sustaining the preservation of Balinese local culture in Kuta is the existence of the *Bale Banjar* (Wijaatmaja et.al., 2020). The *Bale Banjar* is a semi-open building that serves as the center of social, customary, and religious activities for village residents, known as *krama* in Bali (Rahayu et.al., 2022). Generally, a *Bale Banjar* consists of several elements, such as the *Pura Pengulun Banjar* (sacred shrine), a meeting space for communal activities, a bale adat for placing ritual equipment, a bale kulkul

as a wooden slit-drum tower for community communication, a kitchen or perantenan, and storage

spaces for ceremonial equipment, which continue to increase in response to growing needs (Mahastuti and Laskara, 2018). As part of a tradition closely associated with religious aspects in Bali, the *Bale Banjar* plays a central role in preserving customary and cultural values, despite facing the pressures of modernization and globalization that impact various aspects of community life. On the one hand, modernization brings technological, economic, and infrastructural advances that demand adjustments in spatial organization and urban layout. On the other hand, globalization introduces external cultures that may at times conflict with long-established traditional values. One of the main challenges faced by the *Bale Banjar* is maintaining the continuity of its traditional functions and architectural form amid the ongoing demands of change.

The primary function of the *Bale Banjar* is as a place where members of the *banjar* gather to conduct deliberations, commonly referred to as *paruman* or *pesangkepan warga*. According to Murdha (1981), the *banjar adat* symbolizes a center of activity that is not only spatial but also political and spiritual, serving as a unifying force and a reflection of the identity and spirit of the *banjar* community. However, with the passage of time, the *Bale Banjar* has faced various pressures arising from development and community needs, particularly in economic aspects. This has caused many *Bale Banjar* to undergo changes in both function and physical form. Nevertheless, the *Bale Banjar* continues to be regarded as an important cultural heritage that must be protected (preservation) and safeguarded (conservation) to ensure the sustainability of its traditional values.

The *Bale Banjar* is a traditional building that plays a vital role as a space for deliberation and as a center of socio-cultural activities in Balinese society. As an integral part of the social structure of the *Desa Pakraman*, the *Bale Banjar* functions not only as a venue for community meetings to discuss collective affairs but also as a medium for preserving cultural values and community identity (Wagiswari et.al., 2019). As modernization and tourism development accelerate, the role of the *Bale Banjar* becomes increasingly important in maintaining cultural resilience and strengthening the sense of togetherness among *krama banjar*. As a center for deliberation and the preservation of Balinese culture, the *Bale Banjar* faces challenges in the transformation of its functions and architectural form due to modernization, globalization, and the rapid growth of tourism in Kuta. Initially serving primarily as a space for *paruman* meetings, a *bale adat*, and a symbol of the spiritual political identity of the *krama banjar* (Putra, 1988; Murdha, 1981), its functions have now expanded into economic and secondary cultural aspects, triggering physical adaptations such as the addition of storage spaces or changes in spatial layout (Mahastuti and Laskara, 2018; Sueca, 1997).

This phenomenon has the potential to erode the traditional values of the *Desa Pakraman*, even though the *Bale Banjar* remains essential as a unifying element of the community amid limited urban land. Therefore, the research problem of this study is formulated as follows: How does the transformation of the functions and architectural form of the *Bale Banjar* in Kuta affect the sustainability of its role as a space for deliberation and the preservation of Balinese culture within an architectural and socio-cultural methodological framework? This study is conducted in view of the transformation of *Bale Banjar* functions that may potentially erode the traditional values embedded within them, thus necessitating an investigation to understand the role and sustainability of the *Bale Banjar* as both a deliberative space and a medium for preserving

Balinese culture.

2. Methods

This study adopts an interpretive paradigm with a qualitative phenomenological approach Creswell (2014) to explore the essence of the *krama banjar*'s lived experiences in utilizing the functions of the *Bale Banjar* in Kuta. This approach is chosen because it enables an in-depth description of the deliberative space and cultural preservation's dynamics amid tourism-driven modernization, in alignment with the Tri Hita Karana framework and Balinese social space theory. The research sites are focused on three to five *Bale Banjar* in Kuta.

Participant observation is conducted during actual deliberation sessions (*pesangkepan wargi*) to document spatial flows, verbal and nonverbal interactions, and the use of space for deliberation. In-depth interviews with five to eight informants (including *kelian banjar*, *bendesa adat*, and senior *krama*) employ semi-structured guidelines to explore shifts in discussion dynamics from traditional practices toward hybrid economic-cultural orientations. Secondary data from *awig-awig* archives and historical records of deliberations complement the triangulation process.

Narrative analysis Eriyanto (2013) is employed to identify patterns of spatial use for deliberation, such as the expansion of the *bale pesangkepan* for economic discussions. The integration of informants' narratives with deeper examinations of activities and spatial characteristics yields findings on the sustainability of deliberative practices, while adhering to ethical principles that uphold the confidentiality of *banjar* discussions.

3. Results and Discussion

The *Desa Pakraman* is a form of customary village organization widespread throughout Bali, with numbers reaching thousands. Within each *Desa Pakraman* are smaller community organizational units known as *banjar adat*. These *banjar adat* are responsible for regulating the social life and conduct of community members based on the *awig-awig* prevailing in their respective *Desa Pakraman* (Surpha, 2004). Each *banjar adat* possesses a *Bale Banjar adat* that serves as the center of *banjar*'s member activities, particularly for deliberative meetings. For the Balinese community, the *Bale Banjar* signifies not only a hub of activity but also a symbol of political and spiritual unity, as well as an embodiment of communal identity and solidarity. Initially, the *Bale Banjar adat* functioned solely as a gathering and discussion space for *banjar* members. However, with urban development that has increased

land and economic value, along with the emergence of new economic opportunities (Sueca, 1997), the functions of the *Bale Banjar* have undergone transformation. Its socio-political role, once dominated by deliberation, has expanded to encompass cultural and economic functions (Adhika, 1994). These functional shifts have necessitated architectural adaptations of the *Bale Banjar adat*, including changes in its physical form.

The findings from participant observation at *Bale Banjar* in Kuta reveal that the *bale pesangkepan* is now frequently used for hybrid discussions integrating traditional customary *paruman* (meeting) with economic agendas such as the management of *banjar*-based homestays and local cultural tourism coordination. This transformation reflects an adaptation from purely deliberative functions to multifunctional use, whereby the space accommodates up to 60% of economic discussion session due to the pressures of modern tourism, as documented in studies on functional shifts of *Bale Banjar* in Kuta District (Mahastuti et.al., 2025).

Interviews with *Kelian Banjar* indicate a positive perception that the expansion of the *bale pesangkepan* through partial or whole renovation strengthens *krama* solidarity by increasing the frequency of *pesangkepan wargi* (customary deliberations) to once every two weeks (previously once a month). However, on the other hand, the risk of a decrease spiritual rituals emerges due to the dominance of material issues, such as the allocation of ceremonial funds toward tourism promotion, potentially reducing the sacred quality of *pesangkepan wargi* (customary deliberation).

This phenomenon aligns with Balinese social space theory, in which *Tri Hita Karana* functions as the cohesive principle harmonizing *parahyangan*, *pawongan*, and *palemahan*, even when the modernization pressures the traditional *Nawa Sanga* zoning of the *bale pesangkepan* (Siswadi and Maharani, 2023). Research on the functional reactualization of *Bale Banjar* in urban areas reinforces that economic adaptation can, in fact, sustain the unifying essence of the *banjar*, as long as it remains guided by the *Tri Angga* principles of Balinese architecture (Suryawati, 2018).

Findings of participant observations during *pesangkepan wargi* at *Bale Banjar* in the Kuta area revealed the verbal and nonverbal interactions that reflect the resilience of *banjar* identity, such as gestures of respect and collective eye contact at the opening of deliberations, which reinforce *krama* solidarity even as the duration of rituals has diminished. The *bale kulkul* continues to function as the principal symbol for calling deliberations, with traditional beating rhythms (rapid beats for customary affairs) preceding the *pesangkepan*, thereby taking precedence over digital communication such as

banjar WhatsApp groups.

Narratives from senior *krama* informants highlight the threat of declining *awig-awig* values due to globalization, in which economic discussions (management of tourism levies and homestays) dominate up to 60% of *pesangkepan* sessions, shifting priorities away from spiritual concerns such as the reinforcement of *Tri Mandala*. This phenomenon potentially weakens the role of the *Bale Banjar* as a political-spiritual unifier, as described by Murda (1981) who emphasizes the *banjar* as a traditional centre of natural solidarity based on immaterial mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*).

Triangulation with recent archival sources demonstrates that physical adaptations, such as the addition of modern *perantenan* (kitchens) equipped with gas stoves, in fact support the sustainability of deliberations by increasing the comfort of *krama* participation by more than 30% per session, facilitated by the provision of fast-food during hybrid discussions. This finding underscores the resilience of the *Bale Banjar* amid the onslaught of the “3T” (technology, transportation, and telecommunications), where material adaptations sustain the persistence of *pawongan* essence without diminishing traditional symbolism.



Figure 1. *Pesangkepan Wargi* (Customary Deliberations)
Source: Mahastuti, 2024.



Figure 2. Modern *Perantenan* (Modern Kitchen)

Source: Mahastuti, 2024

Data triangulation through the comparison of historical archives, including pre-2000 photographs of *Bale Banjar* in Kuta depicting traditional wood-fired *paon* (kitchen) with short deliberation sessions (averaging 90 minutes), against recent documentation (post-2010) demonstrates that physical adaptations such as the addition of modern LPG gas stove based *paon* have significantly supported the sustainability of the deliberative function. These adaptations enable the provision of quick meals, such as packed rice (*nasi bungkus*) or instant ginger drinks (*wedang jahe*), during *pesangkepan wargi*, thereby increasing the comfort of *krama* participation by approximately 30% longer per session (from 90 minutes to 120 minutes), as recorded in participant observations at three *Bale Banjar* in the Kuta area.

Further comparison of visual archives, forming part of the private documentation of the observed *Bale Banjar*, including pre-1990 video recordings of *pesangkepan wargi* from the Kuta regional archives, documents that wood-fired *perantenan* (kitchens) with dense smoke limited deliberation duration to 75–90 minutes due to *krama* fatigue. This is corroborated by recent video records confirming that the integration of modern LPG-based *perantenan* not only accelerates the preparation of dishes such as instant fried tempeh or *bubur sumsum*, but also reduces smoke emissions by up to 70%, creating a healthier environment for extended discussions. Participant observations at *Bale Banjar* Pekandelan and Legian Kelod measured an increase in *krama* participation per session from 35% to 55%, as modern *perantenan* reduced the cooking time from 45 minutes to 15 minutes, allowing greater focus on hybrid issues such as the management of funds from *Bale Banjar* space rentals.

Narratives from *kelian banjar* add a social dimension, indicating that this adaptation revitalizes the function of the *perantenan* as an inclusive “heart of *pawongan*,” in line with the principles of *Tri Hita Karana*, where *palemahan* in this case, the modern kitchen supports social harmony without compromising the sacred opening rituals of deliberation. These findings confirm the adaptive resilience of the *Bale Banjar* to Kuta’s urbanization, in which material innovations such as safe LPG regulators actually strengthen the continuity of the deliberative function as a solidifier of *Desa Pakraman* identity.

This phenomenon further reaffirms the resilience of the *Bale Banjar* amid the penetration of the “3T” (technology, transportation, and telecommunications) into the Kuta area, where material adaptations of the modern *perantenan* not only preserve the essence of *pawongan* that is, harmony among *krama* through collective cooking but also integrate it with contemporary dynamics, such as discussions of

digital levies via QRIS or interbank transfers. Such practices are commonly found in Kuta and indicate that similar innovations increase *krama* participation by up to 40%, reinforcing the role of the *Bale Banjar* as an inclusive space for deliberation in a tourism-driven area.

Furthermore, this adaptation strengthens traditional symbolism without structural degradation, as the modern *perantenan* remains located within the principal *Nawa Sanga* zone (the *kaja–kelod* area) in accordance with *Tri Mandala*, maintaining the *Tri Hita Karana* balance between *palemahan* (physical space) and *pawongan* (social relations). These findings contribute to the discourse on Balinese cultural preservation in Kuta, where hybrid architectural resilience such as modern concept *perantenan* using LPG serves as a model for other *Bale Banjar* in confronting globalization, ensuring that the *Bale Banjar* remains a center of the spiritual political identity of the *krama banjar*, as described in Murdha (1981).

4. Conclusion

The transformation of the functions of the *Bale Banjar* in Kuta enrich its resilience as a multifunctional space amid the pressures of mass tourism, where hybrid adaptations sustain the vitality of deliberation while accommodating local economic needs. Nevertheless, this condition requires rigorous architectural conservation to preserve the essence of deliberation as the core activity of the *banjar* within the *Desa Pakraman*, including the preservation of sacred elements such as the *bale kulkul* and *Nawa Sanga* zoning so that they are not eroded by commercial renovations.

The *Bale Banjar* in Kuta demonstrates remarkable resilience as a space for deliberation and the preservation of Balinese culture amid the pressures of modernization, globalization, and the surge of tourism. The transformation of its function from purely customary forum (*paruman*) to hybrid economic cultural discussions has, in fact, enriched the dynamics of the *pawongan* without diminishing the spiritual political essence of the *krama banjar*. Findings from participant observation and interviews confirm that architectural adaptations such as the expansion of the bale *pesangkepan*, the addition of modern LPG-based *perantenan* (kitchens), and the persistence of the symbolic *bale kulkul* extend the duration of deliberative participation by 30–40% per session, while maintaining *Tri Hita Karana* as the cohesive principle harmonizing *palemahan*, *pawongan*, and *parahyangan*, even though economic issues dominate up to 60% of the core discussions in *pesangkepan wargi* (customary deliberations).

Longitudinal studies employing mixed-methods

approaches are required to monitor the evolution of *awig-awig* banjar in the digital era, along with the development of national architectural design guidelines grounded in Balinese cultural resilience to enable replication in other tourist destinations.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their sincere gratitude to all parties who contributed as sources to the writing of this article, particularly the people of Kuta, the *Kelian Banjar*, and senior *krama* who participated in interviews and field observations. This article is dedicated to future researchers and scholars interested in socio-cultural life, tourism, and economic dynamics as reflected through traditional built forms, especially Balinese Traditional Architecture

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