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The Role of Customary Norms in Shaping the Spatial Organization of Bale Tani and Bale Bonter in Sade Village

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Sasak customary norms shape spatial organization and are materialized into the architectural features of Bale Tani and Bale Bonter in Sade Village, Lombok, Indonesia. Although previous studies have discussed Sasak traditional houses from architectural, cultural, and environmental perspectives, limited attention has been given to explaining how customary norms are translated into spatial organization and architectural form. An ethnographic qualitative approach was employed through field observations, in-depth interviews, architectural documentation, and literature review. The findings identify four dominant categories of customary norms. (1) The protection of women, closely associated with the Merariq (traditional elopement marriage) practice, establishes a hierarchy of privacy through the placement of daughters' bedrooms in the most protected zones and the provision of layered access. (2) The concept of spatial sanctity requires functions considered less sacred, such as bathing and washing, to be located outside the main building while preserving the Dalem Bale as a ritual space. (3) Cosmological orientation toward Mount Rinjani and the awiq-awiq (customary regulations) guides the orientation of terraces, façades, and front–rear spatial arrangements. (4) Social status and representational functions in Bale Bonter reinforce the role of the front space through floor elevation, low thresholds as etiquette, and facade articulation. These findings are synthesized into a "norms → spatial rules → architectural features" matrix, illustrating how cultural values are transformed into spatial organization and

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architectural elements. The proposed framework provides a practical reference for conserving Sasak vernacular architecture while supporting adaptive design and sustainable management in customary tourism villages.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sade Village is a traditional village located in Pujut District, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The village is inhabited by the Sasak ethnic community, who continue to preserve their traditional way of life and vernacular architectural heritage. According to the village elders, Sade Village has been inhabited since 1079 (Ratmaji et al., 2025). The traditional houses in Sade Village serve not only as residences but also reflect the community's perspective on nature, social life, and customary values that have been passed down through generations. Every architectural element, including the building form, construction materials, and spatial arrangement, embodies symbolic meanings closely related to local beliefs and cultural practices. Consequently, Sade Village represents not only a traditional settlement but also a tangible manifestation of the relationship between architectural space and the cultural identity of the Sasak community.

The people of Sade Village continue to uphold customary laws and traditions that strongly influence the spatial organization of their houses. One of the most prominent traditions is *Merariq*, or elopement marriage, which is a well-known marriage custom among the Sasak people. In this tradition, a man who intends to marry a woman first takes her away secretly, usually at night, before the formal marriage process begins. This practice is believed to preserve the continuity of the Sasak lineage and maintain the authenticity of their ancestral traditions. Furthermore, the people of Sade believe that *Merariq* elevates the status of women, as it symbolizes respect and honor through the courageous act of "abducting" the bride by the groom (Mispani & Fahrurrozi Muh., 2021). Another reason for choosing *Merariq* is the lack of parental approval for the relationship, making the tradition an alternative way for couples to proceed with marriage (Ilmalia et al., 2021).

This tradition directly influences the placement of certain spaces within the house, particularly the girl's bedroom, which is always located at the rear of the house to ensure her safety and protect her honor. In addition, the high respect given to women is reflected in the placement of both the kitchen and the girl's bedroom in the most protected areas of the house. The beliefs of the Sasak people of Lombok are a mix of traditional beliefs, Hindu-Buddhist influences, and Islamic traditions, particularly the Wetu Telu practice. At the heart of their understanding of the world is the deep respect for Mount Rinjani (Lianto et al., 2025). Mount Rinjani is regarded as the most sacred orientation because it is believed to possess the greatest supernatural power on Lombok Island and is considered the dwelling place of Dewi Anjani, who is highly revered by the Sasak community (Agusintadewi, 2016).

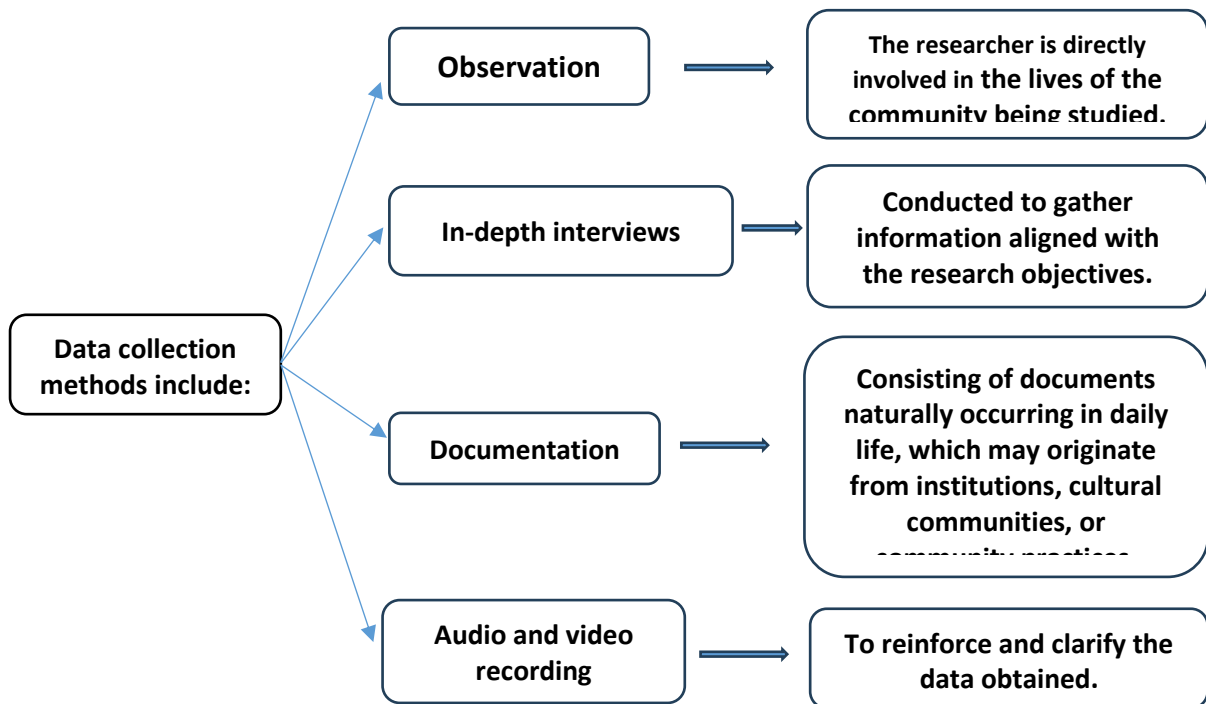
Within the architectural context, these customs and traditions play a significant role in shaping the spatial organization of the traditional house, known as the *bale*. In the *Bale Bontar*, the interior is divided into four main spaces: the girl's bedroom at the rear right, the kitchen at the rear left, the parents' bedroom at the front adjacent to the girl's bedroom, and the front left area, which serves as a guest reception space. The front terrace is used as a weaving area. Meanwhile, the *Bale Tani* features a multi-level spatial arrangement, with floors coated using cow dung, which functions as a natural mosquito repellent, reduces ground moisture, and serves as a traditional substitute for cement (Sahira et al., 2023). The first level functions as both a guest area and the parents' sleeping space, while the highest level accommodates the kitchen and the girl's bedroom, symbolizing the honored position of women, who are regarded as precious and deserving of protection (Yumna & Labib, 2023). The bathroom is located outside the main house to maintain the privacy of the interior when receiving guests. This spatial arrangement reflects a functional hierarchy based on customary values, in which spaces considered important and sacred are placed in the highest and most protected locations.

Therefore, the spatial organization of the *bale* in Sade Village is the result of a close relationship between the social structure, customs, and traditions of the Sasak community. The placement of each space is determined not only by practical functions but also by cultural values that govern daily life. Understanding the relationship between these traditions and spatial organization is essential for explaining how traditional architecture contributes to preserving cultural identity amid the challenges of modernization.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an ethnographic method with a qualitative approach to examine how the people of Sade Village organize their cosmological values and represent them through the spatial arrangement of their residential compounds and traditional houses. Ethnography is a qualitative research method that collects data through observation, interviews, and documentation to provide detailed, systematic, and comprehensive explanations of socio-cultural phenomena.

The qualitative approach requires researchers to conduct fieldwork by directly visiting the research site, namely Sade Village, to collect primary data. Researchers are also expected to develop a thorough understanding of the research subjects through interviews, direct observation of community activities and events, and the examination of relevant documents.



The data were analyzed through the following steps:

1. Identifying and organizing the main categories relevant to the research objectives based on data collected from observations, interviews, documentation, and audio-visual recordings conducted in Sade Village.
2. Drawing conclusions from all the collected data to address the research objectives..

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Merariq Tradition

One of the most well-known cultural traditions among the people of Lombok, particularly the Sasak ethnic community, is the practice of *Merariq*, commonly referred to as elopement marriage. *Merariq* is one of the most important stages in the traditional Sasak marriage ceremony. Etymologically, the term *Merariq* is derived from the Indonesian word *lari*, meaning "to run," while *Merari'an* means *Melai'ang*, or "to take someone away" (Mawardi, 2024). In practice, when a man intends to marry a woman, he first takes her away secretly, usually at night, before the formal marriage process begins (Muhsinin et al., 2022).

Within the *Merariq* tradition, the Sasak community believes that taking a young woman from the guardianship of her family symbolizes masculinity, courage, and a man's seriousness in pursuing marriage. The practice is regarded as a way of preserving personal honor and demonstrating a man's responsibility and commitment. At the same time, parents within the Sasak community consider their daughters to be highly valuable and worthy of respect (Kusuma & Mareta, 2024).

Uniquely, within Sasak culture, a conventional marriage proposal made directly to the prospective bride's family may be perceived as disrespectful. The *Merariq* tradition is instead regarded as a means of honoring women, based on the belief that women should never be treated as objects that can be negotiated or acquired. Rather, they are considered far more valuable than material possessions. The community also believes that a daughter who is taken away through *Merariq* brings greater honor to her family than one who is formally proposed to. This perception reflects the belief that a woman who is "abducted" through *Merariq* is highly valued and deserving of special respect (Mispandi & Fahrurrozi Muh., 2021).

This tradition also demonstrates that some *Merariq* marriages take place without the knowledge of the parents, while others occur with their awareness and tacit approval. In certain cases, parents may even facilitate their children's elopement, considering it a source of pride when their daughter is taken away by a young man as part of the *Merariq* tradition (Ariany Farida, 2017).

However, an exception applies to members of the Sasak nobility, particularly noble women, whose marriages are governed by stricter customary regulations. Noble families are expected to marry within the noble class to preserve their lineage. A noble man is permitted to marry a woman from the *jajarkarang* (commoner) class without violating customary rules. In contrast, a noble woman is required to marry a man of noble status. Failure to comply with this custom may result in the loss of inheritance rights, the absence of a marriage guardian (*wali nikah*), and the loss of the right to participate in family decision-making (Barqi et al., 2021). Castes in the *merariq* tradition all have an impact on the dowry that will be paid, the caste of the king's descendants is called *Raden* for men and *Lala* for women, then *Baiq*, father, and *Amaq* (Azmi Haerul et al., 2022).

If the bride is of *Raden* descent and the father is from an ordinary family, then the child's status in the position of social status is still in the previous position if it is a boy and good if it is a girl. The titles of *Laluand Baiqare* titles for nobles whose social strata are below the social strata of *Raden* (for men) and *Lale* (for women) in feudal society and a few can still be found today (Zahid A, 2023).

3.2 Bale Tani



Figure 1 Bale Tani
Source : (Author, 2025)

The roof of the traditional house is constructed using thatched straw as the primary roofing material, while the walls are made of woven bamboo panels. The elevated rear portion of the roof symbolizes the relationship between humans and God, whereas the extended front roof overhang represents the relationship between humans and one another (Saptaningtyas et al., 2021). The floor is coated with a mixture of soil and cow or buffalo dung, which functions as a natural mosquito repellent, reduces floor moisture, and serves as a traditional substitute for cement (Sahira et al., 2023).

The *Bale Tani* in Sade Village demonstrates a close relationship between the physical form of the building and the customary values and traditions of the Sasak community. In general, the floor plan of the *Bale Tani* is divided into two levels that accommodate two principal spaces: the *Bale Luar* and the *Bale Dalem*. The *Bale Dalem* functions as a sacred space for customary rituals and religious ceremonies, whereas the *Bale Luar* serves as a space for receiving guests and conducting social activities (Saputra et al., 2024).

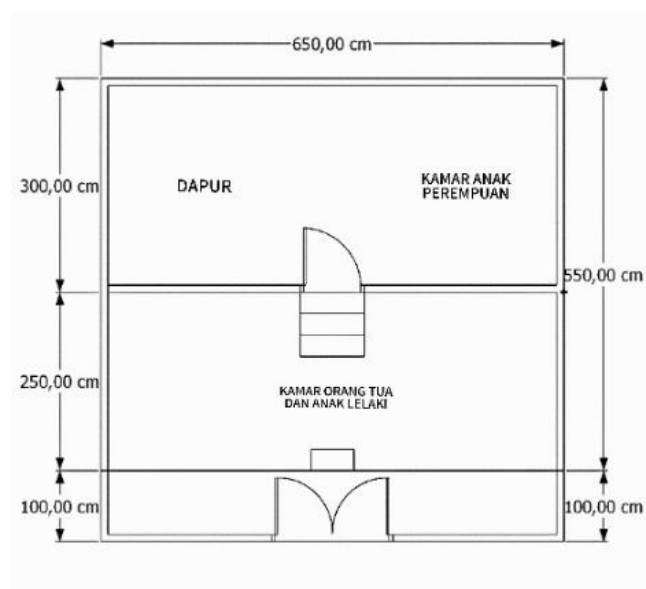


Figure 2 Floor Plan of Bale Tani
Source : (Author, 2025)



Figure 3 Bale Luar
Source : (Author, 2025)



Figure 4 Bale Dalam
Source : (Author, 2025)

Within the *Bale Luar*, leading to the *Bale Dalem*, there are three or four steps connecting the two levels. These steps symbolize the values of humility and mutual respect among members of the community (Sigit Wahyudi et al., 2022).

The spatial layout of the *Bale Tani* is not solely determined by functional considerations but is also deeply rooted in the philosophical values of the *Merariq* tradition—a traditional Sasak marriage custom in which the groom takes the bride away, or "elopes" with her, at night before the official wedding ceremony takes place (Yumna & Labib, 2023). The placement of the daughter's bedroom on the upper level symbolizes the community's respect for and protection of women. This location is considered safer and more honorable, reflecting the Sasak belief that women are the guardians of family honor.

Furthermore, based on interviews with local residents, the kitchen is located at the rear of the house alongside the daughter's bedroom because it is primarily used by women. This arrangement not only supports the efficiency of daily domestic activities but also protects women's privacy while preserving the customary values that emphasize respect for their role within the household. In addition, guests are required to bow slightly when entering the house through its relatively low doorway. This posture implicitly represents an expression of courtesy and respect toward the homeowner, a cultural practice locally known as *Tabe-tabe*.

3.3 Bale Bonter



Figure 5 Bale Bonter
Source : (Author, 2025)

Bale Bonter is a traditional house occupied by community members who hold important social and customary roles, such as *penghulu* (customary leader), *tuan guru* (Islamic religious leader), *keliang* (hamlet head), village heads, and members of the middle noble class. In addition to serving as a residence, *Bale Bonter* functions as a venue for customary court proceedings and the settlement of disputes under customary law. It is also used to store historical artifacts and family heirlooms (Wasil et al., 2023).

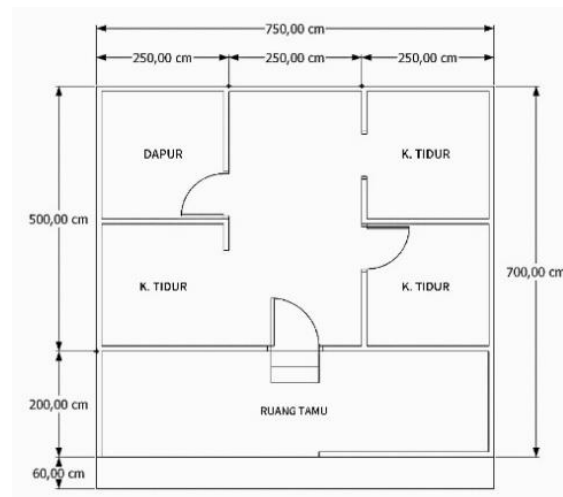


Figure 6 Floor Plan of Bale Bonter (Source : Author, 2025)

The foundation of the *Bale Bonter* is constructed at a higher elevation, requiring earthen steps to access the house. The number of steps at the entrance carries philosophical significance. Five steps symbolize the Five Pillars of Islam as well as the five daily prayers, which serve as fundamental principles for daily life. Meanwhile, three steps represent the three stages of human life: birth, life, and death (Asri et al., 2024).

Unlike the *Bale Tani*, the *Bale Bonter* no longer contains a *Bale Dalem*. Consequently, when a woman is about to give birth, childbirth takes place in the house of her parents or relatives, namely a *Bale Tani*. In addition, the storage area for valuable belongings is relocated to another room, and daughters are provided with their own bedrooms. Although the spatial layout differs from that of the *Bale Tani*, the *Bale Bonter* still includes a designated space for preparing ritual offerings (*sesajen*) (Subiyantoro et al., 2019).



Figure 7 Living Room of Bale Bonter
Source : (Author, 2025)



Figure 8 Bedroom and Kitchen of Bale Bonter
Source : (Author, 2025)

Based on the interview findings, both the *Bale Tani* and *Bale Bonter* are designed without windows. This design is influenced by the *Merariq* tradition and by the use of woven bamboo walls, which contain small gaps that allow natural ventilation to circulate throughout the house. As a result, additional ventilation through windows is considered unnecessary.

Table 1 Sample Profile and Context

Item	Bale Tani	Bale Bonter
Occupants / Function	Residence for the nuclear family; domestic and family ritual functions	Residence of customary leaders; representative and customary deliberation functions
General Spatial Layout	Bale Luar → Bale Dalem (private–sacred core)	Front space becomes dominant; Bale Dalem is absent; the inner Bale remains
Sanitation	Bathroom/toilet located outside the main building	Same; located outside the main building
Orientation	Facade/front terrace follows cosmological orientation (awiq-awiq)	Similar; the front space becomes more representative
Tourism Characteristics	Active front terrace (weaving and receiving guests)	Stronger public representation; greater visual openness

Table 2 Visual Evidence (Photographs/Floor Plans) and Spatial Rule Indicators

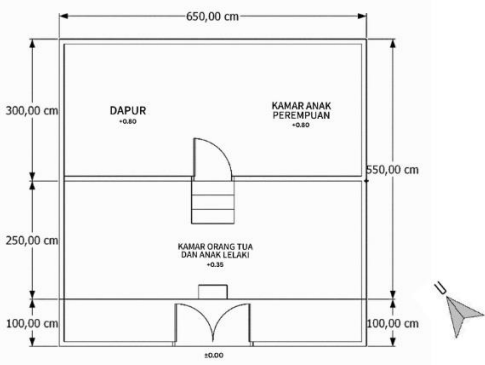
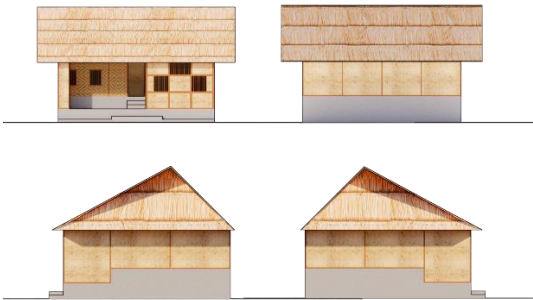
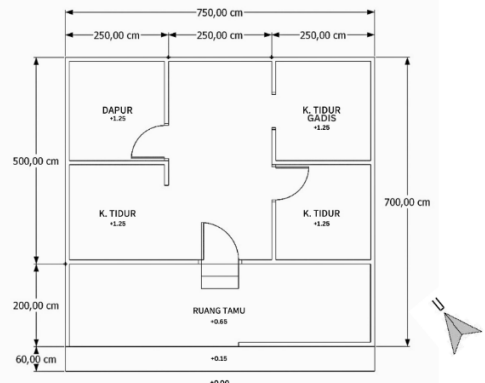
Figure	Brief Description	Spatial Rule Indicators
 Gambar 1 Facade of Bale Tani	Front terrace/Bale Luar; low entrance	Public front zone; controlled guest access and etiquette
 Gambar 2 Floor Plan of Bale Tani	Bale Tani floor plan; daughter's bedroom and kitchen located at the rear/upper level	Protection of women; layered spatial access
 Gambar 3 Façade of Bale Bonter	Front terrace; representative façade	Representation, customary deliberation, and social status
 Gambar 4 Floor Plan of Bale Bonter	Bale Bonter floor plan; kitchen at the rear left, daughter's bedroom at the rear right	Protected domestic space; indirect circulation

 Figure 5 Entrance Door Threshold	Supporting visual evidence for the discussion in Table 3
 Figure 6 Kitchen	
 Figure 7 Sanitation Facility	

Tabel 3. Spatial Elements and Their Implications for Spatial Organization

Aspect	Bale Tani	Bale Bonter	Figure Reference
Primary Spatial Structure	Bale Luar → Dalem Bale → Bale Dalem	Front space becomes dominant; Bale Dalem is absent, while the inner Bale remains	Figures 1–4
Daughter's Bedroom	Most protected zone (rear/upper level); layered access	Rear location (protected); indirect access from the front terrace	Figures 2 & 4
Kitchen	Adjacent to the daughter's bedroom (rear area)	Rear-left location; protected domestic space	Figures 2 & 4
Entrance Door / Threshold	Low entrance (Tabe-tabe); controls visibility and access	Low entrance; greater visibility toward the front space	Figures 1 & 3
Floor / Materials	Traditional floor supporting private and ritual activities; possible dual-purpose use	More varied flooring in public areas; Bale Dalem retains traditional materials	Figures 1–4
Sanitation	Bathroom/toilet located outside the main building	Same	Figure 7

Aspect	Bale Tani	Bale Bonter	Figure Reference
Orientation	Consistent orientation toward Mount Rinjani; active front terrace on the customary side	Similar orientation; stronger emphasis on the representative front space	Figures 2 & 4

The relationship between the *Merariq* tradition and the spatial organization of the *Bale Tani* is clearly reflected in the placement of the daughter's bedroom within the *Bale Dalem*, located on the upper level of the house. This arrangement is not merely a structural configuration but also symbolizes the protection and respect accorded to women, who are regarded in Sasak culture as the "jewels of the family" and therefore deserving of protection. The elevated location of the bedroom within a private area reinforces the role of the house as a guardian of customary values and social norms. Access to this space is carefully controlled and can only be reached through the *Bale Luar*, which serves as a transitional space between the public and private areas of the house.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the spatial organization of the *Bale Tani* and *Bale Bonter* in Sade Village represents a tangible manifestation of the relationship between customary norms, traditions, and spatial functions that shape the architectural identity of the Sasak community. In the *Bale Tani*, the influence of the *Merariq* tradition is reflected in the placement of the *Bale Dalem* as the most private and sacred space within the house. The daughter's bedroom is located in the most protected area, with controlled and layered access that symbolizes both respect for and protection of women. Furthermore, the kitchen, which is positioned adjacent to the *Bale Dalem* as revealed through interviews with local residents, not only reflects the traditional domestic role of women but also serves to maintain family privacy and reinforce the spatial hierarchy between public and private areas. In addition, the principle of sacredness is expressed through the separation of spaces according to the level of ritual significance, while cosmological beliefs influence both the orientation of the building and the spatial arrangement based on the relationship between humans, nature, and ancestors.

In the *Bale Bonter*, changes in residential function and the increasing social role of the homeowner have led to a reorganization of the spatial layout. The front area has become more prominent as a representative space for receiving guests and expressing the family's social status, while private spaces remain located in the inner part of the house, although with a more flexible spatial configuration than that of the *Bale Tani*. Social status and representation are also manifested through architectural elements such as the number of entrance steps, carved ornaments, and the quality of building finishes, all of which symbolize social standing while embodying philosophical and spiritual values. Meanwhile, architectural features such as the low entrance door continue to be preserved as a medium for teaching etiquette, requiring every visitor to bow as a gesture of respect, a cultural practice known as *Tabe-tabe*, when entering the house.

Based on these findings, future research is recommended to expand the scope of the study to other Sasak settlements beyond Sade Village in order to examine the consistency of the relationship between customary norms and spatial organization. Comparative studies conducted across different seasons and during various customary ceremonies are also recommended to better understand the dynamics of spatial use in ritual contexts. Furthermore, more standardized architectural documentation, including building orientation,

elevation, dimensions, and spatial hierarchy, is necessary to develop a framework that explains the relationship between customary norms, spatial rules, and architectural features. Such a framework could serve as a practical reference for the preservation, rehabilitation, and design approval of traditional buildings by customary authorities and other stakeholders in tourism village areas.

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