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Research Paper

Mindful Mobility in Bali: How Walking Experiences Shapes Sense of Place

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how tourists develop a sense of place through guided walking tours in Bali's cultural environments. Using Jorgensen and Stedman's framework of place identity, place attachment, and place dependence, the research explores the psychological and emotional processes through which tourists construct meaning during their visits. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was conducted with six participants who recently joined walking tours. The analysis reveals three key experiential outcomes: (1) enhanced self-awareness and identity reflection, (2) emotional and well being-oriented benefits facilitated by mindful engagement with local spaces, and (3) functional dependence on walking as a mode of accessing authentic cultural experiences. These findings show that short-term walking tours can generate meaningful place-based connections, challenging assumptions that sense of place requires long-term immersion. The study contributes to sense of place theory by highlighting the role of embodied mobility in shaping tourist experiences and extends slow tourism scholarship by demonstrating how walking supports mindful, culturally grounded forms of engagement. Practically, the findings provide insights for developing sustainable, community-oriented walking tour products that promote cultural authenticity and visitor well being.

Keywords: *Sense of Place, Walking Tours, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Slow Tourism*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarship has highlighted growing concerns about the sustainability and authenticity of mass tourism practices (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Goodwin, 2017), prompting both scholars and practitioners to seek alternative approaches that prioritize meaningful experiences over rapid consumption of destinations (Losada & Mota, 2019). This paradigm shift has given rise to slow tourism, a concept rooted in the broader slow movement philosophy that advocates for slower, more mindful, and more connected ways of experiencing places. Originally emerging from the slow food movement (Hall, 2006) and expanding into concepts like Cittaslow (Fullagar et al., 2012), this approach offers an alternative framework that emphasizes deeper human connections with communities, environments, and the essence of destinations.

Slow tourism is defined by two fundamental principles: adjusting travel pace to allow deeper destination engagement, and fostering authentic connections with local communities and places (Dickinson et al., 2011; Heitmann et al., 2011). Walking tours represent a distinct manifestation of slow tourism practices, enabling travelers to observe, absorb, and interpret every nuance of a destination through multisensory engagement (Lipman & Murphy, 2012). Research demonstrates that walking facilitates greater community involvement, enhanced mindfulness, and increased attention toward residents and destinations (Wan Omar et al., 2011; Morris, 2018). Walking tours allow tourists not only to observe but also to absorb and interpret their surroundings in a slower, more reflective manner. This reflective process creates opportunities for deeper engagement with the environment and local communities.

The theoretical significance of walking tours extends beyond their manifestation of slow tourism principles to their potential role in facilitating sense of place formation among tourists. Sense of place conceptualized by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) as comprising place identity (cognitive self-concept linked to place), place attachment (emotional bond), and place dependence (functional support for activities and goals) represents the complex psychological and emotional processes through which individuals develop meaningful connections with geographical locations. While previous research highlights that sense of place is multidimensional, shaped by both objective and subjective factors (Raymond et al., 2017; Shamai & Ilatov, 2005). Other researchers such as Farnum et al. (2005) and Smaldone et al. (2005) defines sense of place as a form of human connection to a place through the dimensions of place of attachment and place of meaning. Walking tours, through their emphasis on slow, mindful exploration and local cultural immersion, potentially serve as catalysts for such place connection processes.

Despite growing academic interest in both slow tourism and sense of place within tourism studies, empirical research examining how walking tours specifically contribute to tourists' sense of place formation remains surprisingly limited (See Table 1). Prathama and Idajati (2024), and Haq et al. (2024) emphasizes the role of walking tours in cultural preservation and strengthening local identity. Other studies such as Morris (2018), Laranjeira and Laranjeira (2017), and Aoki and Yoshimizu, (2015) positioning walking tours as a medium for community expression, artistic media, and advocacy space. Meanwhile, the sociological and political approaches developed by Huss (2023) and Ningrum (2024) associated walking tours with collective memory and social interaction. However, these studies have not adequately addressed the subjective, experiential dimensions of tourist experience during walking tours, nor systematically examined how these experiences contribute to place connection formation. This represents a significant theoretical gap, particularly given tourism's increasingly recognized role as a context for place-meaning construction and emotional attachment development (Stedman, 2003; Williams & Vaske, 2003).

Table 1. Summary of Previous Study and Research Gap

No	Researchers	Research Focus	Finding	Differences with this study
1	Prathama and Idajati (2024)	Identifying the characteristics of walking tours	Walking tours are essential for preserving and enhancing the identity of a place	Focusing on the formation of place attachment by tourists in walking tours
2	Ningrum (2024)	Focusing on social interaction in walking tours from Herbert Blumer's theoretical perspective	"Jogja Walking Tour" is a public tourism model driven by storytellers, facilitating cultural learning and social interaction, encouraging government support for local communities in addition to infrastructure.	Focusing on deep psychological experiences (the formation of a sense of place and place attachment) in tourists, rather than social interaction
3	Haq et al. (2024)	Analyzing the impact of walking tours as a form of cultural tourism in Cirebon	Walking tours are effective for cultural preservation and facilitating cultural exchange. They can be used as a strategy for urban tourism and a shift to slow tourism.	Adapting slow tourism as a platform for walking tours and creating a sense of place for tourists
4	Guillen and Dela Santa (2025)	Investigating the role of walking tours as an advocacy tool for better pedestrian experiences	Walking tours can strengthen advocacy and appreciation for tourism.	Walking tours in this study are focused more as a tool to support slow tourism that influences the psychology of tourists.
5	Aoki and Yoshimizu (2015)	Methodological examination of walking tours as an ethnographic method for critically engaging with history	Highlighting how the experience of walking allows researchers to reflect on their own space-body relationships.	This research encourages tourists to discover a sense of place in the walking tours they participate in.
6	Huss (2023)	Walking tours as a means of examining issues of political space and memory in Jaffa	Walking tours influence the politics of memory and urban narratives, while also contributing to political geography	This study examines how tourists experience a sense of place on walking tours.
7	Laranjeira (2017)	The process of creating a walking tour in Mafalala, Maputo	Contributing to the development of cultural tourism and communities.	Contributing to the tourism industry and the environment
8	Morris (2018)	Walking can be understood as a creative, academic, and curatorial practice in the context of tourism.	Walking tours as a medium for art and community reflection	Focusing on the emotional dimension of tourists and in the context of tourism in Bali

Source: Authors elaboration, 2025

The Indonesian island of Bali presents a particularly compelling context for investigating walking tours and sense of place formation. As an established international destination renowned for its rich cultural landscapes, spiritual traditions, and community-centered way of life, Bali attracts millions of tourists annually seeking authentic cultural experiences (Wijaya et al., 2023; Riski & Wulandari, 2024). However, despite tourists' documented motivations to connect with Balinese cultural values and communities (Febriani & Muttaqin, 2025), walking tour-based products remain significantly

underdeveloped compared to conventional transportation-dependent tourism offerings. This paradox is particularly noteworthy given that many international tourists already engage in independent walking explorations of Bali's historical and cultural sites (Utami et al., 2024; Romanos & Jenkins, 2013). The island's compact cultural landscapes, pedestrian-accessible temple complexes, traditional villages, and rich artistic traditions provide ideal conditions for walking-based cultural immersion experiences.

This contextual gap presents what identify as a problem of practice as an unique empirical opportunity to investigate on how walking tours function as vehicles for sense of place development in culturally rich destinations. Drawing upon calls from tourism scholars for more phenomenologically informed research into place-based tourism experiences (Andrews & Roberts, 2025), this study addresses the research question: *How do tourists experience and construct sense of place through participation in walking tours in Bali's cultural landscapes?*

This study seeks to address this gap by employing *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA), which allows for an in-depth exploration of tourists' lived experiences during walking tours in Bali and how these experiences contribute to the formation of their sense of place. This study makes several important contributions, theoretically it advances sense of place research in tourism contexts by exploring place-meaning construction through embodied travel practices (Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Chen & Rahman, 2018) and extending slow tourism theory by examining how walking practices facilitate mindful mobility and place engagement (Guiver & McGrath, 2016; Fullagar et al., 2012). Practically, this research responds to industry demands for sustainable tourism development that creates meaningful visitor-destination connections (Seraphin, 2024), providing evidence-based insights for developing authentic place-engagement tourism products.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical foundations of tourist experience, walking tours, and sense of place

Tourism scholarship has shifted from service-oriented paradigms to experience-centered models that highlight psychological and emotional dimensions of travel (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Filep & Deery, 2010). Research on memorable tourism experiences demonstrates that tourist experiences include cognitive, affective, and behavioral components rather than mere consumption (Kim et al., 2012; Sthapit et al., 2019). Psychological experiences in tourism involve cognitive and reflective processes occurring when tourists interact with destinations, emphasizing the need to understand tourist psychology for personalized services (Zhang et al., 2018). These experiences encompass knowledge acquisition, cultural interpretation, and self-reflection that influence how travelers perceive destinations and construct meaning from their journeys (Seyfi et al., 2020). Recent research demonstrates that meaningful life experiences, including tourism, significantly impact mental health and life meaning construction (Filep, 2014).

Emotional experiences, conversely, involve affective responses triggered by multisensory engagement with destinations, cultural encounters, and social interactions that generate feelings of awe, connection, and transformation (Hosany et al., 2015). Academic interest in wellbeing and health-oriented tourism has increased since 2015 (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024), paralleling industry growth in transformative tourism experiences. Contemporary studies reveal that psychological and emotional dimensions work together to create transformative tourism experiences encounters that facilitate personal growth, cultural understanding, and lasting behavioral change (Filep & Deery, 2010). Still, previous research has mostly explored these experiences in static tourist contexts rather than dynamic, embodied activities like walking tours.

In this context, walking tours represent the integration of space, material practices, affects, and cognitive work that transcends conventional tourism's observation-based approach by unifying

mobility, cultural learning, and place exploration into embodied experiential processes (Rabbiosi & Meneghello, 2023). These practices embody slow tourism principles through mindful mobility deliberate, reflective movement enabling deep destination engagement (Oh et al., 2016). The experiential benefits of walking tours extend beyond physical activity to cognitive and emotional dimensions. These experiential benefit explaining how tourists develop attachments, identities, and functional relationships with places, as conceptualized in the theory of sense of place by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) framework that use in this study.

Place Identity refers to individuals' cognitions, beliefs, and perceptions about their investment in particular settings (Kyle et al. (2010). Within the domain of tourism, place identity has been demonstrated to foster heightened feelings of belonging to a tourist destination. Furthermore, the tourism environment has been shown to facilitate the expression and affirmation of this identity (Kyle et al., 2004). Tourists develop place identity when they perceive destination character reflects their own identity or personal aspirations (Williams & Vaske, 2003). Place identity serves as the foundation for emotional and behavioral bonds related to loyalty and return intentions.

Place attachment is multidimensional, influenced by factors such as destination image, appeal, personal involvement, and visitor satisfaction (Hou et al., 2005; Lemelin et al., 2015; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Xu & Zhang, 2016). Kim et al., 2012) state that place attachment is influenced by memorable tourist experiences because they contain wellbeing elements (hedonia and eudaimonia). Place attachment represents the positive emotional connection developing between places and individuals (Stedman, 2003).

Place dependence is the psychological and affective bond connecting individuals to specific locations (Lee & Shen, 2013; Yuksel et al., 2010). This concept encompasses locations' capacity to satisfy individuals' functional and emotional requirements in ways that cannot be equally substituted by other locations (Plunkett et al., 2019). Lewicka (2011) research found that travelers experiencing comfort and familiarity in places exhibit stronger place dependence and attachment, with increased likelihood of return. Research demonstrates significant correlation between place dependence and behavioral loyalty among visitors (Plunkett et al., 2019).

2.2. Review of previous empirical research on walking tours

Recent research indicates that walking is the most preferred mobility mode for tourists exploring cities, with tourists walking specifically to explore rather than for recreation (Rabbiosi & Meneghello, 2023; Shoal & Ahas, 2016). Despite growing recognition of walking tours' psychological benefits and their capacity to create opportunities for reflection, emotional connection, and meaning construction (Kim & Jeong, 2025; Bornioli et al., 2018). Research remains fragmented across operational, cultural, and psychological dimensions. While tourism experience research has produced substantial results, theorization remains fragmented (Hosany et al., 2022), with most walking tour studies focusing on infrastructure requirements or cultural preservation outcomes rather than examining how these embodied practices facilitate psychological and emotional processes contributing to sense of place formation (See Table 1).

2.3. Identification of research gaps in walking tour experiences

Previous studies have explored psychological and emotional dimensions of tourism experiences, as well as the concept of sense of place. However, existing research has predominantly examined these experiences in static tourism contexts rather than dynamic and embodied activities such as walking tours. In addition, studies on walking tours remain fragmented, often focusing on operational and cultural aspects rather than psychological and emotional processes. This limitation is significant given the growing demand for immersive tourism experiences. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap

by examining how walking tour experiences contribute to the formation of sense of place through the dimensions of place identity, place attachment, and place dependence, as conceptualized by Jorgensen & Stedman (2001) framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This study uses the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) combines ideas from phenomenology and hermeneutics, resulting in a descriptive and interpretative method. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) emphasizes the ideographic study of individuals, that is, by producing rich and in-depth descriptions of how a person experiences the phenomenon being studied (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This approach was selected because it enables exploration of complex and personal phenomena through excavation of subjective experiences and meanings that cannot be measured quantitatively.

3.2. Population and sample

Purposive sampling was used to recruit individuals who: (i) participated in or conducted a walking tour in Bali at least once in the past six months, (ii) being at least 20 years old, (iii) able to communicate well in Indonesian or English. These criteria ensured participants' experiences remained relevant, providing deeper understanding of psychological, emotional, and perceptual aspects regarding walking tours. Small, homogeneous samples of ten or fewer are recommended in IPA to support idiographic, in-depth analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Larkin et al., 2011). Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) recommend between six to ten participants. This is because IPA places an emphasis on each individual participant and values their unique lived experience before moving on to the shared points of the phenomena. To this end, in this study, six participants participated after fulfilling the sampling criteria. Data were generated through in-depth phenomenological interviews with final six participants that had participated in walking tours lasting two to four hours in various Balinese settings independently or organized by travel agency, within the six months preceding the interviews (See Table 2).

Table 2. Participant Overview

Informant	Age	Origin	Tour Type	Recruitment Source
Irvan	25	Jakarta	Travel Agency	User-Generated Content
Wahab	24	Sumatera	Travel Agency	Social Media Mention
Lia	25	German	Independent	Instagram Hastag
Laura	22	Sumatera	Independent	Instagram Hastag
Romi	24	Jakarta	Travel Agency	Social Media Mention
Anin	23	Yogyakarta	Travel Agency	Social Media Mention

Source: Authors (2025)

3.3. Measurement and instruments

Primary data collected using integrating semi-structured in-depth interviews, direct field observation, and supporting document analysis. Semi-structured interviews explored participants'

personal experiences, perceptions of visited locations, and emotional connections with Bali. This flexible approach allows researchers to explore specific topics while adjusting question order and formulation according to participants' answers (Rachmawati, 2007). Each interview session was recorded with permission and notes captured non-verbal expressions and conversation context.

3.4. Data collection procedure

Data collection was conducted from June to August 2025 in Denpasar and Badung, Bali as a prominent walking tour destination for both domestic and international tourists. A purposive sampling method was employed, selecting participants based on their prior experience in conducting walking tours, either independently or through local travel agencies.

Potential participants were identified and approached through social media platforms by tracking relevant hashtags, direct mentions of walking tour providers, and User-Generated Content (UGC) related to their tour experiences. This digital footprint ensured that participants had substantial firsthand engagement with the phenomenon under study.

The primary data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Prior to each session, ethical protocols were strictly followed; participants were briefed on the study's scope, confidentiality, and their rights through an informed consent process. All interviews were conducted with participants' consent and were recorded in both audio and video formats for ensured accurate data capture and supported the credibility of the research findings.

3.5 Data analysis techniques

Data analysis followed Smith et. al. (2022) and Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014) IPA guidelines. After verbatim transcription, transcripts were imported into NVivo 14 for systematic coding. The first stage involved detailed line-by-line reading of each transcript to identify emergent themes grounded in participants' narratives. These preliminary themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence with original accounts, then clustered into meaningful sub-themes reflecting shared patterns across participants.

Sub-themes were synthesized into three superordinate themes capturing core data dimensions (Larkin et al., 2011). The analytic process was iterative, moving continuously between individual transcripts and cross-case comparisons to preserve idiographic detail while identifying broader conceptual insights (Smith et. al., 2022). Interpretation examined how sub-themes interacted to shape each superordinate theme. To enhance analysis credibility, supporting materials such as field observations and relevant documents were consulted as triangulation (Denzin, 2012), strengthening interpretative claims' validity.

4. RESULT

Analysis revealed three superordinate themes demonstrating how embodied cultural exploration fosters sense of place consist of discovering authentic self through place, inner journeys and pathways to wellbeing, and functional place dependency through authentic cultural access. These themes illuminate the processes through which walking tours enable meaningful destination connections.

4.1. Theme 1: Discovering Authentic Self Through Place

This superordinate theme captures how participants experienced walking tours as vehicles for both self-discovery and identity expression. Rather than passive cultural consumption, participants

described active processes of identity exploration and affirmation through embodied cultural engagement.

Personal Growth and Self-Discovery

Participants consistently described walking tour experiences as catalysts for personal insight and development. The embodied nature of cultural exploration created space for self-reflection and awareness that extended beyond the immediate tourism context. Irvan's narrative reveals how walking tours enabled what could be termed "empathetic awakening" a fundamental shift in relational awareness that extended far beyond the immediate tourism experience:

"Yes, the experience was very influential. It felt really different, made me more sensitive to my surroundings and practised empathy. I realised that there are social dynamics in Bali that I can't understand just from social media, but I can see it for real when I joined the walking tour."

Irvan's description of "practised empathy" indicates that walking tours facilitated experiential learning, transforming empathy from abstract concept into active practice through direct cultural engagement. His contrast between social media representation and direct encounter highlights the distinctive nature of embodied knowledge gained through walking tours, consistent with Haanpää et al. (2022) findings that walking facilitates encounters with place aspects remaining concealed in faster tourism forms.

Wahab's encounter with Le Mayeur Museum paintings reveals another dimension of identity discovery through place encounter. His reflection demonstrates how cultural artifacts can serve as mirrors for self-understanding:

"So he conveyed his message through his paintings and I think it's like, and the thing that triggers me there is like there are many ways to tell something about life to other people whether it's through writing, words or his work. Like Lemayer through his work and it's still alive today, like that."

Wahab's realization that "there are many ways to tell something about life" reflects expanded awareness of communicative possibilities. His phrase "it's still alive today" signals recognition of art's temporal transcendence, aligning with Gadamer's notion of a *fusion of horizons*, where personal experience intersects with historical vision to generate self-understanding (Vessey, 2009). He further links this reflection to the embodied nature of walking:

"The most basic difference is that when I walk, I go slower and I have more opportunities to see things around me. If I'm on a motorbike, I'll just focus on the road and not care about what I'm passing."

Walking thus fosters *phenomenological availability* an openness to encounter unavailable in faster travel modes. Its slower pace enables what Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetic of Space*, describes as *intimate immensity*, where external encounters evoke profound internal reflection (Christie, 2022).

Professional Identity Expression and Enhancement

Several participants described walking tours as opportunities to integrate professional interests and expertise with tourism experiences. Rather than viewing travel as separate from professional identity, participants found ways to express and develop occupational identities through cultural exploration. Irvan, who has an architectural background, connected his professional expertise to walking tour experiences.

"I also like photography, so through the walking tour I can combine my hobby with traveling. I've often seen the beautiful landscape in my hometown, so when I arrived in Bali, I didn't only focus on the scenery but also the architecture of the buildings in Bali that caught my attention."

What emerges here is not simply professional interest applied to tourism, but what might be called integrated identity performance, the capacity to be simultaneously tourist, architect, and photographer within a single experiential frame. This suggests that walking tours create conditions for what could be termed "multi dimensional authenticity" opportunities to express multiple identity facets simultaneously rather than compartmentalizing different life roles. Romi's engagement with historical narratives during his walking tour reveals how professional and personal learning can merge within tourism contexts, as he mentioned:

"My main travel preference is destinations that are rich in history, and I think Bali is rich in history. They told me about the history of Sanur, the naming of Sanur. I think the guide had a lot of knowledge about his field, and he explained it well."

Anin's narrative reflects how walking tours can satisfy intellectual curiosity in ways that enhance both personal enjoyment and professional development:

"I'm quite curious about the things around me, so with this tour there are people I can ask and it's quite insightful."

Anin's emphasis on being able to ask questions points toward the interactive dimension distinguishing walking tours from more passive tourism forms, functioning as inquiry spaces where curiosity can be actively pursued.

4.2. Theme 2: Inner Journey: Pathways to Wellbeing

This theme encompasses participants' affective responses to Balinese environments, revealing how walking tours generate emotional bonds characteristic of place attachment. Participants described profound emotional shifts, wellbeing enhancement, and spiritual connections emerging through embodied destination engagement. Lia articulated the emotional transformation most explicitly:

"That's what I meant when I said I smiled a lot more. I felt much lighter and much happier. I was also more content with my life. When you appreciate life in general, it makes you feel like everyone else does too, and that brings so much joy."

Lia's language of feeling "lighter" and "much happier" points toward what phenomenologists might recognize as fundamental mood shifts in what Heidegger calls "Grundstimmung" or basic attunement to existence. Her progression from personal contentment to perceived universal happiness suggests what could be understood as "empathetic expansion" a widening of emotional identification that extends beyond self to encompass others. The temporal dimension is significant, Lia's use of past tense combined with present reflection suggests the walking tour generated lasting changes rather than temporary mood enhancement, indicating walking tours' potential to facilitate sustainable wellbeing enhancement.

Laura emphasized walking tours' capacity to create reflective spaces facilitating emotional connection:

"This tour gives me room for reflection. When walking or stopping at certain points, I often think there are many simple things around and being reminded not to always rush, but to enjoy the process and atmosphere at every step."

The phrase "enjoy the process and atmosphere at every step" reveals a temporal reorientation from goal-focused to process-focused awareness. This suggests that walking tours can facilitate what mindfulness practitioners might recognize as "present moment awareness" a shift from future-oriented striving to immediate experiential engagement.

Lia's statement illustrates how walking tours can facilitate *sacred encounters* experiences of transcendence tied to Bali's spiritual atmosphere:

"Bali is all about being light and present in the moment. It's impossible to stay sad for long when you look around and see all these beautiful things. Bali gives me the energy that I can't find in my home."

Her description of being "light and present" reflects states of spiritual openness, while claiming "it's impossible to stay sad" highlights the environment's therapeutic capacity to evoke positive emotions. The sense of receiving "energy" unavailable elsewhere suggests place-specific spiritual resources, underscoring Bali as offering unique experiential qualities. This indicates walking tours can operate as moving meditation, where physical exploration intertwines with contemplative awareness.

4.3. Theme 3: Functional Place Dependency Through Authentic Cultural Access

This theme captures participants' perceptions that Bali uniquely provided cultural tourism experiences unreplicable in other destinations. Participants described specific functional capabilities making Bali indispensable for cultural tourism goals, creating strong place dependency relationships.

Cultural Immersion

Participants described walking tours in Bali as opportunities for deeper cultural immersion, moving beyond surface-level tourism to engage with authentic expressions of Balinese life. This immersion was experienced as surprising and memorable, contrasting sharply with more commercialized tourism forms typically associated with Bali.

Lia reflected on her own encounter, highlighting how the embodied act of walking created space to savour the environment:

"We just wanted to go to the area around Nyang-Nyang, and then, yes, the place was so beautiful. At first we rode a motorbike, we thought we should stop further and walk all the way to the beach. The view was worth enjoying for a little longer."

Her account suggests how walking fosters attentiveness and a heightened appreciation of the landscape, turning what might have been a fleeting stop into an immersive experience.

Romi emphasized Bali's distinctiveness by situating his experience in comparison with his home in Java:

"In terms of life, Bali is already cultured. In terms of religion, from waking up to participating, they have applied it. In Jogja, not all aspects of it are used. Not in culture, it might be at certain times, or maybe just for fun. So it's different, the difference is there. In Bali, almost all the people apply the culture itself."

Here, the walking tour served as a lens through which Romi observed the integration of culture into daily life, offering insights into the pervasive religiosity and traditions that shape Balinese society. The interactive nature of walking tours further reinforced this immersion. Romi noted how curiosity and dialogue became central to the experience:

"Perhaps the conversation is because outsiders are curious about Balinese culture. Yes, there are many questions about Balinese culture. Sometimes the walking tour participants ask questions, too. In fact, even the walking tour participants themselves were Balinese."

This highlights how cultural immersion was not limited to passive observation, but actively co-constructed through dialogue, exchange, and reflexive questioning. Such interactions point to the relational dimension of immersion, where culture is not only seen but also interpreted and negotiated collectively during the tour.

Community Integration and Social Discovery

Participants described walking tours as providing unique access to community life and social dynamics that created strong functional attachment to Bali as a destination capable of facilitating

authentic social encounter. Anin described discovering community solidarity that exceeded her expectations:

"What surprised me the most was when I passed a road. It turned out that the road was not repaired by the government, but by donors. Their names were displayed, and I realised that there are still many good people who care. Not only from the local community, but also from people outside, maybe even foreigners, who want to help."

Anin's surprise indicates walking tours function as social discovery mechanisms practices enabling tourists to encounter community dynamics and social relationships remaining invisible through other tourism engagement forms. Her recognition of collaborative community care demonstrates walking tours' capacity to reveal social infrastructure networks of mutual support sustaining community life but typically hidden from tourist view.

Lia emphasized how walking tours provide access to authentic local social environments:

"It was all the surroundings, and also the people and the energy there. I was so in love when I came that I didn't care about cafés or any other crazy spots. Because the most beautiful places were everywhere, you know, with the local people and the little markets."

Lia contrasted "local people and little markets" with commercialized "cafés" and "crazy spots," highlighting her ability to distinguish between community-oriented and tourist-oriented spaces. Her statement that "the most beautiful places were everywhere" when engaging with local life reflects how walking tours reveal aesthetic and spiritual significance in everyday settings. The phrase "I was so in love" indicates experience went beyond surface appreciation, suggesting emotional bonds with community life itself.

Wahab emphasized diverse atmospheres encountered during walking tours:

"For example, there might be some crowded spots along the beach, but there are also some really quiet and calm spots, which I think are great for enjoying your time rather than somewhere else. It's like that all the way to the shops and beyond. I prefer it to be slow. Sanur provides that."

His statement shows how walking facilitated discovery of intimate spaces aligning with his preference for slower, calmer experiences. By recognizing "Sanur provides that," Wahab underscored unique qualities of specific environments and how they support personal wellbeing, indicating functional dependency on place.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study explored how walking tours in Bali shape tourists' sense of place through the dimensions of place identity, place attachment, and place dependence (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). The findings demonstrate that walking tours serve as an embodied mode of cultural engagement, enabling participants to construct meaning, reflect on their identities, and form emotional and functional bonds with Bali. This discussion connects these findings with existing theory, highlights methodological contributions, and outlines both practical implications.

Firstly, place identity according to Jorgensen & Stedman (2001), place identity operates as a cognitive domain where places become integral to how individuals understand and define themselves. This study extends this conceptualization by revealing what we term "embodied identity formation" a process wherein walking tours' physical movement and multisensory engagement actively construct rather than merely reflect place-self connections. Kyle et al. (2010) positioned place identity as cognitive investment of self in settings, emphasizing beliefs and perceptions about environmental attachment. Our findings demonstrate that walking tours enable what we conceptualize as

"professional-personal synthesis," where tourists simultaneously integrate occupational identities with travel experiences in unified experiential frames. Through the superordinate theme "Discovering Authentic Self Through Place," participants showed how walking tours in Bali provided spaces to express and discover themselves. Hobbies such as photography, architecture observation, and historical study were not compartmentalized from tourism but became integral to place identity construction. Irvan's architectural observations and Wahab's philosophical insights gained through museum encounters illustrate this synthesis participants described expressing multiple identity facets simultaneously through embodied cultural exploration. This challenges assumptions in tourism research that travel involves identity escape, rather, tourism operates as a space for identity enhancement and integration (Li, 2025; Liu et al., 2024; Rise, 2025).

Furthermore, participants' descriptions suggest that walking tours facilitate what Gadamer terms "fusion of horizons" phenomenological processes wherein personal experience intersects with cultural-historical meanings to generate self-understanding (Vessey, 2009). Irvan's "empathetic awakening" through direct cultural engagement and Wahab's recognition that "there are many ways to tell something about life" exemplify how walking enables expanded awareness unavailable through faster tourism forms (Haanpää et al., 2022). This finding extends Proshansky et al. (2014) environmental psychology by demonstrating how temporary tourism encounters can trigger lasting identity transformations, suggesting that place identity formation operates not only cognitively but also affectively through empathy development toward environments and communities (AlGhunaim et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2024; Strandberg & Ek Styvén, 2024)

Secondly, place attachment. Conceptualized as emotional bonds formed between individuals and physical environments due to place-associated meanings (Khaidzir et al., 2022; Stedman, 2003), emerged strongly when tourists described experiences in Bali as inner journeys leading to personal wellbeing. This study advances place attachment theory by revealing what we term "somatic place attachment" emotional bonds grounded in multisensory, bodily engagement rather than visual consumption alone. In walking tour contexts, tourists not only enjoyed scenery but experienced self-reflection providing calm and happiness (Morris, 2018). The superordinate theme "Inner Journey: Pathways to Wellbeing" captured participants' affective responses to Balinese environments. Lia's descriptions of feeling "lighter," "much happier," and receiving "energy" from Bali illustrate what phenomenologists might recognize as fundamental mood shifts what Heidegger conceptualizes as "Grundstimmung" or basic attunement to existence (Morris, 2018). Her progression from personal contentment to perceived universal happiness suggests "empathetic expansion" widening emotional identification extending beyond self to encompass community and environment. This extends research demonstrating that place attachment facilitates wellbeing pathways by providing spaces for personal meaning, gratitude, and everyday life appreciation (Razem, 2020; Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010).

Significantly, the temporal dimension challenges conventional assumptions that place attachment requires prolonged engagement (Lewicka, 2011). Participants developed strong emotional bonds through walking tours lasting two to four hours, suggesting that experiential intensity multisensory immersion, reflective pace, cultural depth can compensate for temporal brevity. This finding reveals walking tours functioning as what could be understood as "accelerated attachment catalysts," creating conditions for rapid emotional bonding through intensive embodied engagement. The finding confirms that emotional bonds with places emerge not passively through extended exposure but actively through reflective interactions between travelers and environments. Walking tours provide slower pacing aligned with slow tourism purposes (Shang et al., 2020; Conway & Timms, 2012), allowing tourists to absorb environmental details and develop deeper emotional connections. Thus, place attachment in this study represents not merely destination attachment but inner journeys contributing to tourists' emotional recovery and improved wellbeing.

Thirdly, place dependence. Participants emphasized how interactions with local communities, traditional markets, and vibrant neighborhoods provided authentic experiences rarely found elsewhere. This study extends traditional conceptualizations of place dependence beyond functional-emotional frameworks (Plunkett et al., 2019) by introducing the notion of cultural dependence tourists' reliance on destinations for authentic cultural resources unavailable elsewhere. Local atmospheres emerged as key elements reinforcing functional attachment to Bali, which participants viewed as offering irreplaceable experiential quality (Masterson et al., 2017; Alrobaee & Al-Kinani, 2019). The superordinate theme "*Functional Place Dependency Through Authentic Cultural Access*" illustrates how Bali's deeply embedded cultural life shaped tourists' perceived uniqueness of place. Romi's remark that "in Bali, almost all the people apply the culture itself" contrasted with his home context, while Anin's reflection on community-led road repairs revealed how walking tours expose social infrastructures typically unseen by conventional tourists. These insights demonstrate that place dependence operates across functional, cultural, and existential dimensions.

We further propose "atmospheric dependence" to describe tourists' reliance on place-specific energies and spiritual atmospheres for emotional wellbeing. Lia's statement that Bali provides "energy that I can't find in my home" and Wahab's preference for Sanur's calmness exemplify how destinations fulfill deep human needs for authenticity and spiritual connection. This broadens Dwyer et al. (2019) understanding of place dependence beyond recreational use, framing it as comprehensive fulfillment where destinations satisfy intertwined physical, emotional, cognitive, social, cultural, and spiritual needs. Finally, place dependence was reinforced through the *immersive culture* theme, where tourists viewed Bali as a platform for direct engagement with local traditions, architecture, and community life. Such experiences reflect the destination's distinctive value rooted in location uniqueness, quality of engagement, and irreplaceability (Yuksel et al., 2010; Lee & Shen, 2013).

Challenging Temporal Assumptions in Sense of Place Formation

A critical theoretical contribution emerges from findings challenging conventional assumptions that sense of place formation requires extended temporal immersion. While researchers emphasize duration's importance for attachment development (Lewicka, 2011). Our findings reveal that experiential intensity enabled through embodied mobility, reflective temporal spaces, multisensory engagement, and cultural depth can facilitate rapid, meaningful place connections during brief tourism encounters.

Participants developed strong place identity, attachment, and dependence through walking tours lasting merely two to four hours, contradicting assumptions underlying sense of place research that meaningful connections require prolonged residence or repeated visitation. This suggests tourism scholarship requires reconceptualization of sense of place formation mechanisms, acknowledging that certain tourism practices particularly those emphasizing embodied engagement and reflective awareness can catalyze place connections through intensive experience rather than extensive duration. This finding supports emerging research suggesting that tourism experiences' transformative potential lies not in temporal length but in experiential depth and quality of engagement (Seyfi et al., 2020).

6. CONCLUSIONS

This interpretative phenomenological analysis reveals how walking tours in Bali function as embodied practices facilitating sense of place formation through intertwined dimensions of place identity, attachment, and dependence (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). The findings demonstrate that walking tours serve as 'transformative mobilities' enabling tourists to construct meaning, reflect on identities, and form emotional

and functional bonds with destinations through intensive experiential engagement rather than extended temporal immersion.

The study makes three theoretical contributions to tourism scholarship. First, it extends place identity theory by revealing 'embodied identity formation' processes wherein physical movement and multisensory engagement actively construct place-self connections. Participants' integration of professional interests with travel experiences demonstrates 'professional-personal synthesis' challenging assumptions that tourism involves identity escape and revealing travel as identity enhancement space (Kirillova et al., 2017). Second, findings advance place attachment understanding through 'somatic place attachment' emotional bonds formed through bodily, multisensory engagement rather than visual consumption alone. This extends Stedman (2003) framework by demonstrating that emotional bonds develop through reflective interactions enabled by walking's deliberate pace. Third, the study proposes 'cultural dependence' and 'atmospheric dependence' as constructs describing tourists' reliance on destinations for authentic cultural experiences and spiritual resources providing existential fulfillment (Masterson et al., 2017).

Most significantly, this research challenges assumptions that sense of place formation requires extended temporal engagement (Lewicka, 2011). Participants developed strong place connections through walking tours lasting two to four hours, revealing that experiential intensity embodied mobility, reflective spaces, multisensory engagement, cultural depth facilitates rapid place connection development. This suggests tourism scholarship requires reconceptualization acknowledging that practices emphasizing embodied engagement can catalyze place connections through intensive experience rather than extensive duration (Zhang & Huang, 2025)

As tourism industries seek models prioritizing meaningful experiences over consumption maximization, understanding how embodied practices create lasting place connections becomes critical. This research demonstrates that sense of place traditionally conceptualized as developing through prolonged residence can emerge through intensive tourism encounters, opening possibilities for reimagining tourism's role in human-place relationships. Walking tours represent opportunities for tourism becoming vehicle for personal transformation, cultural understanding, and place-based consciousness development (Rabbiosi & Meneghello, 2023).

While findings are contextually grounded in Bali's cultural richness, they offer conceptual insights demonstrating how walking tours contribute to experiential tourism development. As destinations navigate tourism's complexities, walking tours offer promising pathways toward futures where visitors and communities engage in mutually enriching cultural exchange revealing tourism's potential as meaningful human endeavor fostering genuine appreciation for places, cultures, and communities rather than mere economic activity.

LIMITATION AND FURTHER STUDY

This study has several limitations. First, the small sample (n=6), though appropriate for IPA, restricts generalizability. Participants were predominantly young, educated, and experienced travelers, suggesting the need for future research examining diverse demographic groups, including older tourists and families. Second, the focus on positive experiences introduces potential self-selection bias, as participants who enjoyed walking tours may differ from those who did not. Exploring unsuccessful or neutral walking experiences could reveal conditions under which sense of place fails to develop. Third, as data were collected within six months of participation, long-term impacts on destination relationships remain unclear; longitudinal research could capture the temporal evolution of place attachment.

Cultural and linguistic factors also warrant attention, as subtle meanings may have been lost in translation and the researcher's familiarity with Balinese contexts may have influenced interpretations. Moreover, this study addressed only guided walking tours, leaving self-directed walking unexplored. Comparative studies could clarify how interpretive mediation shapes place-meaning construction. Finally, findings are contextually grounded in Bali's cultural landscape; cross-cultural comparative research would help determine which processes of place formation are universal versus culturally specific.

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