

# THE PRODUCTION OF RELIGIOUS SPACE: LIVED SPACE AND THE SACRED-ECONOMIC DIALECTIC IN THE SUNAN AMPEL PILGRIMAGE AREA, SURABAYA

Siti Azizah, Karnaji and Bagong Suyanto  
Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia

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**Corresponding author:** Siti Azizah, email: [siti.azizah-2021@fisip.unair.ac.id](mailto:siti.azizah-2021@fisip.unair.ac.id)

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**Abstract:** This study examines the production of religious space in the Sunan Ampel area of Surabaya through a sociological-historical approach, emphasizing the concept of lived space and the dialectics between sacrality and economy. Departing from Henri Lefebvre's theory of space production, this article argues that the sacredness of Ampel is not a static entity that is inherited ahistorically, but rather the result of social construction that continues to be produced and reproduced through ritual practices, social relations, economic activities, and collective memory that are formed historically. This research uses a qualitative method with in-depth interviews, field observations, and historical document analysis. The study's findings show that, sociologically and historically, Ampel evolved from a religious settlement into an urban religious pilgrimage and tourism area with layers of symbolic, social, and economic meaning. The dialectic between sacredness and economics does not exist as a structural conflict of a binary nature, but rather as an everyday social experience negotiated by the actors. In the Sunan Ampel lived space, economic activities are tied to religious ethics and the moral economy, thereby supporting the sacred space's sustainability.

**Keywords:** Space Production; Lived Space; Sacrality; Economy.

## Introduction

The Sunan Ampel religious tourism area in Surabaya is one of Indonesia's important religious destinations, possessing strong historical, spiritual, and social value. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when Sunan

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Ampel established a complex of tombs, mosques, and Islamic boarding schools as a center for the spread of Islam in East Java, the area has developed into a spiritual magnet for pilgrims from various regions, both domestic and international.<sup>1</sup> As one of the Wali Songo tomb sites, Ampel is not only associated with pilgrimage traditions and the Ampel Mosque, but also represents a dynamic urban space shaped by historical processes, social interactions, power relations, and everyday practices. The increasing number of visitors has stimulated economic, social, and cultural activities, particularly religious-based trade and tourism,<sup>2</sup> transforming the area into a meeting point between sacred spirituality and evolving urban-commercial dynamics that reflect contemporary religious urbanism.<sup>3</sup>

Several studies demonstrate that religious tourism areas are shaped by dynamic historical and social processes that transform spatial structures and functions. Research on the Sunan Giri Tomb shows how conflicts and pilgrims' activities continuously reshape religious space as a social product influenced by history, power relations, and everyday practices,<sup>4</sup> while other studies emphasize the role of socio-cultural factors, spatial planning, and conservation in shaping religious destinations.<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on the commodification of sacred spaces further reveals how pilgrimage sites shift toward economic functions under the influence of state and market forces, as religious spatial practices become embedded in the logic of tour-

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<sup>1</sup> Atiek Suprapti Budiarto, Indriastjario, Agung Budi Sardjono, "The Urban Heritage of Masjid Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Toward the Intelligent Urbanism Development," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 227 (2016): 601-608.

<sup>2</sup> Rimadewi Suprihardjo, "Pengembangan Kawasan Cagar Budaya Ampel sebagai Potensi Pariwisata Religi di Surabaya," *Jurnal Penataan Ruang* 11, no. 1 (2016): 30-38.

<sup>3</sup> Farida Hudanti, Takeyuki Okubo, and Petrus N. Indradjati, "Spatial Analysis for Fire Risk Reduction in Kampung Ampel Cultural Heritage Area, Surabaya," *Geoplanning: Journal of Geomatics and Planning* 7, no. 1 (2020): 1-16.

<sup>4</sup> Budi Santosa, Antariksa, Lisa Dwi Wulandari, "Dinamika Ruang Wisata Religi Makam Sunan Giri di Kabupaten Gresik," *El-Harakah* 16, no. 2 (2014): 174-202.

<sup>5</sup> Aqilah N. K. Latif, Wiwik D. Pratiwi, Samsirina, "Analisis Perubahan Peremukiman Akibat Pariwisata di Kawasan Wisata Situ Cileunca Kabupaten Bandung," *Jurnal Lingkungan Binaan Indonesia* 8, no. 3 (2019), 96-104; Suwindar Agung Sutianto, Yuanita F. D. Sidabutar, and M. Ismael P. Sinaga, "Development of Historical and Religious Tourism in Spatial Planning Towards the Utilization of Local Wisdom Potentials in Penyengat Island," *JMKSP (Jurnal Manajemen Kepemimpinan dan Supervisi Pendidikan)* 8, no. 2 (2023): 527-543; Jaeyeon Choe, "Religious Tourism," *Tourism Geographies* 27, no. 3-4 (2025): 830-39.

ism and capitalism.<sup>6</sup> Although these studies highlight the transformation and reproduction of religious space, they tend to focus on symbolic, functional, or economic aspects without sufficiently examining the long-term historical dynamics and the everyday lived practices through which local communities maintain and negotiate the meaning of sacred space, leaving room for further exploration in the context of Ampel.<sup>7</sup>

From a sociological perspective, religious space is not merely a geographical location but a social arena where religious practices, power relations, symbolic interactions, and meaning-making processes continuously unfold. The theory of the production of space, particularly Henri Lefebvre's framework, understands space as a dynamic social construct shaped through the dialectic of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational (lived) space, emphasizing that religious sites are experienced emotionally and symbolically by their actors. This perspective is relevant for analyzing areas such as Sunan Ampel, where rituals, pilgrimages, and everyday social interactions actively reproduce the space as a vibrant religious environment. Nevertheless, studies of religious tourism spaces often remain confined within a dichotomy between sacredness and commercialization, positioning economic activity solely as a threat to religious space.

Based on these conditions, this article departs from the argument that the Sunan Ampel area is a socio-religious space produced through a dialectical relationship between religious practices, economic activities, and the life experiences of the actors who live there. The sacredness of Ampel is not inherent or fixed; it is continually reproduced through pilgrimage practices, rituals, social manners, and the internalization of religious values in daily activities, including economic practices. Economic activity cannot be understood solely as a process of commodification of space, but as part of a lived space that is attached to the meaning of blessings, devotion, and religious

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<sup>6</sup> Rizal Akbar Aldyan, "The Commodification of Religious Tourism in the Tomb of Sunan Kudus," *Cultural Tourism Research* 2, no. 7 (2020): 32-47; A. Sumandiyar and H. Nur, "Space Capitalization and Marginalization of Communities Around the Sultan Hasanuddin International Airport Area," *Phinisi Integration Review* 3, no. 2 (2020): 249-255.

<sup>7</sup> Agus Subaḡin, Antariksa Antariksa, Lisa Dwi Wulandari, Herry Santoso, "Patterns of Sacred Spaces in the Settlement with Religious Plurality: Balun Village, Lamongan," *Journal of Islamic Architecture* 7, no. 3 (2023): 493-500.

ethics. Thus, sacredness and capitalization in Ampel do not exist as binary oppositions that negate each other, but rather as co-existing and negotiated relationships in the experience of everyday space. Based on the above background, this study addresses the following research question: How is religious space in the Sunan Ampel religious tourism area of Surabaya produced through lived space, and how is the sacrality–economy dialectic interpreted and negotiated in the everyday social practices of the actors involved?

This study uses a type of qualitative research with a phenomenological approach and in-depth interviews to explore the spatial experiences of pilgrims, residents, traders, religious leaders, and community leaders in the Sunan Ampel area. The research was conducted from July 2025 to January 2026. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document and literature searches related to sacred spaces, pilgrimage, and space production. Data analysis was conducted thematically using Henri Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space, which views space as a social product shaped by production relations, power, and everyday practices.<sup>8</sup> In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre proposes a triadic framework, spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and representational or lived space, that emphasizes the dialectical relationship between space production and social life.<sup>9</sup> These interconnected dimensions provide a comprehensive lens for examining how social practices, lived experiences, and symbolic meanings interact in shaping space. Through this approach, the research aims to offer conceptual and empirical contributions to the study of urban religious spaces, particularly in understanding how sacred spaces remain meaningful amid ongoing social and economic dynamics.<sup>10</sup>

## History and Meaning of the Sunan Ampel Area

Historically, the Sunan Ampel area has been a center of Islamic da’wah and religious settlements on the north coast of East Java

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<sup>8</sup> Olusola Oladapo Makinde and Amao Funmilayo Lanrewaju, “Henri Lefebvre Theory of Space and Social Production Philosophy: A Critical Interpretation,” *Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2024): 67-80.

<sup>9</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 33-39.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

since the 15th century. The presence of Sunan Ampel as a key figure in the process of Islamization of East Java not only marked the religious transformation of the local community but also shaped the configuration of a distinctive social space. The establishment of the Ampel Mosque and the existence of Sunan Ampel's tomb are the core of the sacred space that remains the center of the community's spiritual, social, and cultural orientation to this day.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 1.** Ampel Mosque (Source: Personal documentation, 2025).

The Ampel Mosque is the main sacred site in the Ampel area and serves as the center of the community's spiritual activities and pilgrimages. The mosque not only serves as a place of worship but also as a symbol of the region's sanctity and religious identity. Every pilgrim who enters the mosque area generally passes through several gates that mark the transition from the profane to the sacred, creat-

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<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of the history of Sunan Ampel and the Ampel Mosque in the Islamic tradition of East Java and its role as a center for *da'wah* in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

ing a gradual and reflective spiritual experience. *Salāh*, prayer, recitation, and socio-religious interaction activities take place continuously, making this mosque a spiritual as well as a social center for the Ampel people.



**Figure 2.** Sunan Ampel's Tomb (Source: Personal documentation, 2025).

The existence of the Ampel Mosque and the Sunan Ampel Tomb not only serves as a center of religious rituals but also as a historical symbol that binds the collective memory of the Ampel people. The pilgrimage activities that lasted almost all day created a strong religious atmosphere, marked by prayer, chanting, scripture reading, and social interaction among pilgrims. This sacred space is a meeting point between the spiritual and social dimensions, where acts of worship coexist alongside the tradition of maintaining social ties. The high intensity of the visit shows the strategic role of the sacred space as the main driver of the dynamics of the Ampel area as a whole.

From a sociological perspective, the sacred space of Ampel does not exist as a complete entity at a specific point in time. Still, it is produced and reproduced through a long historical process. The sacredness of this area is built through the repetition of pilgrimage practices and religious rituals, and through the transmission of collective memory across generations. Mosques and tombs not only preserve traces of local Islamic history but also serve as collective symbols that bind the community to the narrative of da'wah, blessings, and the religious authority of Sunan Ampel. Thus, the sacred

space of Ampel can be understood as a living historical space rather than a relic of the past.

The practice of pilgrimage is one of the mechanisms that maintains the historical continuity of this region. Pilgrimage not only preserves the memory of Sunan Ampel as a guardian figure but also repeatedly reenacts the meaning of space in the pilgrim's life. Sutan Rajatinggi Ritonga, a pilgrim who has been coming repeatedly since the 1990s, emphasized that the physical changes in the region have not changed the inner meaning he feels. He stated that he still interpreted Ampel as "*a place of prayer to ask for help from God.*"<sup>12</sup> This statement shows that the historical continuity of Ampel's space lies more in the reproduction of symbolic meaning and spiritual experience than in the stability of its physical form.

The continuity of this meaning is also strengthened by residents' and community leaders' historical awareness. For them, Ampel is not just a residential area or a religious tourist destination, but a "guardian area" that embodies purity and the history of Islamic *da'wah*. Mbah Mustajab, a local community leader, emphasized the importance of maintaining this awareness amid changing times. He stated, "*The trick is to continue to instill awareness that Ampel is a guardian area, not merely a place of business.*"<sup>13</sup> This statement shows that historical memory serves as a symbolic framework that guides how space is used and negotiated by various social actors.

Over time, the growing number of pilgrims has encouraged the development of supporting economic activities around the Ampel area. The trade in worship equipment, food and beverages, parking services, and lodging is growing to meet pilgrims' needs. This phenomenon shows that, from the beginning, the sacred space of Ampel was never completely separated from the surrounding community's socio-economic life. These economic activities are not a new phenomenon that has emerged solely as a result of modernization, but rather part of social adaptation that has historically accompanied the development of pilgrimage practices.

In this context, the relationship between sacredness and economics in Ampel can be understood as the result of an adaptive historical process. Economic activity is not necessarily seen as a threat to the sacredness of space but as part of the pilgrimage eco-

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Sutan Rajatinggi Ritonga, Surabaya, October 28, 2025

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mbah Mustajab, Surabaya, December 12, 2025

system that supports the sustainability of religious practices. This understanding is also reflected in residents' experiences. Bu Muslihah emphasized that for a long time, the functions of space in Ampel have coexisted in a relatively harmonious manner. She stated, "The mosque is to do *ṣalāh*, the Sunan Ampel is to pray. Those who sell are selling, those who make pilgrimages are pilgrims."<sup>14</sup> This statement demonstrates a historical understanding of the differentiation of spatial functions, which strengthens the region's sacred meaning.

Thus, the historical trajectory of the Sunan Ampel area shows that the production of sacred spaces unfolds over a long-term process involving Islamic da'wah, pilgrimage practices, collective memory, and socio-economic adaptation. The sacredness of Ampel does not rest on static physical forms, but on society's ability to continue reproducing the meaning of space through living social practices. The relationship between sacredness and economy in this region is not the result of a momentary compromise but a reflection of the historical dynamics that have shaped Ampel as an urban religious space that has survived across generations.

#### *Religious Practices and the Establishment of Living Space in the Sunan Ampel Area*

Within the framework of space production theory, Henri Lefebvre places lived space as the dimension of space closest to human experience, namely, space that is emotionally, symbolically, and existentially lived in daily life. Living space cannot be fully understood through its formal function or physical form, but rather through how it is perceived, interpreted, and lived by social actors. This perspective is important when reading the Sunan Ampel area, where religious spaces are not only places of worship but also living spaces that touch the inner dimension and shape the social experience of their users.

In the context of the Sunan Ampel area, religious practices play a role as the main medium for the formation of lived space, because sacred spaces are not only perceived as places of worship, but as living spaces that are full of symbolic and spiritual meaning. This is in line with Eliade's thinking, which distinguishes sacred space as a

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Bu Muslihah, Surabaya, October 29, 2025

space that has a special existential quality compared to a profane space.<sup>15</sup> Through ritual practices, pilgrimages, and daily religious activities, the space in the Sunan Ampel area touches the inner dimension of human beings. It shapes the way they interpret their existence and their relationship with the social and spiritual environment.<sup>16</sup>

Empirical findings in the Ampel area also show that the value of space is determined not only by physical factors but also by non-physical ones, such as religious beliefs, collective memory, and people's spiritual experiences, which continuously shape the area's identity and spatial meaning. In the Sunan Ampel area, religious practice is the primary medium for the formation of lived space, where sacred space is not only perceived as a place of worship but also as a living space that touches the mind and shapes how humans interpret their existence.

In the Sunan Ampel area, religious practices such as pilgrimage, prayer, and *tawassul* rituals are important in shaping lived spaces. The space in this region is not just a physical place, but a space that connects individuals with a deeper spiritual dimension. For many pilgrims, the Ampel space is a place of hope, inner peace, and closeness to the God. Agus Khaerul, a pilgrim who visited Ampel, described his experience by saying, "It's just right here, people are *tawassul* (intercessory prayer) here, people are looking for *barakah* (blessing) here."<sup>17</sup> This statement describes how the Ampel space is experienced emotionally, as a place that is more than just a ritual location, but also a spiritual space that gives serenity and hope.

The spiritual experience at Ampel is not only personal, but also collective. Muhammad Jamaluddin, a pilgrim who often spends the night in the mosque's foyer, said he came to Ampel out of an inner urge to calm down. He said, "If you want to come here, it comes from the heart, want to calm down. The aura here makes you calm down."<sup>18</sup> This experience shows how the Ampel space lives in the pilgrims' consciousness as a place of spiritual escape, where they rearrange their emotions and the meaning of their lives.

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<sup>15</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1959).

<sup>16</sup> Jack Williams, "Embodied World Construction: A Phenomenology of Ritual," *Religious Studies* 60, no. 1 (2024): 103-122.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Agus Khaerul, Surabaya, 28 Oktober 2025

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Muhammad Jamaluddin, Surabaya, October 28, 2025

Sutan Rajatinggi Ritonga, a pilgrim who has visited Ampel repeatedly since the 1990s, stated that although the area's physical facilities have changed, his inner experience has remained consistent. He called Ampel a "place of prayer to ask for help from God."<sup>19</sup> This shows that the experience of space in Ampel does not depend entirely on physical changes but rather on a symbolic meaning that is sustained through ongoing religious practice.

Ampel's lived space is shaped not only by pilgrims' experiences but also by residents who live there daily. For residents, Ampel is a domestic, social, and religious space that blends into their daily routines. Bu Muslihah, a resident of Madura descent who has lived in the Ampel area since childhood, interprets space with a clear but side-by-side division of functions. She said, "The mosque is to do *salah*, the Ampel area is to pray. Those who sell are selling, those who are pilgrims are pilgrims, they have their own goals."<sup>20</sup> Within the framework of lived spaces, these spaces are part of citizens' consciousness, inseparable from religious and social life.

For Hj. Rusni, a resident who manages a coffee shop around the Ampel area, daily practices in Ampel are carried out with a balance between work and worship. She stated that residents live a lifestyle: "When it's time to work, you work. When it's time to worship, you worship."<sup>21</sup> It shows how religious spaces not only organize economic life but also provide ethical structure and meaning within citizens' social routines.

In Ampel's lived space, spaces such as alleys, markets, and mosque courtyards are also part of a social landscape full of meaning. Alleys are not only understood as a space of circulation, but also as a space for meeting, interaction, and small economic activities. Hanafi, a resident, said that the spaces are "a place where people interact to meet their needs."<sup>22</sup> This shows that the space is not just for moving from one place to another, but also as a social space that facilitates economic activities and interactions between individuals.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Sutan Rajatinggi Ritonga, Surabaya, October 28, 2025

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Muslihah, Surabaya, October 29, 2025

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Hj. Rusni, Surabaya, November 13, 2025

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Hanafi, Surabaya, November 13, 2025



**Figure 3.** Food stalls and motorcycle parking in the alley and in front of residents' houses (Source: Personal documentation).

The picture above shows concretely how the narrow alley in the Ampel area has transformed the function and meaning of space. Visually, the alley that was supposed to serve as the village's circulation space appeared crowded, with motorcycles parked tightly on both sides, leaving a narrow lane in the middle for pedestrians. This condition shows the intensification of the use of space: the alley is no longer just a mobility route for citizens but also functions as a parking area, an economic space, and a transit space for tourists. Thus, this image not only records the alley's physical condition but also shows the shift in power relations across space. The village space is an arena for negotiation among residents' needs, economic interests, and religious tourism flows. Alleys are no longer merely spaces belonging to local communities but part of a wider network

of urban spaces where various actors and interests meet, compete, and adapt.

In addition, the unwritten symbolic mechanism also plays a role in maintaining the sacred meaning of the Ampel space. Umar, a resident of Arab descent, insisted that the area of the mosque and tomb should be well respected, as “it is not allowed to do anything of various things, for fear of tarnish.”<sup>23</sup> This belief shows that the lived space in Ampel is maintained by people’s inner awareness of moral consequences, not just by formal rules or regulations.

Overall, Ampel’s lived space is a space lived in layers by various actors, pilgrims, residents, and economic actors. The Ampel space is not just a physical location, but a social-religious space that continues to live and reproduce in the daily experiences of the actors involved. The sacred space and the daily space in Ampel do not contradict each other; rather, they reinforce one another in the life of the local community, showing how the lived space continues to develop through intertwined social interactions.

Thus, analyzing the space in the Ampel area through the concept of lived space allows a more complete understanding of how sacred spaces survive and reproduce in everyday life. The sacredness of Ampel does not come solely from history or physical buildings, but from life experiences that are continually renewed through social, emotional, and meaningful practices shared with them. The Ampel area is not only the space used, but also the space where the actors actually live.

### **Economic Activity and Transformation of Sacred Space Experience in the Ampel Area**

As a religious tourism area, Ampel offers a multidimensional experience that combines worship practices with economic activities. Visitors not only come to make a pilgrimage, but also enjoy culinary tours, shopping, and a distinctive historical atmosphere. This is acknowledged by Agus Khaerul, a pilgrim, who stated that the existence of traders is actually an important part of the pilgrimage experience. According to him, “We do need pilgrim traders; if we don’t bring drinks here, we will automatically buy them. Fortu-

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Umar, Surabaya, October 31, 2025

nately, there are traders, right?”<sup>24</sup> statement shows that economic activities in Ampel are not seen as a disturbance to the sacred but as a support for pilgrims’ needs.



**Figure 3.** The Entrance Gate to Sunan Ampel’s Tomb (Source: Personal documentation, 2025)

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Agus Khaerul, Surabaya, October 28, 2025.



**Figure 4.** Shops and street vendor stalls in front of the Entrance Gate  
(Source: Personal documentation, 2025).

Rows of shops and stalls, starting from the entrance of the Ampel tomb and extending along Ampel Mosque and Ampel Suci Street, peddle various Islamic products, including *peci* (Muslim cap), *mukena* (female prayer attire), prayer mats, food, drinks, fruits, and other worship equipment. This trade activity is very dense, especially along Ampel Suci Street, which is the main route for pilgrims to the tomb. The existence of this religious commodity emphasizes Ampel's identity as a pilgrimage-based economic center. Agus Khaerul also described the spatial experience by saying that: "When we entered from the Ampel Mosque alley, the religious atmosphere was immediately felt. Along the way, there are already those selling *peci*, *mukena*, and prayer mats. The buying and selling activity is so integrated with the existing pilgrimage space. In my opinion, conditions like this can only be found in religious pilgrimage areas. If it weren't for the place of pilgrimage, it would be impossible for this kind of trade to flourish."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Within the framework of lived space proposed by Henri Lefebvre, space in Ampel does not exist as a static, sterile entity separate from the profane world. Instead, this space is produced simultaneously by worship practices, economic activities, and social interactions, which are intertwined in complex and ambivalent religious experiences. In Ampel, the sacredness is manifested not only in certain places, such as tombs or mosques, but also in daily life involving social and economic interactions. Pilgrims, for example, experience the Ampel space not only as a sacred space for prayer but also as a crowded space with economic activities such as trade, parking services, and others. This condition shows that the sacred space in Ampel cannot be understood as a place of worship alone, but as a living space full of activity and continuous social dynamics.

The religious experience at Ampel is layered and takes place in physical space. Pilgrims must pass through crowded areas full of social interaction before reaching quieter spaces such as mosques or tombs. This process creates a transitional experience, allowing pilgrims to adjust from their busy daily lives to a more sacred space. This aligns with Robert A. Orsi's view of lived religion, which emphasizes that religion is lived through concrete, daily practices and is not separate from the socio-economic context of its people.<sup>26</sup>

From the perspective of lived space, space in Ampel is not only produced by religious activities such as worship and pilgrimage, but also by economic activities surrounding it. Trading activities, such as the sale of worship supplies, food stalls, parking services, and others, are inseparable from the religious experience. For Bu Ida, a restaurant owner in Gang Ampel Rahmat, the Ampel area is still considered a "spiritual visit," even though she trades there. She revealed that she still respects the area as a religious space rather than just a tourist or commercial attraction.<sup>27</sup>

This shows that, for many economic actors, the space in Ampel is not only understood as a commercial space but also as part of a religious space that must be maintained through manners and boundaries. The existence of street vendors such as Bu Korib also reflects the ambivalence between the sacred and the profane. Although she viewed the core area of the tomb as a sacred space, she

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<sup>26</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Life of Everyday People* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Ida, Surabaya, October 28, 2025.

also stated that his economic activities had a religious dimension because she sought the pleasure of God.<sup>28</sup>

This ambivalent phenomenon is clearly seen in the work of a parking attendant like Faizal, who works on Nyamplungan Street. Faizal interprets parking spaces as “both” sacred and commercial. He realized that his job was to make a living, but the parking space was still respected as part of the worship area.<sup>29</sup> The experiences of Faizal and other parking attendants, such as Safari, who work near the tomb, show how functionally profane spaces, such as parking lots, are still interpreted through religious consciousness because they are directly related to pilgrimage activities.

In this case, work in Ampel is not just an economic activity but also a contribution to the smooth running of pilgrims. Safari even believes his work is worth the reward because it enables others to worship smoothly.<sup>30</sup> This underscores that, in the lived space, economic activity is understood not only as a profane transaction but also as part of a spiritual dimension that connects individuals to religious and social values. In this context, work in the Sunan Ampel area is more than just a means of earning a living; it is part of the devotion that supports the smooth worship of pilgrims, which, in turn, gives deep meaning to these workers’ daily lives.

For traders like Nizar, who sell around Sunan Ampel’s tomb, the ambivalence between religiosity and commerciality is reflexively realized. He acknowledged that the Ampel area is increasingly commercial as the number of pilgrims grows, but he still emphasizes that it is first understood as a place of worship. Nizar stated, “Trading near the tomb of the guardian must be carried out with intention and manners, because if the intention is straight, economic activity will actually be a source of blessings.”<sup>31</sup> This shows that commerciality in the Ampel area does not eliminate the sacred, but is negotiated through the intentions, manners, and moral awareness of economic actors.

In addition, residents’ experiences, such as Bu Muslihah’s, show that the density of economic and social activities in Ampel is accepted as part of daily life without offending religious values. Ac-

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Qorib, Surabaya, October 21, 2025

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Faizal, Surabaya, October 21, 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Safari, Surabaya, October 21, 2025

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Nizar, Surabaya, December 11, 2025.

ording to Bu. Muslihah, although Ampel is crowded with pilgrims and economic activity, the space's function is still clearly understood by residents. This social consciousness, according to him, regulates the ambivalence between commerciality and religiosity in a harmonious way.<sup>32</sup> However, symbolic tensions remain. Residents like Utomo remind us that if Ampel is understood only as a commercial space, its sacred value can be threatened. He revealed, "If Ampel is commercialized, it could bring divine punishment." This statement shows that although economic activity is well developed in Ampel, the local people still maintain the area's sanctity.

Mbah Mustajab, a community leader, interpreted this change as a challenge to maintain balance. He acknowledged that economic activity is growing, but emphasized that manners and respect for sacred spaces must be maintained. "Trading is allowed, many can, but manners and respect for holy places must not be lost."<sup>33</sup> This realization shows that, in the lived space, the balance between sacredness and commerciality in Ampel is shaped not only by policy but also by the internalization of religious values in daily practice.

Overall, the experience of space at Ampel illustrates how economic activity transforms sacred space without eliminating its religious significance. The Ampel space is lived as a simultaneous space, where religious and commercial aspects are intertwined. In the lived space experience, the sacred is not only present in the silence but also in the hustle and bustle, transactions, and daily economic activities that various actors constantly negotiate.

## **Religious and Economic Dialectics in Ampel Space**

The dialectic between religiosity and economics is a key dimension in understanding the production of space in the Sunan Ampel area. In many studies of sacred spaces, economic activities around religious sites are often understood reductively as a form of commercialization that can damage the sacred. In the context of Ampel, economics and religiosity do not exist as strictly separate domains; they are intertwined in the experience of daily space (lived space).

Within the framework of Henri Lefebvre's theory, this dialectic is understood not as a structural conflict or a battle of interests

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Muslihah, Surabaya, October 29, 2025.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mustajab, Surabaya, December 12, 2025

among actors, but rather as a social experience that is constantly negotiated in everyday practice. In his view, space is not a final product, but a process that is always open to social negotiation. Thus, sacredness and profanity are not two poles that negate each other, but two dimensions that coexist in the spatial consciousness of Ampel society.

Lefebvre's approach is important in this regard because it shifts the focus of spatial analysis from macro structures or the interests of mere actors to everyday practice as the main arena of meaning production. Dialectics in Lefebvre's thought are not binary oppositions that conflict; rather, they are fluid, intertwined relationships. Space is understood as a process open to social negotiation, in which sacred and economic meanings are formed together through social interactions.<sup>34</sup>

In religious contexts, the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane is often understood as two strictly separate realms. However, existing studies show that such segregation is conceptual and does not fully reflect the community's social experience. In the spatial analysis of religion, the sacred and the profane often coexist in the same space, especially in urban contexts. The religious space is not only a place for rituals but also a space for social, economic, and cultural interaction.<sup>35</sup>

Empirically, the interpenetration of ritual practices and economic activities in Ampel reinforces the argument that religious-economic dialectics cannot be reduced to "commercialization" that automatically destroys the sacred, but rather is part of the production of space in everyday experience (*lived space*). In line with Henri Lefebvre's framework, this relationship is better understood as an ongoing social negotiation: space is not a final product but a process constantly reshaped by everyday practices that govern how people move, interact, and interpret sites. Therefore, the sacred and the profane do not exist as binary oppositions that negate each other, but rather as two dimensions that coexist and frame each other. Economic practices acquire an ethical orientation from religious values, while religious experiences unfold within the density of urban social functions. In the spatial analysis of religion, this condition re-

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<sup>34</sup> Tilman Schwarze, *Space, Urban Politics, and Everyday Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2023).

<sup>35</sup> Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2015).

inforces the critique of the conceptual understanding of the sacred-profane dichotomies, because religious spaces in cities such as Ampel work simultaneously as an arena for ritual, social interaction, economic circulation, and cultural reproduction, where sacred meaning and economic logic are woven together in fluid and sustainable spatial dynamics.

The dialectic of religiosity and economics in the Sunan Ampel Mosque area needs to be placed in the historiography of Islamic movements in Indonesia, which, from the beginning, shows the relationship between da'wah, trade networks, and the formation of urban communities. Empirically, Ampel shows that economic practices are not external elements considered to pollute sacred space, but rather a constitutive part of religious experience, challenging the assumptions of modern literature that often equate economic existence with the degradation of sacredness.<sup>36</sup> If we take it further, this relationship is a recurring pattern in the history of Islam Nusantara: merchant networks play a role as a medium for the transmission of teachings and the consolidation of coastal communities, while figures such as Sunan Ampel in traditional narratives are not only understood as scholars, but also socio-economic nodes that support authority and expand the spread of da'wah influence so that the production of Ampel space today can be read as a continuation of the integration of religiosity and economics that rooted from the beginning.

In a broader historiographic frame, Ampel represents an urban Islamic space where mosques, tombs, markets, and pious practices develop in a mutually formative manner, thereby supporting the reproduction of religious spaces, communal solidarity, and the sustainability of the livelihoods of the surrounding community.<sup>37</sup> Empirical findings corroborate the analysis that the economy around the religious space does not merely work as a logic of capital that infiltrates the sacred, but as a practice that continues to be assessed, limited, and legitimized through moral devices such as manners, halal, service, and collective memory of the “guardian area.” In the context of contemporary Indonesian Islamic movements, this

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<sup>36</sup> M. Rizal Abdi, “Flock With God, Ally With Money: Pilgrimage of the Wali As Generator of Local Economy,” *Nisḥam* 5, no. 2 (2017): 1-14.

<sup>37</sup> M. Madyan, Himmatul Kholidah, Dina Fitriasia S., and Nisful Laila, “Dampak Ekonomi Wisata Religi, Studi Kasus Kawasan Wisata Sunan Ampel Surabaya,” *BISMA (Bisnis dan Manajemen)* 7, no. 2 (2018): 101-106.

mechanism suggests that the Islamization of public space does not always move through the formalization of rules or ideological battles, but also through community-based normative governance that constantly negotiates the limits of economic fairness; This dynamic is also related to the process of increasing the visibility of Islamic practices in the public sphere since the end of the New Orde.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the expansion of the religious economy can be read through the debate on the commodification of religious symbols as market commodities,<sup>39</sup> including when the practice of religious travel (tourism/pilgrimage) is increasingly connected to the economy through social media and popular culture.<sup>40</sup>

In the context of Ampel, economics is embedded in the structure of religious values that shape the orientation, ethics, and boundaries of economic practice. The value of blessings, manners, and service to pilgrims became the moral foundation that framed economic activities. These religious values function as a moral control mechanism that limits economic activities considered to violate the sacredness of space. Nevertheless, symbolic tensions remain, indicating that the relationship between religiosity and economics in Ampel is dynamic rather than static. The sacredness of space does not exist as a finished condition, but as a meaning that is constantly maintained, negotiated, and reproduced through everyday social practice. Economics is accepted as long as it is understood as part of the service of pilgrimage and the search for halal sustenance. Still, it becomes questionable when it exceeds the symbolic limit considered appropriate.

These findings in Ampel confirm the criticism of the sacred-profane dichotomy in the study of religious space, while complementing it by showing that ritual and economic coexistence do not simply passively coexist but function as a mechanism for producing the sacred itself. Many assume that the presence of the automatic

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<sup>38</sup> Imas Lu'ul Jannah, "Pious Yet Trendy Young Muslim: 'The Bros Team' and Public Qur'an in Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 23, no. 2 (2022): 373-390.

<sup>39</sup> Lida Maulida and Doli Witro, "Komodifikasi Simbol-Simbol Agama di Kalangan Kelas Menengah Muslim di Indonesia," *SOSEBI: Jurnal Penelitian Mahasiswa Ilmu Sosial Ekonomi dan Bisnis Islam* 2, no. 2 (2022), 137-152.

<sup>40</sup> Amelia Fauzia and Haryo Mojopahit, "Instagramable Pilgrimage: Spiritualism, Conservatism and Commodified Religion on Indonesian Celebgrams Posts," *Kha-zanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 21, no. 2 (2023), 245-272.

market entails a degrading commodification that undermines the sacred. Still, Ampel's case challenges this reductionist reading: economic practices are received, organized, and lived through a living moral apparatus, manners, *halal*, service, and the memory of the "guardian area" so that the economy does not appear as an intruding external logic, but rather as a practice that is continuously negotiated to maintain the limits of propriety. Thus, Ampel can be read as a religious-economic hybrid model that is both historical and contemporary, in which the sacredness of urban space is produced relationally through a continuous encounter between religious authority, community norms, and livelihood needs.

## Conclusion

The Sunan Ampel area emerges as an urban religious space formed through complex socio-historical processes and continuously reproduced through pilgrimage practices, collective memory, and socio-economic adaptation. Rather than a static sacred site or merely a historical relic, Ampel constitutes a lived space whose sacredness is not inherently given but socially constructed and historically maintained. The repetition of rituals, the transmission of guardianship narratives, and the internalization of religious ethics and manners in everyday life sustain its symbolic continuity. Thus, the durability of Ampel does not rest primarily on its physical form, but on the ongoing reproduction of meaning enacted by the actors who inhabit and utilize the space.

This study contributes to discussions of urban Islamic space by demonstrating that religiosity and economic activity in Ampel operate not as opposing forces but as an integrated praxis encompassing pilgrimage, trade, service, and moral regulation. The findings challenge the assumption that commercialization necessarily erodes sacredness. In Ampel, economic practices function within a morally regulated pilgrimage ecosystem in which communal norms define limits, purposes, and ethical orientations. Drawing on Lefebvre's framework, Ampel can be understood as a space produced through the interaction of perceived space, conceived space, and lived space, where sacred and profane dimensions intertwine in everyday experience. Here, religiosity is expressed not only in formal rituals but also in trade ethics, service conduct, worship rhythms, and behav-

ioral norms that collectively safeguard sacred meaning amid urban density.

Historically, the Ampel case expands scholarship on coastal and urban religious formations by showing that the mosque–market nexus is not a modern anomaly but rooted in long-standing linkages among da’wah, community life, and economic circulation. Yet this continuity is not mechanical repetition; it is continually mediated by urban planning regimes, tourism policies, and contemporary economic dynamics. Ampel should therefore be read not through a binary of enduring tradition versus destructive commodification, but as an arena of ongoing historical negotiation in which authority, economy, and guardianship memory are constantly reconfigured. For urban religious tourism governance, this implies that sustaining sacred space requires alignment with lived values and moral rhythms of the community, while future research may extend this analysis comparatively across wali sites and further examine how moral-economic boundaries and authority contestations are negotiated in everyday spatial practice.

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