



Traditional Spirituality and Sustainability: Global Perspectives

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Abstract

This book chapter highlights the affinities between traditional spirituality and sustainability. Across global and local contexts, development initiatives have often privileged outsider perspectives and technocratic interventions that misalign with local worldviews. Consequently, many climate change adaptation efforts have proved ineffective and unsustainable, shaped by foreign agendas and external funding. Moreover, many traditional knowledge-holders perceive modern development models as grounded in materialism, consumerism, and excess, rendering them incongruent with their local values and cosmologies. Set against

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this background, the chapter calls for a paradigmatic shift in research, policy, and practice to better harness the synergies between traditional spirituality and sustainable development. Such alignment promises adaptation strategies that are not only more effective and enduring but also more equitable, ethical, and culturally grounded. The chapter also introduces this volume—*Handbook of Traditional Spirituality and Sustainability*—outlining its structure, thematic focus, and individual contributions across seven regional and conceptual sections.

Keywords

Traditional spirituality · Local knowledge · Sustainability · Sustainable development goals (SDGs)

1 Introduction

Across the world, many of the most biodiverse ecosystems have been preserved through the stewardship of traditional cultures living sustainably within them (Dawson et al. 2021; Ellis et al. 2021). Examples abound that illustrate how communities have leveraged their local traditional (indigenous) knowledge to adapt effectively to climate change (Granderson 2017; Leal Filho et al. 2021; Makondo and Thomas 2018; Schramm et al. 2020). One success factor for ecologically resonant conservation and adaptation practices is that indigenous ways of life are often rooted in values and cosmologies that foster environmentally attuned “land-care practices of reverential reciprocity” (Nelson 2020, para. 10). A substantial body of literature highlights the relatively harmonious interrelationship between indigenous knowledge, traditional spirituality, and sustainable subsistence (Granderson 2017; Gupta and Agrawal 2017; Nelson and Shilling 2018; Yunkaporta 2019). This chapter explores the nexus between traditional spirituality and sustainability in five concise sections. It begins by outlining key affinities between spirituality and sustainable practices (Sect. 2). It then examines the challenges that hinder broader integration of these perspectives into a meaningful framework for research, policy, and practice (Sect. 3). The chapter concludes by proposing a future research agenda (Sect. 4), positioning the contributions of this volume as a direct response to the identified challenges, and outlining the volume structure (Sect. 5) and individual book chapters (Sect. 6).

2 Spirituality and Sustainable Practices—Affinities and Opportunities

Many traditional cultures and communities have lived sustainably on the Earth since time immemorial, leveraging their place-informed and worldview-shaped traditions and practices to promote a respectful and harmonious coexistence with the Earth and walk lightly on it (Luetz 2024). Worldview plays a vital—though often under-recognised—role, and holds considerable promise for shaping global sustainability

discourse, biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, and initiatives such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Leal Filho et al. 2021; Luetz 2026; UN 2015). Crucially, Kennedy et al. (2020) propose that indigenous knowledge creation and dissemination can support a global transition toward a more sustainable development paradigm (see also Krenak 2020; Tu’itahi et al. 2021).

These legacies and perspectives embody a compelling case for reimagining ecological conservation and sustainability through spirituality-informed lenses. Central to this vision is the appreciation of traditional spiritualities, values, and knowledge systems as more than local curiosities—they are foundational epistemologies that continue to underpin sustainable ways of life. There is growing recognition that such knowledge, historically marginalised by dominant paradigms, may hold critical insights for navigating present and future ecological crises. Engaging these worldviews is thus not merely an ethical imperative, but a strategic and epistemic necessity for advancing sustainable practices. While specific traditional spirituality and sustainability practice varies widely among communities and groups, the literature consistently emphasises the holistic nature of worldviews wherein the self is understood in relational terms, embedded in local environments (Berkes et al. 1994; Throsby and Petetskaya 2016).

Sustainable development should be better informed by worldview perspectives because spirituality often aligns closely with environmental stewardship, place-based understandings and ethics, and intergenerational responsibility. In many traditional and non-Western worldviews, nature is not merely a resource but a sacred entity imbued with spiritual significance. Such worldview perspectives promote practices of reverential reciprocity, in which human interaction with nature is guided by humility and respect rather than extraction and domination (Luetz and Nunn 2023). For example, Pacific Island communities have long sustained biodiverse ecosystems through spiritually grounded practices (Luetz and Nunn 2020, 2021). Integrating spirituality offers not only a motivational force unmatched by economics or science (Fair 2018) but also encourages holistic development rooted in shared values and ethical responsibility (Leal Filho et al. 2022). As Luetz and Nunn (2023) argue, recognising the entangled relationship between spirituality and sustainability can help overcome the shortcomings of purely rationalist paradigms and foster more enduring, just, and context-sensitive development outcomes.

3 Challenges and Obstacles Hindering Broader Integration

Despite their value, indigenous and traditional knowledge systems continue to be widely sidelined by dominant technocratic models that shape most global development policy and practice. Many climate change adaptation initiatives, often funded and designed externally, have been ineffective and unsustainable precisely because they misalign with local spiritual and ecological worldviews (Bedford et al. 2021; Luetz and Nunn 2020, 2021; McNamara et al. 2020). Relatedly, development, as

understood in many global contexts, often remains narrowly framed by economic growth, material accumulation, and consumerism (Ahenakew 2016; Wiedmann et al. 2020). For instance, Ahenakew (2016) critiques that in most modern societies, the notion of progress is almost always framed in terms of “an unsustainable single story of development as social-economic accumulation” (p. 324). Such reductionist notions fail to resonate with indigenous cosmologies, which tend to emphasise holism, reciprocity, and interconnectedness (Atkinson-Nolte et al. 2021; Throsby and Petetskaya 2016; Tu’itahi et al. 2021).

Consequently, indigenous peoples—despite living on the frontlines of climate change and possessing invaluable local knowledge—are often excluded from formal decision-making processes. Instead, their contributions are subordinated to scientific studies, which are perceived as epistemologically superior (Ford et al. 2016; García-del-Amo et al. 2020; Makondo and Thomas 2018; Schipper et al. 2021). This dynamic is vividly evident in contexts such as the Pacific Islands, where traditional spiritual insights are frequently dismissed or even disparaged (Luetz and Nunn 2020). For example, Fair (2018) observes that religious knowledge is often relegated to the “bottom tier” (p. 6) of epistemological legitimacy, associated with “deviation, ignorance, passivity and maladaptivity” (Kempf 2017, p. 30). In addition, development discourse commonly casts indigenous peoples as passive recipients of Western interventions, rather than as active agents and knowledge-holders with ecological literacy and spiritual insight (Ahenakew 2016; Krenak 2020; Yunkaporta 2019). In consequence, dominant development discourses and epistemological hierarchies perpetuate colonial legacies and marginalise alternative knowledge systems critical to resilience (Luetz et al. 2023). The obstacles to harnessing indigenous knowledge for sustainable development are substantial (Leal Filho et al. 2025). Much work remains to be done.

4 Opportunities for Research, Policy, and Practice

Moving forward, there is a strong rationale for more proactive engagement with traditional worldviews and local value systems in sustainability research, policy, and practice (Leal Filho et al. 2024). There is significant emerging scholarly support for integrating traditional spirituality into mainstream sustainability frameworks. Numerous scholars argue that worldview-attuned perspectives can complement scientific approaches and lead to more culturally grounded and enduring solutions (Buxton et al. 2021; Havea et al. 2018; Hoffman and Sandelands 2005; Kealiikanakaolehaililani and Giardina 2016; Luetz and Leo 2021; Nelson and Shilling 2018; Nunn et al. 2016; Schramm et al. 2020). This shift demands a reframing of traditional knowledge-holders not as peripheral actors but as central contributors to global sustainability transformations.

This book is as a contribution to that agenda. Its chapters provide regionally and thematically diverse examples of how traditional spirituality and sustainability intersect—and how this nexus can be meaningfully engaged by researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners alike. Rather than offering a monolithic view of tradition,

the volume invites readers to explore nuanced, localised, and relational knowledge and value systems that can inform climate action, conservation, and sustainable development. To this end, the editors have intentionally adopted an inclusive understanding of ‘traditional spirituality’, encompassing a wide range of faith traditions, including mainstream theological perspectives. Such framing is necessary, given that in many places traditional spiritual beliefs have acquiesced to introduced religious traditions. Importantly, as Martens (2023) reminds us, “we are all Indigenous to Mother Earth” (p. 1). This broader and more inclusive understanding of indigeneity—and of faith more generally—can help reframe humanity’s collective responsibility to harness worldview-informed contributions for planetary health.

This volume openly celebrates a wide range of traditional worldview perspectives which are integral to sustainability. It does so not solely for the benefit of the featured indigenous communities or traditional knowledge-holders but as an appeal to all people everywhere who bear responsibility for shaping research, policy, and development practice. Engaging worldview perspectives—both widely and deeply—is not merely an ethical imperative but also a strategic and epistemic cornerstone for highlighting and leveraging the affinities between traditional spirituality and sustainability. Set against this background, the *Handbook of Traditional Spirituality and Sustainability* celebrates faith-engaged perspectives that are attuned to diverse indigenous, traditional, and local place-based knowledges—and to the ways these enable sustainable development.

5 The Handbook: An Overview

The chapters in this Handbook have been structured into seven regionally defined sections to showcase the rich diversity of traditional spiritualities while remaining attentive to the specific contexts in which they are experienced and practised. The organisation of the book chapters into geographically-informed sections reflects four guiding principles. First, this arrangement illustrates global diversity while respecting local contextuality, ensuring that traditions are not abstracted from the places, ecosystems, and communities in which they are embedded. Second, it allows for regionally differentiated insights to emerge more clearly, avoiding generalisation while facilitating deeper comparative reflection within and across regions. Third, this structure aligns with the Handbook’s emphasis—echoed in the original Call for Papers¹—on place-based, indigenous, and contextually rooted knowledge systems. Fourth and finally, this approach enhances thematic coherence, comparability, and navigability for readers. The seven parts of the Handbook are as follows:

Part I: Africa—Explores African Traditional Religions, sacred ecologies, and customary governance systems.

¹ https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CFP_Handbook_of_Traditional_Spirituality_and_Sustainability.pdf

Part II: Asia—Features animist, Islamic, and tribal engagements with sacred landscapes and sustainability.

Part III: Australia and Oceania—Examines Aboriginal spiritualities, Pacific theologies, and intercultural pedagogies.

Part IV: Europe—Includes Celtic, Baltic, Slavic, and Northern European traditions in dialogue with ecological renewal.

Part V: North America—Presents indigenous and eco-village (intentional community) perspectives on spirituality and stewardship.

Part VI: South and Central America—Highlights agroecological and bioeconomic knowledges rooted in indigenous cosmologies.

Part VII: Transnational and Theoretical Perspectives—Offers comparative and conceptual contributions that extend across regional boundaries.

Together, these sections invite readers into a grounded yet expansive exploration of how traditional spiritualities continue to inform and inspire sustainability in diverse cultural and ecological contexts. We now introduce the chapters of this book.

6 The Handbook Chapters

6.1 Part I: Africa

This section explores the rich and diverse interrelations between traditional spirituality and environmental sustainability in African contexts. Across the seven chapters, authors examine how indigenous worldviews, spiritual beliefs, and ecological knowledge inform sustainable land, water, and biodiversity management. Themes of sacred geography and cosmology recur—evident in customary land governance in Ghana, the water-deity veneration at Ikorodu's Ota Spring, and sacred wetland practices in Southern Africa. Several chapters highlight how African Traditional Religion (ATR) embeds ecological ethics through reverence for ancestral spirits, totems, taboos, and sacred groves, functioning as informal governance systems for biodiversity conservation, especially in Yorubaland and Botswana. Water spirituality emerges as a unifying motif, not only symbolising life and renewal but also guiding community engagement, social transformation, and sustainable development. The San people's ecological practices further challenge dominant Western paradigms by advocating a relational and collective epistemology. Together, these studies demonstrate that traditional African spiritualities are not peripheral but foundational elements of environmental stewardship, offering pluralistic, culturally embedded frameworks for sustainability. The chapters in this section highlight diverse under-recognised opportunities for leveraging and integrating these spiritual-ecological linkages into broader sustainability discourses and policies.

In Chap. 2, *Building on Synergies: Harnessing Indigenous Worldviews for Customary Land Governance in North-Western Ghana*, **Samuel Ziem Bonye**, **Thaddeus Arkum Aasoglenang**, and **Frederick Dapilah** investigate the role of indigenous spiritual and cultural practices in shaping customary land governance.

Drawing on qualitative fieldwork in four communities, the authors reveal a persistent disconnect between state governance frameworks and local spiritual worldviews, which emphasise the interrelation of human, natural, and spiritual realms. The chapter argues for enhanced collaboration between customary and state authorities to integrate indigenous knowledge systems into land policy and practice, thereby promoting more culturally grounded and sustainable governance.

In Chap. 3, *The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 15 in Botswana: A Review of the Literature*, **Wazha Bickie Maundeni and Kgosietsile Velempini** reflect on how African Traditional Religion (ATR) contributes to biodiversity conservation aligned with SDG 15. Through a review of secondary sources, the chapter highlights the spiritual reverence for natural features such as trees and hills, showing how ancestral beliefs have historically governed and supported sustainable land use. The authors argue that neglecting ATR in SDG frameworks is a missed opportunity, and call for its integration into conservation strategies and educational curricula to promote more effective and enduring ecological stewardship in Botswana and beyond.

In Chap. 4, *Totem, Taboos, and Sacred Places: An Analysis of the Yorùbá Tribe with Environmental Conservation and Management Practices in Southwest Nigeria*, **Bibitayo Ayobami Owolabi and Adedamola O. Sanuade** investigate how Yorùbá spiritual beliefs and traditional practices enable environmental stewardship. Through customs involving totems, taboos, sacred groves, and ancestral reverence, the Yorùbá have historically protected biodiversity and regulated the use of natural resources. The chapter highlights the embeddedness of ecospirituality in Yorùbá cosmology and argues that such indigenous ways of knowing offer valuable insights for sustainable environmental management.

In Chap. 5, *Traditional Spirituality and Sustainability: Interrogating the Place of Ota Spring in Ikorodu, a Coastal African Community*, **Omotayo K. Charles** presents an ethnographic study of the Ota spring, a sacred water body in southwest Nigeria associated with a deified ancestral figure. The chapter explores how the spiritual reverence for Ota as a water deity fosters a sustained cultural and ecological relationship with the spring, integrating religious practice with environmental care. By linking traditional spirituality to local strategies of ecological wellbeing, the study offers new insights into how sacred geographies shape sustainable development in coastal Yorubaland.

In Chap. 6, *Water Spirituality, Community Engagement and Social Change in Yorubaland, Southwestern Nigeria*, **Oyeniye Solomon Aboyeji** investigates the symbolic and transformative role of water in the cultural and spiritual life of Yorubaland. Using a historical and phenomenological approach, the chapter explores how water embodies meanings of life, purification, and renewal, and serves as a catalyst for community engagement and social transformation. The study underscores the need to integrate spiritual and cultural values into contemporary water management practices, positioning water spirituality as central to sustainable development in the West African region.

In Chap. 7, *How the San People of Southern Africa Use Their Indigenous Knowledge for Ecological Sustainability*, **Gallous Atabongwong and**

Johannes M. Luetz present a literary synthesis of the San people's ecological worldview and sustainable practices. The chapter explores how the San understand, preserve, and live in harmony with their environment, offering insights that challenge dominant Western notions of development that are rooted in resource extraction and nature's exploitation. The authors advocate for a more inclusive and pluralistic sustainability discourse that values diverse cultural knowledge systems and their undeniable contributions to safeguarding ecological integrity.

In Chap. 8, *Spirituality and Sustainable Water Use: Insights from Wetland Conservation Practices in Southern Africa*, **Moleboheng B. Pherane and Abraham R. Matamanda** explore the spiritual dimensions of wetland conservation across indigenous communities. Drawing on socio-ecological analysis and case study research, the authors highlight how wetlands are not only ecological assets but also sacred spaces that contain and sustain cultural and spiritual significances. The chapter argues for integrating traditional spirituality into water management frameworks, emphasising that protecting wetlands is intrinsically tied to sustaining human and ecological well-being across generations.

6.2 Part II: Asia

This section highlights diverse Asian expressions of traditional spirituality as catalysts for sustainable development and ecological resilience. Drawing on case studies from India, Japan, and Malaysia, the chapters illustrate how spiritual beliefs, sacred landscapes, and religious institutions foster community-led sustainability practices that have enabled cultural continuity. In India, tribal communities integrate Ayurvedic and indigenous health systems with nutrition education, climate-resilient agriculture, and biodiversity stewardship, offering replicable, spiritually grounded approaches for achieving multiple SDGs. Japan's sacred springs reflect animistic reverence for water and demonstrate how spiritual beliefs have historically underpinned environmentally sustainable industries such as sake brewing and papermaking, with sacred sites continuing to serve as cultural anchors in modern communities. In Malaysia, mosques function as dynamic hubs of sustainability communication and environmental ethics, advancing green practices through sermons and digital outreach, and contributing to the emergence of Islamic ecotourism. Collectively, these chapters show how traditional spirituality is not only compatible with sustainability goals but vital to the design and diffusion of culturally appropriate, locally led responses to global environmental and developmental challenges.

In Chap. 9, *Interweaving Spirituality and Sustainability: Indigenous Pathways to Transformation in India's Tribal Communities*, **Prema Nedungadi, Janci Rani, Radhika Menon, Aswathy S., Chandrashekar Janakiram, Akshay Iyer, and Raghu Raman** explore how spiritual traditions and indigenous knowledge systems in India's tribal communities contribute to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Drawing on initiatives led by a Tribal Center of Excellence in Kerala, the chapter showcases scalable healthcare strategies, nutrition

education, and climate-resilient agricultural practices that integrate Ayurvedic and indigenous approaches. The authors present replicable models that not only promote equity and biodiversity conservation but also argue for new policies which embed tribal spiritual values in sustainable development planning.

In Chap. 10, *Sacred Springs and Magical Waters: Influences of Animism on the Sustainable Uses (Sake Brewing & Papermaking Industries) of Spring Water in Japan*, **Masaaki Okada** investigates the cultural, spiritual, and practical significance of 756 existing spring water sites across Japan. Drawing on surveys, interviews, and folklore, the chapter highlights how animistic beliefs have imbued these springs with sacred value, sustaining community rituals, festivals, and traditional industries such as sake brewing and papermaking. Okada demonstrates that even as their utilitarian function has diminished, these spring-water sites continue to serve as spiritual anchors and vital regional resources supporting sustainability practices in local communities.

In Chap. 11, *The Mosque as Catalyst for Sustainability Communication and Practices in Malaysia*, **Mohamad Saifudin Mohamad Saleh, Naziru Alhaji Tukur, and Shaidatul Akma Adi Kasuma** examine the evolving role of mosques in promoting sustainability within Malaysia's Muslim-majority context. The chapter highlights how khutbahs (Friday sermons) and social media are used to communicate values related to environmental protection, ethical business, and social well-being. Framing mosques as hubs for green practices and Islamic eco-tourism, the authors show how these places of worship can be reconceptualised as enablers of sustainability in contemporary Malaysian society.

6.3 Part III: Australia and Oceania

This section brings together diverse indigenous and faith-based perspectives across Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands, highlighting the ways traditional spiritualities and cosmologies underpin ecological stewardship, education, and justice. Across the Pacific, cultural protocols surrounding submerged lands, ecological knowledge, and traditional authority systems are shown to embody deep-rooted memory, risk adaptation, and environmental reverence. In Australia, Aboriginal relationships to sacred lands such as Uluru and pedagogical approaches rooted in Yolŋu ontology, for example, reveal the intimate ties between land, kinship, and learning. Several chapters explore how indigenous knowledge is engaged in educational transformation, intercultural partnerships, and the development of more spiritually attuned pedagogies, such as in tertiary Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) contexts. Christian traditions are also re-examined through indigenous theologies—such as Māori Christology—or creatively adapted to promote creation care and sustainability practices among faith communities. One contribution offers a theological critique of settler-colonial narratives, reimagining divine relationality as a basis for justice, inclusion, and ecological responsibility. Other chapters address the impacts of Evangelicalism on indigenous spiritual traditions and rights, and the role of joint governance and accountability in managing

sacred lands. Collectively, these chapters exemplify how traditional spiritualities and their embodied practices remain vital for sustainable futures in the region, calling for respectful engagement, relational theologies, and decolonising methodologies that acknowledge indigenous agency and cultural continuity.

In Chap. 12, *Not God-Forsaken: A Trinitarian Reply to the Settler-Colonial Narrative in Australia*, **Chris Budden** offers a theological critique of settler-colonialism through a reimagining of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. He argues that colonial narratives have often conceived and treated indigenous people and land as god-forsaken, legitimising dispossession and erasure. By reclaiming a Trinitarian theology that is relational, inclusive, and grounded in creation, Budden proposes a framework for the church to support justice, honour indigenous sovereignty, and challenge the colonial logic behind elimination.

In Chap. 13, *The Role of Accountability in Preserving Spirituality and Nature: The Case of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park*, **Sara Moggi, Alessandra Pagani, Alessia Battistella, and Maria Guandalini** investigate how joint management and accountability mechanisms contribute to the protection of Aboriginal spiritual heritage and natural landscapes. Focusing on Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, which is legally owned by local Aboriginal people and co-managed with the Australian Government, the authors highlight the significance of the Uluru climbing ban as a case of spiritual and environmental respect. Drawing on diverse data sources, the chapter demonstrates how well-structured accountability frameworks can support both ecological preservation and indigenous cultural continuity.

In Chap. 14, *Story-Making: Engagement as Life in the Northern Australian Yolŋu and Christian Traditions*, **Rachel J. Herweynen and Julia J. Verdouw** explore Yolŋu conceptions of engagement through the spiritual and educational experiences of Yolŋu students and families in Gäwa, northeast Arnhem Land. Drawing on ethnographic storytelling, the authors examine Yolŋu epistemologies and ontologies of presence, participation, and agency, grounded in kinship (*gurrutu*) and country (*wäja*). By decentring normative educational frameworks, the chapter offers a Yolŋu-Jesus vision of engagement that is embodied, relational, and spiritually resonant, positioning Yolŋu ways of knowing as a gift to Australian education.

In Chap. 15, *Spiritual Beliefs and Cultural Protocols Regarding Submerged Lands in the Pacific Islands: Significance and Implications for Sustainability*, **Patrick D. Nunn, Paul Geraghty, Vasemaca Setariki, Marcus Bussey, Tony Heorake, Loredana Lancini, Kaliopate Tavola, Frank Thomas, and Elyse Zavar** examine culturally grounded traditions that honour submerged ancestral lands across the western Pacific. These spiritual protocols—often based on memories and involving rituals tied to sunken places—serve both historical and pragmatic functions, preserving identity while enhancing risk awareness in geologically unstable environments. The authors argue that such oral traditions hold critical insights for climate adaptation, countering dismissive attitudes toward indigenous knowledge and offering valuable lessons for sustainability in the face of future rising seas.

In Chap. 16, *Whose Right to Exist? The Challenge of Evangelicalism to Self-Determination and Indigenous Spirituality Across the Pacific*, **Shannon Brincat** examines the disruptive impacts of rising Evangelical movements on indigenous

spiritualities and sustainability across Pacific Island communities. The chapter argues that Evangelicalism, often supplanting both traditional belief systems and earlier missionary Christianities, undermines long-standing community-based ecological practices and the broader principle of self-determination. Brincat highlights how these eschatological and rewards-based faith systems complicate local climate action and international indigenous representation.

In Chap. 17, *Learnings From the Intercultural Understanding Partnerships (ICUP) Program for Developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives Within School Culture and Curriculum in Australia*, **Richard G. Leo** presents case-based insights from a national initiative aimed at fostering intercultural and interfaith understanding in Australian schools. Focusing on how the ICUP program engages school communities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, the chapter identifies practices that support decolonisation and promote educational equity. By advancing culturally responsive pedagogy and reducing discrimination, the chapter aligns with the aims of SDG 4 in promoting inclusive and quality education for all.

In Chap. 18, *Towards a Spiritual Pedagogy in Tertiary Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Courses*, **Phyllis Araneo** presents a psycho-spiritual-ecological approach to ESD pedagogy that draws on the reflective traditions of matrilineal cultures and Christian faiths. Conducting a multiple case study involving 750 participants across six universities in five countries over an 11-year period (2008–2018), this chapter uses thematic analysis of stakeholder perspectives to identify pedagogical strategies that foster environmentally responsible behaviour through personal introspection, emotional engagement, and spiritual awareness. Araneo argues that integrating spirituality into ESD can deepen its transformative potential and address core challenges in sustainability education.

In Chap. 19, *Working Together: The Significance of Protocols for Engagement Between Indigenous Peoples and Universities*, **Veronica Bird, Kim Walker, David Rahaqetih Webb, and Peter Blaze Corcoran** examine the importance of formalised protocols in shaping respectful partnerships between indigenous communities and academic institutions. Drawing on case studies from Australia and the United States, the authors detail the processes by which collaborative agreements were developed to support co-research, mutual learning, and land acknowledgment. The chapter offers a practical model for universities seeking to engage ethically with indigenous peoples and advance the joint responsible stewardship of knowledge and place.

In Chap. 20, *Using Creative Methodologies to Assist Christians to Embrace Creation Care*, **Sally Shaw** presents findings from a Doctor of Ministry research project conducted in Adelaide, Australia, which explores how experiential and arts-based pedagogies can inspire sustainable action among Christian participants. Designed as a 1-day workshop, the program integrated cognitive, affective, and practical learning domains to foster deeper engagement with eco-theology, indigenous perspectives, and climate realities. The chapter highlights how this approach encouraged participants to adopt more sustainable practices and suggests its potential for broader interfaith application in environmental education.

In Chap. 21, *Māori Christology, Theology, and Sustainability*, **Adam Dodds** explores how Māori theological perspectives—particularly the Christological concepts of *Tohunga Whakapapa* and *Te Mātāmua*—can inform ecological ethics and enrich global theological discourse. Rooted in the Māori worldview of *whakapapa* (genealogy), which interweaves God, land, and humanity, the chapter contrasts indigenous and Western spiritualities and highlights the value of leveraging indigenous theology for environmental sustainability. Drawing on both Māori and patristic theological insights, Dodds argues that Māori Christology provides a theologically grounded imperative for ecological stewardship.

6.4 Part IV: Europe

This section discusses the diverse spiritual traditions, sacred practices, and cultural cosmologies that have evolved in Europe and explores how they relate to environmental sustainability and the human–nature relationship. Wonder tales from the European folklore canon, particularly those of the Grimm brothers, are interpreted as repositories of ecological wisdom and relational ethics. In Lithuania, the forest emerges as a sacred and reciprocal realm at the heart of national identity, recently recognised as intangible cultural heritage. Historical Scandinavian rituals surrounding winter, water, and agrarian survival similarly reveal pre-Christian cosmologies that sought to activate the life-giving forces of the land. A theological reflection on Anglican Christianity brings religion and science into conversation, proposing their integration as a resource for ecological ethics and sustainable development. Contributions on Celtic spirituality and Portuguese water traditions highlight the enduring presence of sacred geographies—whether in nature reverence, ritualised springs, or communal irrigation systems—as foundations for harmonious living with the Earth. These chapters collectively demonstrate how Europe’s spiritual and cultural heritages, while regionally distinct, converge around a deep reverence for land and water, offering rooted, historically informed contributions to contemporary sustainability discourses.

In Chap. 22, *Human-Nature Interrelationships in Wonder Tales of the European Tradition*, **Jurij Dobravec** explores the spiritual and ecological insights embedded in European wonder tales, particularly those collected by the Grimm brothers. The chapter examines how these narratives portray nature not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in sustaining human–nature relationships. By analysing nature-inclusive motifs across various European traditions, Dobravec highlights their relevance for contemporary sustainability discourse and suggests ways these traditional conceptions can inform modern ecological thinking and support sustainability practices.

In Chap. 23, *The Human–Forest Relationship in Lithuania: History Meets the Future*, **Daiva Vaitkevičienė** and **Vykintas Vaitkevičius** explore the deep spiritual and cultural significance of forests in Lithuanian identity and heritage. Forests are portrayed as sacred, autonomous realms inhabited by deities, offering spiritual inspiration, and shaping reciprocal human–nature relationships rooted in reverence,

emotional renewal, and communal refuge. The chapter traces how, in 2023, this enduring connection was nationally recognised as intangible cultural heritage, offering a foundation for integrating traditional ecological worldviews into contemporary public policy and forest governance—especially poignant in Lithuania’s context where deforestation symbolically equates to the destruction of the nation.

In Chap. 24, *Water, Weather and Winter: Activating and Ritualizing Growth Forces in Historic Scandinavia*, **Terje Oestigaard** investigates pre-Christian agrarian rituals in Scandinavia that centred on water as a life-giving force. Drawing on ethnological and historical sources, the chapter explores how rural communities used seasonal rituals—especially those involving “froth wells” that remained unfrozen in winter—to activate subterranean growth forces and symbolically conquer the harshness of winter. These rituals, often featuring horse races and symbolic contests, reflect deeply embedded cosmologies that sought to sustain agricultural continuity and align human action with the cyclical vitality of the land.

In Chap. 25, *Of Anglican Christianity, Science and Sustainability*, **Neil A. Gordon** examines the complex interplay between Anglican theology, scientific thought, and sustainability discourse. Tracing historical figures from Boyle and Newton to Venn and Polkinghorne, the chapter explores how religious and scientific worldviews have alternately conflicted and converged in shaping ethical responses to environmental issues. Gordon argues that a holistic integration of Anglican theology, scientific reasoning, and sustainability principles can offer a robust framework for addressing contemporary global challenges.

In Chap. 26, *Contributions of Celtic Spirituality to Sustainability*, **Bożena Gierek** explores how the holistic worldview embedded in Celtic spirituality can foster a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. Drawing on ancient texts, medieval sources, and contemporary practices—including fieldwork in Ireland with both Catholic and neo-pagan practitioners—the chapter highlights a creation-centred cosmology that values all elements of the cosmos. Gierek argues that this integrated spiritual perspective offers meaningful contributions to sustainability by through its emphasis on reverence for nature and balanced coexistence.

In Chap. 27, *Water Heritage: Traditions and Sustainability in Portugal*, **Alexandra Vieira** explores the cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance of water-related practices in Portuguese history. Focusing on traditional infrastructures such as *levadas* (traditional watercourses or irrigation channels) and fountains, the chapter highlights how rural communities have developed sustainable water management systems rooted in local identity and reverence for sacred springs. Vieira argues that preserving these water traditions—many of which are imbued with healing and religious symbolism—is vital for sustaining environmental stewardship in the face of the growing effects of urbanisation and climate change.

6.5 Part V: North America

This section explores diverse North American perspectives at the interface of spirituality and sustainability, highlighting both theoretical insights and locally grounded case studies. One chapter examines how integral ecology, as articulated by Pope Francis, is embodied within the St. Francis Farm Community—an eco-village in the United States—where spiritual values, communal living, and degrowth principles inform a holistic approach to sustainability. Another contribution critically interrogates whether spirituality constitutes a missing component in sustainable development discourse, arguing that while spiritual self-identification may correlate with sustainable behaviours, natural law provides an alternative and universally applicable foundation for sustainability, independent of religious or spiritual affiliation. The final chapter offers a compelling narrative from Banff National Park in Canada, where efforts to protect endangered biodiversity—exemplified by the Banff Springs snail—are increasingly entwined with indigenous knowledge systems, sacred geographies, and reconciliation practices. Together, these chapters underscore the importance of integrating spiritual, ethical, and indigenous worldviews into sustainability praxis, while also questioning assumptions about the universality or coherence of “spirituality” as a driver for environmental change. They collectively call for pluralistic, inclusive approaches that bridge spiritual sensibilities, ecological science, and community-based stewardship.

In Chap. 28, *An Investigation Into the Connection Between Spirituality and Sustainability: A Case Study of St. Francis Farm Community*, **Nok Yin Ma** investigates how spirituality shapes collective approaches to sustainability within a U.S.-based eco-village. Drawing on the concept of integral ecology as articulated by Pope Francis, the chapter presents findings from interviews and document analysis that highlight the community’s holistic engagement with social, environmental, and economic dimensions—particularly through practices aligned with a degrowth economy. Ma argues that spiritual values play a pivotal role in fostering sustainable communal living and calls for broader recognition of spirituality in sustainability research.

In Chap. 29, *Is Spirituality the Missing Component of Sustainable Development?*, **Madhavi Venkatesan, Andrew Burwick, Thomas DiGeso, and Justin MacLennan** explore the nuanced relationship between spirituality and sustainability within the United States. While empirical findings show some correlation between spiritual self-identification and sustainable behaviours, the chapter critiques the lack of definitional clarity around “spirituality” and its inconsistent association with pro-environmental action. The authors argue instead for natural law as a more universal and enduring foundation for sustainability, offering a theoretical framework that transcends religious affiliation.

In Chap. 30, *The Snail and the Bison: Stories of Biodiversity in Banff National Park*, **Karen Wall** reflects on the layered ecological and cultural significance of conservation efforts in one of Canada’s most iconic landscapes. Centred on the endangered Banff Springs snail, the chapter explores how biodiversity protection intersects with indigenous reconnection to traditional lands, sacred geographies,

and collaborative stewardship. Through a case study of an indigenous mural project at the Cave and Basin site, Wall highlights how sustainability efforts are increasingly informed by the spiritual, cultural, and communicative dimensions of reconciliation—understood as cultural resurgence, representational sovereignty, and ecological stewardship.

6.6 Part VI: South and Central America

This section explores how indigenous cosmologies, agroecological traditions, and organisational worldviews across South and Central America contribute to sustainability practices that are both culturally embedded and spiritually grounded. In Mexico, the cultivation of vanilla in the Totonacapan region illustrates how intergenerational indigenous knowledge and adaptation to climate change have preserved resilient agricultural systems despite pressures of globalisation and ecological degradation. In the Brazilian Amazon, the case of the Baniwa people's cultivation of *jiquitaia* chilli pepper demonstrates a vibrant socio-bioeconomy where material sustenance, symbolic meaning, and spiritual practice converge in agroforestry-based sustainability. These traditional practices challenge dominant techno-economic understandings of bioeconomy by centring relational ontologies and spiritual values. Complementing these case studies is a Brazilian organisational analysis that uncovers how managers across diverse institutions understand the interconnection between spirituality and sustainability. Findings reveal a strong emphasis on care, balance, well-being, and values as foundational to organisational and planetary flourishing. Together, the chapters show how indigenous and local understandings of spirituality serve not only as cultural heritage but as vital ethical and epistemological resources for shaping sustainable futures in a region marked by biodiversity loss, inequality, and looming environmental threats.

In Chap. 31, *Vanilla in Totonacapan: A History of Indigenous Adaptation to Climate Change Through the Exchange of Knowledge Applied as Sustainable Development*, **Marco Vinicio Rodríguez-Demeneghi**, **Noé Aguilar-Rivera**, and **Arturo Alonso Armas Silva** examine the cultural and ecological significance of vanilla cultivation in the Totonacapan region of Mexico. Faced with the dual pressures of climate change and globalisation, Totonac communities have drawn on intergenerational indigenous knowledge to sustain this culturally emblematic crop. The chapter argues that the resilience of vanilla production lies not only in technological innovation but in the continued application of traditional ecological wisdom rooted in Totonaca heritage.

In Chap. 32, *Baniwa Chilli Pepper: Indigenous Spirituality, Socio-Bioeconomy, and Sustainability*, **Joana Castro Pereira**, **Thais Lemos Ribeiro**, **Verônica Korber Gonçalves**, **Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue**, and **Andreza Silva de Andrade** explore how indigenous spirituality underpins sustainable socio-bioeconomic practices among the Baniwa communities of the Alto Rio Negro in the Brazilian Amazon. Focusing on the cultivation and commercialisation of *jiquitaia* chilli pepper, the chapter highlights how agroforestry and symbolic cultural values coalesce in

grassroots bioeconomies. The authors argue that engaging with diverse spiritual worldviews can inspire transformative sustainability practices both within and beyond the Amazon.

In Chap. 33, *Perceptions About Spirituality and Sustainability in the View of Managers of Brazilian Organizations*, **Valéria Garlet, Lúcia Rejane da Rosa Gama Madruga, Thiago Antonio Beuron Corrêa de Barros, Fernando Vieira Cezar, Bruno Mello Corrêa de Barros Beuron, and Lucas Veiga** present qualitative insights into how organisational leaders in Brazil understand and integrate spirituality and sustainability. Drawing on interviews with managers across diverse sectors, the study identifies eight thematic categories—ranging from well-being and care to values and belief—that illustrate the interconnections between spiritual perspectives and sustainability practices. The authors argue that spirituality offers a transformative framework for rethinking organisational culture and fostering more holistic approaches by decision makers to environmental sustainability.

6.7 Part VII: Transnational and Theoretical Perspectives

The concluding section draws together cross-regional insights and theoretical reflections that broaden the conceptual scope of traditional spirituality in relation to sustainability. One contribution explores the role of indigenous agroecologies as spiritually grounded frameworks for transforming unsustainable food systems. Through case studies spanning Europe, Africa, and North America, the authors propose agroecology as a paradigmatic alternative to industrial agriculture—rooted in reverence for land and cosmologies that integrate spiritual and ecological wisdom. A second chapter examines animal sentience and spiritual potential, challenging anthropocentric ethics by proposing an expanded spiritual imagination that recognises the relational, affective, and moral significance of non-human life. The chapter calls for a holistic rethinking of sustainability that includes the voices and experiences of all sentient beings. The final chapter offers a sobering reflection on extinction as an epistemological crisis, arguing that biodiversity loss erodes not only ecological integrity but also the very conditions of knowing, learning, and ethical action. It introduces the concept of ecogogy—a pedagogical and theological call to cultivate love and responsibility in an age of ecological diminishment. Together, these chapters illuminate the theoretical richness and moral urgency of integrating spirituality into sustainability discourse across scales and species.

In Chap. 34, *Indigenous Agroecologies as Spiritual Frameworks of Sustainable Food Systems in the Anthropocene*, **Bruno Borsari and Malcolm F. Vidrine** argue that Indigenous spiritualities offer critical pathways for transforming unsustainable food systems. Drawing on a systematic literature review and six case studies from Indigenous cultures in Europe, Africa, and North America, the chapter demonstrates how agroecology—rooted in spiritual relationships with land and biodiversity—can serve as a viable alternative to industrial-scale agriculture. The authors propose an educational model that integrates indigenous agroecological principles into

sustainability curricula to promote planetary health and advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

In Chap. 35, *Towards a More Holistic Sustainability: Animal Sentience and Spiritual Potential*, **Daniela Rizzo** challenges anthropocentric paradigms by affirming the intrinsic worth and spiritual potential of animals. Drawing on ecological and Christian theological perspectives, the chapter redefines spirituality to include the affective, relational, and sentient capacities of animals. Rizzo argues that recognising animals as sentient companion species—interwoven within the ecological web of life—offers a more comprehensive, ethical, and actionable foundation for advancing sustainability.

In Chap. 36, *Extinction, Epistemology, and Ecogogy—Knowing, Learning, and Loving in a Diminishing World*, **Johannes M. Luetz** explores the epistemological consequences of unrelenting biodiversity loss on science, community, and metaphysics. Arguing that extinction erodes our collective capacity to know, relate, and live meaningfully, the chapter proposes ecogogy—an embodied, ecological pedagogy—as a pivotal response. Luetz invites faith-engaged educators to approach conservation as an ecotheological imperative that safeguards not only life itself, but also the spiritual and intellectual conditions necessary for intergenerational knowing, learning, and loving.

Comprising 36 chapters rich in diversity and originality—and organised into seven parts spanning geographical and theoretical dimensions—it is our joy and privilege to present the *Handbook of Traditional Spirituality and Sustainability*. We warmly thank all contributing authors for their excellent work and the peer reviewers for their thoughtful critiques. We hope that the message of this volume will inspire imitation, adaptation, application, and multiplication across diverse contexts.

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