



Institutional Design and Governance Capacity in Community-Based Ecotourism Management: A Case Study of Sebangau Blackwater Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Community-based ecotourism management requires an institutional design capable of integrating multiple stakeholders to achieve effective and sustainable governance. Increasing development of conservation-based tourism destinations has not always been accompanied by stronger institutional arrangements that enhance governance capacity. This study aims to analyze the relationship between institutional design and governance capacity in community-based ecotourism management at Sebangau Blackwater Tourism, Palangka Raya City, Indonesia. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving 20 informants representing the local government, the Sebangau National Park Authority, village administration, tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis), local communities, private sector actors, academics, and the media. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, supported by NVivo 12 Plus, while data credibility was ensured through source, method, and document triangulation. Findings indicate that the institutional design has involved multiple stakeholders. Governance effectiveness, however, remains constrained by limited role clarity, organizational legitimacy, coordination mechanisms, and institutional continuity. Community social capital, reflected in mutual cooperation, deliberative decision-making, and environmental stewardship, strengthens governance capacity despite weaknesses in formal institutions. Findings suggest that governance capacity cannot be enhanced solely through additional resources or organizational capacity-building programs

INTRODUCTION

Community-based ecotourism (CBE) has increasingly been recognized as an approach capable of integrating environmental conservation, community empowerment, and local economic development into a sustainable development framework (Mulyani et al., 2021). Unlike conventional tourism, which primarily emphasizes economic growth, community-based ecotourism positions local communities as the principal actors in planning, managing, and benefiting from tourism activities (Diarta & Gde, 2022). Success in this management model depends not only on the availability of natural resources but also on institutional capacity to organize stakeholder relationships, distribute authority, and develop governance systems that can adapt to environmental changes and community needs (Hamka et al., 2022). From a public administration perspective, institutional design constitutes a fundamental component because it determines how rules, organizational structures, coordination mechanisms, and accountability systems are established to support effective destination governance (Wahyudin et al., 2024). Strengthening institutional design has therefore become a strategic priority in community-based ecotourism management to ensure that environmental conservation and community welfare can be achieved simultaneously through adaptive, participatory, and sustainable governance models (Teguh et al., 2025).

Indonesia possesses substantial potential for developing community-based ecotourism because of its exceptional biodiversity and the continued growth of the tourism sector. According to Statistics Indonesia (BPS, 2025), domestic tourist trips reached approximately 1.02 billion in 2024, representing an increase of around 22% compared with 2023, while international tourist arrivals reached 13.74 million, reflecting an increase of approximately 18% over the previous year. At the destination level, Sebangau Blackwater Tourism in Kereng Bangkirai Village recorded significant growth, attracting 114,075 domestic visitors in 2024, although the number of international visitors remained relatively low at 119 (Palangka Raya Tourism Office, 2026). These figures indicate that the destination possesses considerable potential for community-based ecotourism development. Increasing tourist arrivals, however, have not been fully accompanied by stronger institutional capacity and destination governance, highlighting the need for an institutional design capable of integrating multiple stakeholders in destination management (Hamka et al., 2022). Serving as the main gateway to Sebangau National Park, which covers approximately 568,700 hectares, Sebangau Blackwater Tourism requires an institutional framework capable of integrating conservation objectives, community empowerment, and sustainable tourism development (Teguh et al., 2025).

Previous studies have examined community-based ecotourism management from various perspectives, producing diverse findings according to their respective research contexts. Filantropi and Bella (2022) found that successful community-based tourism management depends largely on community participation, local leadership, and institutional organizations capable of managing tourism activities sustainably. Aulia et al. (2024) demonstrated that stakeholder mapping is essential for clarifying stakeholder

roles and improving the effectiveness of community-based tourism implementation at the destination level. Maring et al. (2026) further argued that stakeholder collaboration can transform conflicting interests into constructive cooperation through strengthened institutional mechanisms and inter-organizational communication.

Existing studies have made important contributions to the development of community-based ecotourism. Most investigations, however, have primarily emphasized community participation, stakeholder collaboration, or destination development strategies, while relatively limited attention has been devoted to examining the relationship between institutional design and governance capacity in community-based ecotourism management. Research specifically addressing how institutional arrangements influence governance capacity in conservation-based ecotourism destinations, particularly Sebangau Blackwater Tourism as the primary gateway to Sebangau National Park, also remains scarce. Addressing this research gap, the present study aims to analyze the influence of institutional design on governance capacity by examining the distribution of authority, role clarity, inter-organizational coordination, and organizational capacity in community-based ecotourism management. Findings are expected to enrich the field of public administration, particularly studies on community-based tourism governance, while providing practical recommendations for developing more adaptive, accountable, and sustainable institutional arrangements for conservation-based ecotourism management.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

1. Community-Based Ecotourism

Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) is a tourism development approach that positions local communities as the primary actors in planning, decision-making, resource management, and the distribution of economic benefits. This approach seeks to balance environmental conservation, community empowerment, and local economic development to ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations. Unlike conventional tourism, which focuses primarily on increasing tourist arrivals and economic returns, CBE emphasizes active community participation as both the owner and manager of tourism resources. According to Nurlukman et al. (2025), the success of community-based tourism depends largely on the ability of local communities to integrate economic activities with ecosystem conservation, thereby generating sustainable social, economic, and environmental outcomes. This perspective suggests that ecotourism success relies not only on natural resource potential but also on the institutional capacity of communities to manage those resources sustainably.

The concept of CBE has evolved beyond community participation toward governance models that integrate environmental sustainability, public policy, and institutional collaboration. Anwar et al. (2026) argued that mangrove ecotourism management should consider environmental carrying capacity as the foundation for community-based governance, ensuring that tourism activities remain within ecological limits. Aqilah and Islam (2024) emphasized that

sustainable ecotourism development is strongly influenced by government policy, community empowerment, and active community participation throughout the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. These perspectives indicate that successful community-based ecotourism requires not only active local participation but also institutional support capable of strengthening community capacity while maintaining ecological sustainability. Ecotourism development must also recognize the ecological characteristics of protected landscapes that serve as tourism destinations. Sisriany and Furuya (2024) explained that many ecotourism destinations in Indonesia are located within protected landscapes, requiring management approaches that integrate spatial planning with biodiversity conservation. Perkasa et al. (2024) found that the characteristics of canal-user communities within Sebangau National Park influence the effectiveness of conservation management, highlighting the importance of community-oriented governance in peatland ecosystems. Putri et al. (2025) further demonstrated that riparian ecosystems possess considerable ecotourism potential when conservation objectives, economic utilization, and community participation are managed in an integrated manner. These findings indicate that community-based ecotourism should be understood not merely as a tourism development strategy but also as a governance approach that strengthens the relationship between communities, institutions, and ecosystem sustainability.

2. Institutional Design and Governance Capacity in Community-Based Ecotourism

Institutional design refers to the arrangement of organizational structures, rules, authority distribution, coordination mechanisms, and accountability systems that regulate interactions among stakeholders in public governance. Within community-based ecotourism, institutional design provides the structural foundation through which organizations coordinate their responsibilities, allocate authority, and achieve collective objectives. Governance capacity subsequently reflects the ability of these institutional arrangements to formulate policies, coordinate stakeholders, implement programs, and respond effectively to emerging challenges. Zitri et al. (2026) argued that governance dynamics in community-based tourism are determined not only by stakeholder collaboration but also by the quality of institutional arrangements governing interactions among government agencies, local communities, and other stakeholders. This perspective highlights that governance capacity emerges from the interaction between institutional structures, coordination mechanisms, and organizational capabilities.

Institutional design becomes increasingly important in ecotourism destinations characterized by complex ecological and social conditions. Murahman et al. (2025) emphasized that community-based ecotourism governance should integrate formal institutions with local wisdom to ensure that decision-making processes remain responsive to both community needs and environmental conditions. Hardjati and Nafi'ah (2026) further argued that social capital constitutes a critical component of community governance because trust, shared norms, and collective action strengthen institutional resilience and organizational performance. These findings suggest that governance capacity is

shaped not only by formal administrative structures but also by institutional ability to mobilize social capital as a strategic governance resource.

Strengthening governance capacity also requires institutional arrangements capable of balancing environmental conservation with community welfare. Yunus et al. (2024) demonstrated that peatland ecosystems generate not only direct economic benefits but also significant ecological and social values that support sustainable livelihoods. Institutional governance, therefore, must integrate conservation objectives with local economic development through adaptive organizational arrangements capable of responding to environmental change. This conceptual perspective provides the theoretical foundation for the present study by positioning institutional design as the principal determinant of governance capacity in community-based ecotourism management. The study specifically examines how authority distribution, role clarity, organizational legitimacy, inter-organizational coordination, and institutional continuity contribute to strengthening governance capacity at Sebangau Blackwater Tourism as a community-based ecotourism destination.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine how institutional design influences governance capacity in community-based ecotourism management at Sebangau Blackwater Tourism, Kereng Bangkirai Village, Palangka Raya City, Indonesia. A qualitative case study was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of institutional dynamics, stakeholder interactions, and organizational capacity within the governance of a conservation-based tourism destination. This article was developed from the empirical findings of a doctoral dissertation, with the analysis specifically focusing on institutional design and governance capacity. Accordingly, only data directly related to organizational structure, authority distribution, role clarity, inter-organizational coordination, organizational capacity, and institutional relationships among stakeholders were analyzed. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who were directly involved in destination management, including representatives from the local government, the Sebangau National Park Authority, the village administration, Tourism Awareness Groups (*Pokdarwis*), local communities, private sector actors, academics, and the media.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Informants

Informant Group	Number of Informants	Primary Information
Local Government	3	Tourism policies, regulations, and destination development programs
Sebangau National Park Authority	2	Conservation management and inter-agency coordination
Village Administration	2	Community facilitation and local institutional governance
Tourism Awareness Group (<i>Pokdarwis</i>)	3	Operational management of the tourism destination
Local Community	5	Community participation, tourism services, and local empowerment
Private Sector	2	Business partnerships and tourism-related economic activities
Academics	2	Capacity-building initiatives, research, and technical assistance
Media and Community Organizations	1	Tourism promotion and public communication
Total	20	

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of institutional design and governance capacity. Interviews explored issues related to authority distribution, role clarity, inter-organizational coordination, organizational capacity, decision-making processes, accountability mechanisms, and institutional challenges encountered in community-based ecotourism management. Field observations focused on governance practices, stakeholder interactions, tourism facilities, and the implementation of organizational responsibilities within the destination. Documentary evidence included regional regulations, development planning documents, Tourism Awareness Group decrees, tourism statistics, institutional reports, and other official documents relevant to destination governance. Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. All interview transcripts, observational records, and documentary evidence were coded using NVivo 12 Plus to identify key themes related to institutional design and governance capacity, including role clarity, authority distribution, coordination mechanisms, organizational legitimacy, accountability, and institutional continuity. Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and document triangulation, allowing findings to be verified across multiple informants and documentary sources to produce credible and contextually grounded interpretations.

RESULT

1. Institutional Design in Community-Based Ecotourism Management

Findings indicate that the management of Sebangau Blackwater Tourism demonstrates that community-based ecotourism development is determined not only by the availability of natural resources but also by the effectiveness of institutional arrangements governing relationships among stakeholders. Analysis of interview data, field observations, and documentary evidence revealed that destination management involves multiple actors from the public sector, local communities, private enterprises, academia, and the media. Institutional diversity, however, has not yet been accompanied by an institutional design capable of effectively integrating organizational functions, authority distribution, and coordination mechanisms. Governance capacity therefore develops in a fragmented manner and remains highly dependent on the initiatives of individual organizations rather than on an integrated institutional system.

Formally, the Palangka Raya Tourism Office serves as the leading institution responsible for tourism policy, destination development, infrastructure provision, tourism promotion, and community empowerment programs. The Sebangau National Park Authority exercises jurisdiction over conservation management because a portion of tourism activities is conducted within the park's buffer zone. The Kereng Bangkirai Village Administration functions as an intermediary between local communities and government agencies, while the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) is responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the destination. Additional stakeholders include local entrepreneurs, boat operators, food vendors, tourism communities, academics, and media organizations that participate in destination development initiatives. These institutional arrangements indicate that destination governance has embraced a multi-stakeholder approach, although coordination mechanisms have not yet evolved into an integrated institutional framework capable of sustaining long-term collaboration.

Institutional mapping conducted during the study identified distinct roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Stakeholders and Institutional Roles in Sebangau Blackwater Tourism Management

Stakeholder	Primary Role	Institutional Authority
Palangka Raya Tourism Office	Tourism policy, destination development, promotion, and community empowerment	Regional tourism governance
Sebangau National Park Authority	Conservation management and protected area governance	Conservation authority
Kereng Bangkirai Village Administration	Community facilitation and local coordination	Administrative and coordinating authority
Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis)	Operational management and visitor services	Community-based tourism management
Local Communities	Tourism services, transportation, culinary businesses, and MSMEs	Operational participation

Private Sector	Business partnerships and limited investment	Economic collaboration
Academics	Research, training, and technical assistance	Capacity building
Media and Community Organizations	Tourism promotion and public communication	Information dissemination

Although institutional responsibilities have been formally identified, findings reveal that authority distribution has not been fully translated into standardized operational procedures. Most informants reported that coordination relies primarily on informal communication and interpersonal relationships rather than documented institutional mechanisms. Such arrangements enable effective cooperation when personal relationships are strong, yet governance performance declines during organizational transitions or leadership changes. Governance capacity consequently remains dependent on individual leadership rather than institutional resilience, indicating that organizational performance has not yet been institutionalized within a sustainable governance framework.

One of the most significant findings concerns the institutional continuity of the **Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis)**, which functions as the primary community organization responsible for destination management. Documentary analysis and interview evidence revealed that the group's official decree had expired while the process of appointing a new management structure had not yet been completed. This institutional transition has reduced the formal legitimacy of the organization and weakened its ability to coordinate with government agencies and external partners. From the perspective of institutional design, the absence of stable organizational legitimacy constrains the organization's capacity to represent community interests, manage tourism programs, establish inter-organizational partnerships, and ensure accountability within destination governance.

Findings further indicate that institutional arrangements continue to reflect a sectoral governance pattern. The local government primarily emphasizes destination development and tourism services, whereas the Sebangau National Park Authority prioritizes ecosystem conservation. Local communities focus predominantly on sustaining tourism-related livelihoods through boat transportation, culinary businesses, and other tourism services. These differing institutional priorities do not inherently create governance problems. Limited institutionalized coordination, however, prevents stakeholders from integrating their respective responsibilities into shared planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes. Inter-organizational forums remain irregular and are generally organized only in response to specific activities or events rather than functioning as permanent governance mechanisms. Institutional integration therefore remains relatively weak, reducing the overall capacity of destination governance despite the presence of multiple active stakeholders.

2. Governance Capacity in Community-Based Ecotourism Management

Findings demonstrate that governance capacity in Sebangau Blackwater Tourism is shaped by the collective ability of stakeholders to manage organizational resources, perform institutional functions, coordinate decision-making processes, and sustain destination management over time. Within the context of community-based ecotourism, governance capacity extends beyond the government's administrative capability to include the collective capacity of all stakeholders to organize tourism activities, resolve institutional challenges, allocate resources effectively, and balance economic development with environmental conservation. Evidence from interviews, observations, and documentary analysis indicates that governance capacity remains at a developing stage, where essential governance components already exist but have not yet been fully integrated into a coherent institutional system.

Organizational capacity within government institutions was found to be relatively strong in terms of regulatory authority, administrative support, destination development, and tourism promotion. The Palangka Raya Tourism Office has consistently facilitated destination development through infrastructure improvement, tourism promotion, and community empowerment programs. Likewise, the Sebangau National Park Authority possesses substantial institutional capacity in conservation management through ecosystem monitoring, biodiversity protection, and environmental management programs. Despite these institutional strengths, findings indicate that organizational capacities continue to develop independently according to the mandates of individual institutions rather than as components of an integrated governance system. Consequently, individual organizational capacity has advanced more rapidly than collective governance capacity, limiting the effectiveness of cross-sectoral collaboration.

At the community level, governance capacity is reflected in the ability of local residents to manage tourism activities on a daily basis. Community members actively provide river transportation services, culinary businesses, homestay facilities, handicrafts, tour guiding services, and other tourism-related enterprises. These activities demonstrate that local communities possess considerable operational capacity to support tourism development. Organizational capacity, however, has largely evolved through practical experience rather than systematic institutional strengthening programs. Training initiatives organized by government agencies and academic institutions remain sporadic and project-oriented, limiting their contribution to long-term organizational development. Operational competence has therefore progressed more rapidly than managerial capability, particularly in strategic planning, organizational management, monitoring, and evaluation.

Inter-organizational coordination represents another critical component of governance capacity. Findings indicate that communication among stakeholders occurs frequently during tourism festivals, promotional events, government visits, and other collaborative activities. Coordination mechanisms, however, remain predominantly event-driven rather than institutionalized within permanent governance structures. Formal coordination forums that

facilitate information exchange, joint planning, policy synchronization, and collaborative evaluation have not yet been established on a regular basis. Strategic decisions consequently continue to be made independently by individual organizations according to their respective mandates, reducing opportunities for integrated destination governance. Governance challenges therefore arise not from insufficient communication but from the absence of institutionalized coordination mechanisms capable of supporting sustained inter-organizational collaboration.

Institutional continuity also emerged as a significant determinant of governance capacity. Findings reveal that the incomplete renewal of the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*) management structure has weakened the organization's institutional legitimacy and reduced its effectiveness in representing community interests. This situation has affected the implementation of tourism programs, access to government assistance, and collaboration with external organizations. Governance capacity, therefore, depends not only on organizational competence but also on institutional continuity that provides legal certainty, organizational stability, and stakeholder confidence. Sustainable community-based tourism management requires local institutions capable of maintaining consistent organizational performance despite leadership transitions and administrative changes.

Beyond formal institutional arrangements, community social capital plays a substantial role in strengthening governance capacity. Local values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), deliberative decision-making (*musyawarah*), and collective responsibility for environmental conservation continue to support tourism management activities. Community participation is consistently observed in environmental clean-up campaigns, tourism events, destination maintenance, and visitor reception. These social values strengthen governance capacity by fostering trust, cooperation, and collective responsibility even when formal institutional mechanisms remain relatively weak. Community governance capacity therefore develops through the interaction between formal institutional arrangements and informal social institutions embedded within local culture.

To synthesize these findings, five principal dimensions of governance capacity were identified, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Dimensions of Governance Capacity in Sebangau Blackwater Tourism Management

Governance Capacity Dimension	Empirical Findings	Governance Implications
Organizational Capacity	Individual organizations possess adequate institutional capacity, although development remains sector-oriented	Collective governance capacity has not yet been fully established
Human Resource Capacity	Communities demonstrate strong operational skills, while managerial competencies remain limited	Tourism services perform well, but strategic management requires further strengthening
Inter-organizational Coordination	Coordination occurs primarily through informal and activity-based communication	Joint planning, monitoring, and evaluation remain insufficiently institutionalized
Institutional Continuity	Organizational legitimacy of <i>Pokdarwis</i> is weakened during leadership transition	Community representation and organizational effectiveness are reduced
Community Social Capital	Mutual cooperation, deliberation, and environmental awareness remain strong	Social capital reinforces governance capacity despite institutional limitations

Overall, findings indicate that governance capacity in Sebangau Blackwater Tourism is determined not merely by the availability of organizational resources but by the ability of institutional arrangements to integrate those resources into a coherent governance system. Government agencies, local communities, the Tourism Awareness Group, the Sebangau National Park Authority, private sector actors, academics, and media organizations each possess important institutional functions. Governance capacity nevertheless remains fragmented because institutional mechanisms capable of integrating authority distribution, organizational legitimacy, coordination, accountability, and continuous learning have not yet been fully developed. These findings suggest that strengthening governance capacity in community-based ecotourism requires institutional reforms that extend beyond increasing financial resources or technical skills. Greater emphasis should instead be placed on developing institutional arrangements that facilitate long-term coordination, organizational sustainability, adaptive governance, and collective decision-making among all stakeholders.

3. Relationship between Institutional Design and Governance Capacity

Findings indicate that governance capacity in Sebangau Blackwater Tourism does not develop independently but is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the institutional design governing relationships among organizations. Analysis of interview data, field observations, and documentary evidence demonstrates that governance capacity improves when institutional arrangements provide clear authority distribution, well-defined organizational roles, effective coordination mechanisms, and legitimate institutional structures. Conversely, governance capacity becomes fragmented when institutional arrangements lack clarity, causing organizations to operate independently

according to their respective mandates without generating effective institutional synergy. These findings suggest that institutional design constitutes the fundamental foundation upon which governance capacity is developed within community-based ecotourism management.

The relationship between institutional design and governance capacity is particularly evident in the distribution of authority among stakeholders. The local government, the Sebangau National Park Authority, the Kereng Bangkirai Village Administration, the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*), local communities, and private sector actors possess relatively distinct institutional responsibilities based on their organizational mandates. These responsibilities, however, have not been translated into integrated operational procedures capable of supporting collaborative governance. Although no major conflicts over authority were identified, overlapping responsibilities continue to occur during activities requiring the participation of multiple organizations. Governance performance therefore depends largely on informal communication and interpersonal relationships rather than institutionalized coordination mechanisms. These findings demonstrate that clear authority distribution represents a fundamental prerequisite for strengthening governance capacity and achieving sustainable destination management.

Institutional continuity constitutes another important mechanism linking institutional design and governance capacity. Findings reveal that the expiration of the Tourism Awareness Group's organizational decree not only created administrative uncertainty but also reduced the organization's institutional legitimacy in representing community interests. Weak organizational legitimacy affected collaboration with government institutions, access to development programs, and stakeholder coordination. Institutional continuity therefore serves not merely as a legal requirement but also as an essential determinant of organizational capacity, partnership development, accountability, and long-term governance effectiveness. Stable institutional arrangements provide organizations with the authority and legitimacy necessary to sustain collaborative relationships and implement tourism development initiatives.

The relationship between institutional design and governance capacity is further reflected in inter-organizational coordination mechanisms. Stakeholders maintain relatively intensive communication during tourism activities, promotional events, and collaborative programs. Coordination practices, however, remain largely informal and activity-oriented rather than institutionalized within permanent governance structures. Joint planning, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms have yet to become routine organizational practices. Organizational capacity to address cross-sectoral issues consequently continues to depend on individual initiatives and interpersonal relationships rather than formal institutional arrangements. Governance capacity therefore develops as a collection of separate organizational capabilities instead of an integrated collective governance capacity capable of supporting adaptive destination management.

Community social capital emerged as an important enabling factor that strengthens the relationship between institutional design and governance capacity. Values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), deliberative decision-making (*musyawarah*), and collective environmental responsibility continue to support destination management despite the limitations of formal institutional arrangements. Local communities actively participate in maintaining tourism facilities, organizing tourism events, protecting environmental quality, and supporting destination promotion through voluntary collective action. These findings indicate that governance capacity develops through the interaction between formal institutional arrangements and informal community institutions. Social capital, however, cannot fully substitute for formal institutional mechanisms because strategic decision-making, resource allocation, and inter-organizational accountability continue to require organizational legitimacy and clearly defined institutional responsibilities.

To summarize these findings, the relationship between institutional design and governance capacity is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Relationship Between Institutional Design and Governance Capacity in Sebangau Blackwater Tourism Management

Institutional Design Dimension	Empirical Findings	Implications for Governance Capacity
Authority Distribution	Stakeholder roles have been identified, although integrated operational procedures remain limited	Organizational capacity exists, but collective governance remains fragmented
Institutional Legitimacy	The Tourism Awareness Group experienced a period of organizational transition	Community representation and inter-organizational coordination became less effective
Coordination Mechanisms	Coordination is primarily informal and event-based	Joint planning, monitoring, and evaluation remain insufficient
Organizational Capacity	Government agencies and local communities demonstrate adequate operational capacity	Program implementation functions effectively, while institutional integration remains limited
Community Social Capital	Mutual cooperation, deliberation, and environmental stewardship remain strong	Social capital strengthens governance capacity despite institutional constraints

Source: Research Findings

Overall, findings demonstrate that the relationship between institutional design and governance capacity is mutually reinforcing. Institutional arrangements characterized by clear authority distribution, organizational legitimacy, structured coordination mechanisms, and institutional continuity contribute directly to stronger governance capacity by improving planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and adaptive decision-making. Governance capacity does not disappear when one institutional component is weak; instead, it becomes increasingly dependent on community social capital and individual organizational initiatives. Findings therefore confirm that strengthening governance capacity in community-based ecotourism

requires institutional reforms that extend beyond increasing organizational resources or technical competencies. Adaptive institutional design capable of integrating organizational functions, stakeholder coordination, and accountability mechanisms represents the principal pathway toward sustainable community-based ecotourism governance.

DISCUSSION

Findings indicate that institutional design constitutes the fundamental basis for developing governance capacity in community-based ecotourism management at Sebangau Blackwater Tourism. Clear institutional arrangements enable stakeholders to understand their respective roles, responsibilities, and authority, thereby improving governance effectiveness. Findings also demonstrate that the involvement of multiple stakeholders alone does not automatically produce strong governance capacity unless institutional relationships are supported by well-defined governance structures. This observation is consistent with the concept of institutional design in public governance, which emphasizes the importance of formal rules, organizational structures, and authority allocation as prerequisites for institutional effectiveness. Findings support those reported by Filantropi and Bella (2022), who concluded that the success of community-based tourism largely depends on the quality of local institutions managing tourism destinations. Similar evidence was presented by Suhandi et al. (2022), who found that community participation becomes more effective when supported by institutional arrangements capable of organizing stakeholder interactions systematically.

Governance capacity identified in this study further demonstrates that relatively clear authority distribution has not yet been accompanied by institutionalized coordination mechanisms. The local government, the Sebangau National Park Authority, the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*), the village administration, and local communities each perform distinct institutional functions; however, coordination continues to rely primarily on informal communication and personal relationships. Such conditions indicate that organizational capacity has not yet evolved into collective governance capacity, where institutions function as an integrated governance system. These findings reinforce the argument that governance capacity is determined not only by the capabilities of individual organizations but also by the quality of institutional relationships among them. Similar conclusions were reported by Aulia et al. (2024), who emphasized that stakeholder mapping is essential for clarifying institutional relationships and reducing role overlap in community-based tourism destinations. Comparable findings were presented by Andjanie et al. (2023), who argued that successful community-based tourism depends on clearly defined stakeholder responsibilities. Tiarantika and Efani (2024) also demonstrated that decision-support systems in ecotourism management become effective only when institutional coordination mechanisms are well established. Organizational continuity emerged as another important determinant of governance capacity. The transition of the Tourism Awareness Group's management reduced institutional legitimacy and weakened its ability to

represent community interests and collaborate with external stakeholders. Findings indicate that governance capacity depends not only on the competence of human resources but also on organizational continuity, which provides legitimacy, institutional stability, and certainty in decision-making processes. Organizations possessing strong institutional legitimacy are better positioned to coordinate development programs, allocate responsibilities, and establish long-term partnerships. These findings corroborate those of Maring et al. (2026), who found that legitimate institutional arrangements are capable of transforming stakeholder conflicts into constructive collaboration within community-based ecotourism management. Similar conclusions were reported by Wawo et al. (2025), who demonstrated that community participation increases when local organizations occupy clearly defined institutional positions. Sudarmawan and Hidayat (2025) likewise emphasized that sustainable tourism development requires stable local institutions capable of supporting continuous community empowerment.

Findings also reveal that community social capital strengthens governance capacity despite the limitations of formal institutional arrangements. Values such as mutual cooperation, deliberative decision-making, and environmental stewardship enable communities to sustain tourism services, maintain destination facilities, and support collective tourism activities. Within community-based ecotourism, social capital functions as an institutional resource that strengthens organizational resilience by fostering trust and long-term commitment among stakeholders. Social capital alone, however, cannot replace formal institutional arrangements in strategic decision-making and long-term program implementation. These findings are consistent with Arizkha et al. (2023), who concluded that social relationships and community participation constitute the primary assets supporting successful tourism village development. Similar observations were made by Andjanie et al. (2023), who argued that high levels of community participation should be accompanied by institutional mechanisms capable of managing participation effectively. Suhandi et al. (2022) further emphasized that community participation becomes sustainable only when supported by legitimate local institutions.

Findings further demonstrate that governance capacity cannot be separated from the ecological characteristics of Sebangau Blackwater Tourism, which forms part of a tropical peatland ecosystem. Destination governance must therefore integrate environmental conservation with tourism development because the sustainability of ecotourism depends directly on ecosystem integrity. Institutional design consequently performs a dual function by regulating stakeholder relationships while simultaneously integrating conservation objectives with local economic development. These findings are consistent with Sosilawaty et al. (2022), who reported that hydrological changes in peat swamp ecosystems directly affect vegetation diversity within Sebangau National Park, thereby requiring adaptive governance approaches. Similar arguments were presented by Ballut-Dajud et al. (2022), who identified weak institutional governance and poor stakeholder coordination as major drivers of wetland degradation. Perkasa et al. (2026) likewise demonstrated that community

behavior significantly influences forest fire risk in the Sebangau Watershed, highlighting the need for governance systems capable of integrating conservation objectives with community engagement.

From a sustainability perspective, findings indicate that institutional design should accommodate the interdependence between tourism development, habitat conservation, and the socio-economic dynamics of riverside communities. Sebangau Blackwater Tourism functions not only as a tourism destination but also as part of an ecosystem supporting globally important biodiversity, including the Bornean orangutan. Strengthening governance capacity should therefore focus on enhancing institutional ability to balance economic development, environmental conservation, and community welfare. These findings support those of Panda and Djohan (2025), who demonstrated that successful forest regeneration within Sebangau National Park depends largely on sustainable ecosystem management. Panda et al. (2025) similarly reported that the quality of orangutan habitat is closely associated with ecosystem integrity and long-term conservation management. Priono and Ellisa (2025) further emphasized that sustainable riverside settlements in Palangka Raya require an appropriate balance between local traditions, urban development, and environmental protection, suggesting that tourism governance should adopt an adaptive institutional perspective.

Overall, findings indicate that strengthening institutional design represents a more fundamental strategy than merely increasing individual organizational capacity. Clear authority distribution, institutional continuity, structured coordination mechanisms, and the integration of conservation objectives with community empowerment collectively determine governance capacity in community-based ecotourism. Tourism development should therefore prioritize institutional reform rather than focusing exclusively on training programs or infrastructure provision. Findings extend the work of Maring et al. (2026) regarding the importance of collaboration in community-based ecotourism management while complementing the findings of Tiarantika and Efani (2024) by demonstrating that governance capacity is ultimately determined by the quality of institutional arrangements. Findings also reinforce the argument advanced by Aulia et al. (2024) that sustainable destination management requires clearly defined institutional structures capable of integrating stakeholder relationships within an adaptive governance system.

Based on the synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical discussion, this study proposes an Institutional Design-Governance Capacity Model for Community-Based Ecotourism Management. The model demonstrates that governance capacity is primarily shaped by four interrelated dimensions of institutional design, namely authority distribution, institutional legitimacy, coordination mechanisms, and organizational continuity. These dimensions collectively influence governance capacity through stronger organizational capability, stakeholder coordination, accountability, collaborative decision-making, and adaptive governance. Community social capital, reflected in mutual cooperation, deliberative practices, and environmental stewardship, functions as an enabling factor that reinforces the relationship between institutional design

and governance capacity. Strengthened governance capacity subsequently contributes to sustainable community-based ecotourism management by balancing environmental conservation, community empowerment, and local economic development. The proposed model extends existing governance literature by positioning institutional design as the principal determinant of governance capacity rather than treating governance capacity solely as a consequence of organizational resources or stakeholder participation.

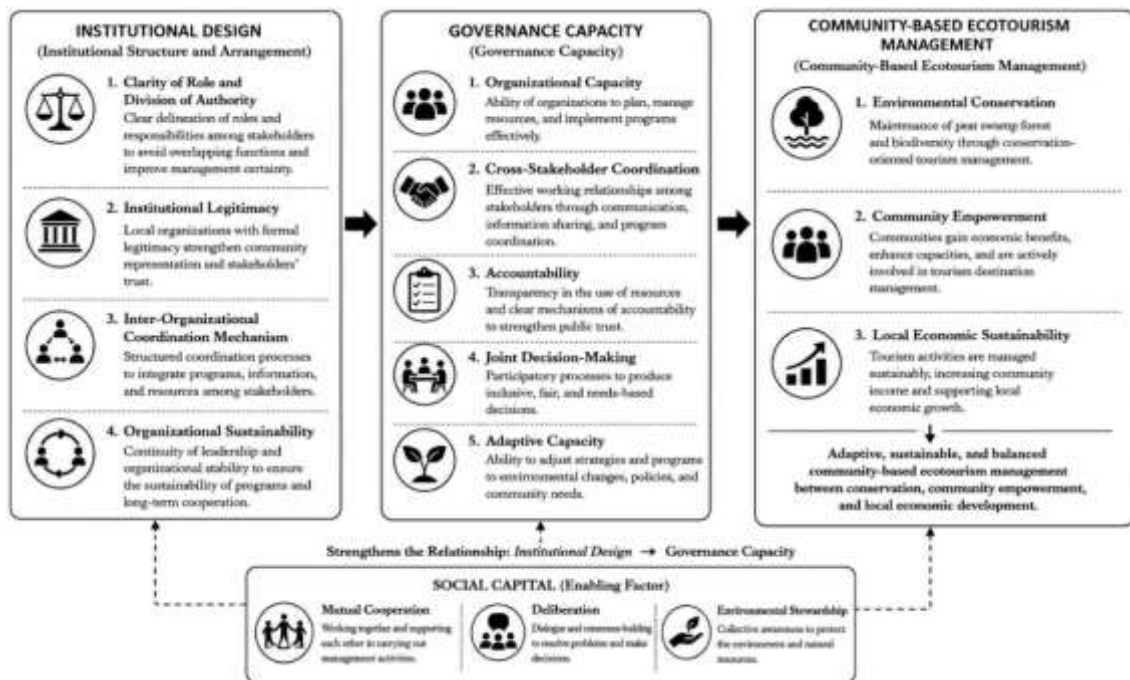


Figure 1. Institutional Design–Governance Capacity Model for Community-Based Ecotourism Management

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. The research employed a single-case study design, meaning that the identified institutional characteristics are closely associated with the specific social, ecological, and administrative context of Sebangau Blackwater Tourism. Analysis focused primarily on the relationship between institutional design and governance capacity without quantitatively assessing their effects on destination performance, community welfare, or conservation outcomes. Institutional dynamics are also subject to continuous change, allowing organizational structures, policies, and stakeholder relationships to evolve beyond the period covered by this research. Future studies are therefore encouraged to adopt comparative designs across multiple community-based ecotourism destinations and to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to examine more comprehensively the relationships among institutional design, governance capacity, and destination performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings demonstrate that institutional design serves as the primary foundation for developing governance capacity in community-based ecotourism management at Sebangau Blackwater Tourism. Institutional arrangements involving the local government, the Sebangau National Park Authority, the village administration, the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), local communities, private sector actors, academics, and the media have established the basic governance framework for destination management. Governance effectiveness, however, remains constrained by limited role clarity, organizational legitimacy, institutional continuity, and structured coordination mechanisms. Community social capital, reflected in mutual cooperation, deliberative decision-making, and environmental stewardship, partially compensates for these institutional limitations by strengthening stakeholder collaboration and sustaining tourism management activities. Findings confirm that governance capacity cannot be enhanced solely through organizational resources or capacity-building programs. Strengthening governance capacity requires an adaptive institutional design capable of integrating stakeholder functions, authority distribution, coordination mechanisms, accountability, and organizational continuity into a coherent governance system.

The study contributes theoretically by extending the public administration literature through demonstrating that institutional design functions as a key determinant of governance capacity in community-based ecotourism management. Existing studies have generally emphasized stakeholder participation, collaborative governance, or community empowerment, whereas this study highlights the critical role of institutional arrangements in shaping governance performance. Practical implications are equally significant, suggesting that local governments and destination managers should prioritize strengthening local institutions through organizational revitalization, establishment of permanent multi-stakeholder coordination forums, development of standardized operational procedures, clarification of institutional responsibilities, and continuous organizational capacity development. These institutional reforms are expected to improve governance effectiveness while supporting the long-term sustainability of conservation-based ecotourism destinations.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study adopted a single-case study approach, meaning that the findings are closely associated with the institutional, social, and ecological characteristics of Sebangau Blackwater Tourism and may not be directly generalizable to other community-based ecotourism destinations. Second, the analysis focused specifically on the relationship between institutional design and governance capacity without quantitatively examining their influence on destination performance, community welfare, visitor satisfaction, or conservation outcomes. Third, institutional governance is inherently dynamic, allowing organizational structures, stakeholder relationships, and public policies to evolve beyond the period of data collection. Future research should therefore employ comparative studies across multiple ecotourism destinations with different institutional contexts and

integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine more comprehensively the relationships among institutional design, governance capacity, collaborative performance, and sustainable tourism outcomes. Future studies are also encouraged to develop measurable governance capacity indicators that can serve as practical tools for evaluating institutional performance and supporting evidence-based policy development in community-based ecotourism management.

FURTHER STUDY

This study still has some limitations, so more research on the topic of Institutional Design and Governance Capacity in Community-Based Ecotourism Management: A Case Study of Sebangau Blackwater Tourism is needed to improve the study and give extra insights to both the author and the readers.

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