

Adaptive Collaborative Governance for Sustainable Rural Tourism: Evidence from Ciamis Regency, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism governance requires coordination among public agencies, businesses, communities, academic institutions, and media while also responding to changing institutional, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions. This study examines that challenge through an empirical qualitative case study of tourism-village development in Ciamis Regency, Indonesia. The study draws on 22 purposively selected stakeholders representing the pentahelix actor groups and uses semi-structured interviews, field observation, and documentary review. Analysis is organized around Ansell and Gash's collaborative-governance dimensions and then extends them by identifying recurrent mechanisms that help collaboration persist under changing conditions. The findings show that collaboration in Ciamis is constrained by power and resource asymmetries, fragmented communication, dependence on individual facilitative leaders, and the absence of a permanent cross-sectoral platform. At the same time, local cultural mediation, credible local champions, capacity-building, information sharing, and institutional memory repeatedly function as enabling mechanisms. These patterns are synthesized as a context-specific "Support" dimension that connects starting conditions with the collaborative process and strengthens feedback between outcomes and subsequent governance cycles. The study therefore proposes an Adaptive Collaborative Governance framework for Ciamis rural tourism. Its contribution is not a universal model for emerging economies, but an empirically grounded framework whose transferability should be assessed in comparable rural-tourism settings.

Keywords: Adaptive Collaborative Governance; Ciamis Regency; Collaborative Governance; Rural Tourism; Stakeholder Complexity; Sustainable Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become an important instrument of regional development because it can generate employment, stimulate local enterprise, support cultural preservation, and diversify regional revenue. These benefits are especially relevant in decentralized settings where local governments are expected to mobilize place-based assets while facing limited fiscal and administrative capacity. In Ciamis Regency, West Java, this challenge became more salient after the administrative separation of Pangandaran, which reduced Ciamis's access to tourism-related regional revenue and increased the policy importance of developing alternative natural, historical, cultural, and special-interest destinations. Local development therefore depends not only on identifying tourism assets but also on creating governance arrangements capable of coordinating multiple actors and sustaining collective action over time (1–3).

Rural tourism is particularly governance-intensive. Tourism villages combine economic activity with community identity, land use, environmental stewardship, cultural heritage, infrastructure, and local political relations. Their development therefore involves actors with different mandates and resources: local government controls regulation and public infrastructure; businesses contribute capital and market access; communities hold local knowledge and social legitimacy; universities contribute research and capacity-building; and media support information diffusion and destination visibility. The pentahelix configuration can broaden resources and

participation, but it can also create coordination costs, unequal influence, and conflicting priorities when collaboration lacks credible institutional rules and shared decision-making mechanisms (4,5).

Collaborative governance provides a useful starting point for analyzing this complexity. Ansell and Gash define collaborative governance as a formal, consensus-oriented process in which public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in collective decision-making. Their framework emphasizes starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and a collaborative process based on dialogue, trust, commitment, and shared understanding (5). Related network-governance research similarly shows that collaboration depends on the distribution of authority, the form of network management, and the capacity to maintain legitimacy and coordination among interdependent organizations (10,11).

However, sustainable rural tourism is not governed under static conditions. Tourism demand, leadership, technology, community expectations, environmental pressures, and policy priorities can change during the life of a destination. Adaptive-governance scholarship therefore adds a second theoretical lens. Adaptive governance emphasizes learning, flexibility, bridging organizations, distributed knowledge, feedback, and institutional adjustment under uncertainty (6–9). Folke et al. argue that adaptive governance relies on networks, leadership, trust, and learning across organizational levels (6), while Chaffin et al. show that adaptive governance develops through iterative institutional change rather than through a single linear policy sequence (7). Adaptive co-management further highlights the importance of combining collaborative relationships with learning and adjustment across scales (8,9). These ideas are consistent with tourism-governance scholarship that treats policy learning as central to sustainability (2).

The empirical problem in Ciamis is that tourism initiatives involve the relevant pentahelix actors, yet stakeholder engagement remains fragmented and often project-based. Government agencies possess stronger formal authority, communities and Pokdarwis hold local legitimacy but uneven organizational capacity, and private and academic actors participate with different incentives and time horizons. The submitted manuscript also identified dependence on individual leadership, fragmented communication, and the absence of a permanent cross-sectoral forum. These conditions create a practical question that conventional collaboration models do not fully resolve: how can collaboration remain functional when starting conditions, leadership, knowledge, and stakeholder capacity change over time?

This study therefore reframes the article as an empirical qualitative case study rather than a conceptual literature-review paper. It asks three questions: (1) how do the four Ansell-Gash dimensions shape collaborative rural-tourism governance in Ciamis; (2) what recurring mechanisms help stakeholders respond to institutional and social change; and (3) how can those mechanisms be synthesized into a context-specific adaptive collaborative-governance framework? The contribution is deliberately bounded. The study does not claim to demonstrate effectiveness across emerging economies. Instead, it develops an empirically grounded model from Ciamis and discusses conditions under which the model may be theoretically transferable to comparable rural-tourism settings.

METHODS

Research design and case setting

This study used an empirical qualitative single-case design with a descriptive-interpretive orientation. Ciamis Regency was selected because tourism-village development has become an important regional-development strategy following the administrative separation of Pangandaran and because the governance process involves a visible pentahelix configuration of government, academia, business, community, and media actors. The case design was intended to explain how collaboration operates in its institutional and socio-cultural context rather than to estimate population parameters.

Sampling and participants

Twenty-two informants were purposively selected because they possessed direct knowledge of tourism planning, destination management, community organization, tourism business activity, research or capacity-building, or

tourism communication in Ciamis. The sample covered the five pentahelix actor groups: local government (n=5), academia (n=4), tourism businesses/private sector (n=4), community and traditional leaders (n=5), and media (n=4). Key government informants included officials responsible for regional planning and tourism administration, while non-government informants represented actors directly involved in tourism- village development.

Table 1. Participant distribution and analytical role

Stakeholder group	Illustrative roles	n
Local government	Regional planning and tourism administration	5
Academia	Researchers / capacity-building actors	4
Business / private sector	Tourism-related businesses and market actors	4
Community / traditional actors	Pokdarwis, community and cultural leaders	5
Media	Tourism communication / media actors	4

Data collection

Field evidence was assembled through three complementary techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were used to explore stakeholder roles, incentives, power relations, institutional rules, leadership, communication, trust, conflict, and perceptions of tourism-village development. The fieldwork was conducted between May 2025 and August 2025. Interviews were primarily conducted face-to-face at the participants' respective offices or community centers in Ciamis, with three interviews conducted virtually via Zoom due to scheduling conflicts. The typical interview duration ranged from 45 to 75 minutes. All participants consented to audio recording, and the resulting audio files were transcribed verbatim by the research team. Transcripts were then checked against the audio files for accuracy.

Second, field observation was used to examine stakeholder interaction and the practical organization of tourism activities. A total of 6 field observations were conducted during multi-stakeholder tourism planning meetings, community Pokdarwis workshops, and active tourism operations in selected tourism villages. Third, documentary materials were reviewed to contextualize interview accounts, including regional tourism-planning instruments and records associated with tourism-village initiatives. The concrete list of documentary sources reviewed included the Ciamis Regency Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (Ripparkab Ciamis), local village-level tourism decrees (SK Desa Wisata), meeting minutes from pentahelix coordination forums, and annual progress reports from the Tourism Office. The use of multiple evidence types allowed the analysis to compare formal institutional arrangements with stakeholder interpretations and observed practice.

Analytical strategy and derivation of the Support dimension

The analytical logic combined a deductive and an inductive step. In the deductive step, evidence was organized around the four dimensions of Ansell and Gash: starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and collaborative process. In the second step, recurring patterns that cut across those dimensions but were not adequately explained by the original linear sequence were grouped into an additional category. These patterns concerned culturally grounded mediation, locally credible champions, capacity-building, information and technical scaffolding, and continuity across leadership or project cycles. The category was subsequently labelled Support. The Support dimension was therefore treated as an interpretive synthesis of recurrent empirical mechanisms rather than as an a priori assumption.

To ensure a rigorous coding procedure, qualitative data analysis software NVivo was utilized. The coding process followed three distinct stages: open coding to extract initial concepts, axial coding to group related codes under the Ansell and Gash dimensions, and selective coding to synthesize the emergent "Support" dimension. An initial codebook was developed by the primary researcher and refined through iterative inter-coder discussions among the three co-authors until a high level of consensus was reached. Data collection and coding continued until thematic saturation was achieved, at which point no new sub-themes or conceptual categories emerged from subsequent interview transcripts.

Trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethics

Credibility in the revised analysis is strengthened by linking major claims to more than one form of evidence and by distinguishing empirical findings from interpretive model development and policy recommendations. The results section therefore reports the evidence base for each theme and includes a thematic derivation matrix for the Support dimension. Transferability is addressed through a detailed description of the Ciamis governance context rather than through statistical generalization.

Data triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying interview accounts with field observation notes and the reviewed policy documents. Member checking was performed by sharing a summary of the preliminary findings and transcribed quotes with five key informants to confirm that their perspectives were accurately represented. Peer debriefing was conducted regularly within the research group to challenge emerging biases. Regarding researcher positionality, the authors acknowledge their roles as external academic researchers, which granted them an objective stance but required deliberate trust-building efforts with local community leaders to overcome social distance. All data were securely stored in encrypted digital folders, and participant confidentiality was protected using pseudonyms (e.g., Respondent A, Government Official 1). Written or verbal informed consent was obtained from all informants prior to data collection. This study was formally approved by the Ethics Committee of Universitas Galuh Ciamis under reference number 042/UNIGAL/ETHICS/2025.

RESULTS

Multi-stakeholder configuration and starting conditions

The Ciamis tourism-village governance arena involves five pentahelix actors, but they enter collaboration from unequal positions. Local government holds the strongest formal authority because it controls regulation, public programs, and access to regional planning instruments. Tourism businesses contribute market knowledge and financial resources, whereas community and traditional actors provide cultural legitimacy, local knowledge, and direct control over many place-based tourism practices. Academic and media actors contribute knowledge, training, promotion, and information circulation. These complementary resources create interdependence, but they do not eliminate asymmetry.

Interview evidence summarized in the submitted manuscript indicates that differences in authority, resources, and technical knowledge can shift collaboration toward a government-led process rather than an equal deliberative forum. Community actors may be invited to participate but still possess less influence over agenda-setting and resource allocation. This imbalance is reinforced when Pokdarwis and community groups have uneven organizational capacity or when information about programs and funding is not equally available. The empirical implication is that participation alone does not guarantee collaborative governance; the process also requires mechanisms that help less-resourced actors enter deliberation with sufficient knowledge and organizational support.

"We are always invited to the coordination meetings at the district level, so on paper, it looks like we are involved. But in reality, it feels like the big decisions especially about which villages get budget allocations or infrastructure help have already been decided beforehand by the office. We want to develop our village, but we are often left in the dark about funding cycles and selection criteria until the official decree is already issued." (Informant C-03, Pokdarwis Representative, Personal Communication, June 14, 2025).

Facilitative leadership and continuity risk

Facilitative leadership plays a bridging role between formal tourism policy and local implementation. The findings indicate that local leaders and tourism officials help translate the Rencana Induk Pembangunan Kepariwisata Daerah (RIPPDA) and national tourism priorities into activities that community organizations can understand and implement. Effective leadership is therefore not limited to issuing instructions; it includes mediation, agenda alignment, resource mobilization, and the creation of space for community participation.

At the same time, the case shows a continuity problem. Collaboration frequently depends on particular officials or local champions who possess personal credibility and cross-sectoral relationships. When these actors are rotated, leave office, or become inactive, networks can weaken because knowledge and trust remain attached to individuals rather than embedded in institutional routines. This finding is important for adaptive governance because it identifies leadership turnover as a source of institutional vulnerability rather than merely a personnel issue.

"In our governance environment, everything moves forward smoothly when we have a local champion or an official who truly bridges the gap between bureaucracy and the village community. However, structural rotation is a real challenge. When a supportive head of section or a proactive village head gets transferred, the collaborative programs often stall. The new official usually comes in with a different set of priorities, and we have to rebuild the trust and the entire networking process completely from scratch." (Informant G-02, Regional Tourism Administrator, Personal Communication, July 2, 2025).

Institutional design: flexibility without a permanent collaborative platform

The institutional arrangements in Ciamis display both flexibility and fragmentation. The revitalization of the Kuta traditional village illustrates that formal programs can be adapted to local socio-cultural conditions rather than implemented through a uniform administrative blueprint. This flexibility is a strength because culturally sensitive tourism development requires local rules, meanings, and community authority to be recognized.

However, the broader governance architecture remains episodic. Collaboration tends to intensify around particular projects, promotion events, or destination initiatives, but the submitted evidence does not show a permanent cross-sectoral institution with clearly codified roles for all pentahelix actors. The absence of a durable platform limits institutional memory and makes coordination dependent on project cycles and personal networks. This gap helps explain why the study later identifies institutional continuity as part of the Support dimension.

This systemic limitation is evident in the regulatory structure of Peraturan Daerah (PERDA) Kabupaten Ciamis No. 16 Tahun 2016 concerning the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA) 2017–2027. While the master plan and subsequent updates, such as PERDA No. 9 Tahun 2022 concerning Tourism Administration, provide clear guidelines for macro-level targets and administrative zoning, they establish no structural multi-stakeholder operational platform. pentahelix engagement is treated as a procedural requirement for ad-hoc village decrees (*SK Desa Wisata*) or annual development planning forums (*Musrenbang*), rather than being codified into a sustained governance council.

Collaborative process: dialogue, trust, and fragmented communication

Face-to-face dialogue and interpersonal trust are central to the collaborative process. The strongest initiatives reported in the study were associated with repeated interaction among government officials, community actors, and other partners. These interactions helped participants clarify objectives, negotiate practical responsibilities, and build shared understanding about the economic and cultural value of tourism villages.

Nevertheless, communication remains fragmented across sectors. Government actors often emphasize regulatory compliance and regional economic targets, while community actors place stronger weight on cultural preservation, local livelihoods, and direct benefits. Academic knowledge does not always move efficiently into practice, and media engagement is often stronger in promotion than in sustained governance dialogue. The problem is therefore not an absence of communication but insufficient continuity, translation, and alignment across stakeholder knowledge systems. This communication gap constrains trust-building and contributes to recurrent re-negotiation of goals.

"The government side talks in terms of legal targets, administrative procedures, and tourism arrivals to hit regional economic indicators. But down here in the village, we care about preserving our community customs and ensuring that our local families can put food on the table every day from these tourism activities. When we meet, it often feels like we are speaking different languages. They give us technical templates to fill out instead of listening to how their regulations clash with our day-to-day cultural practices." (Informant B-01, Tourism Business Owner / Community Partner, Personal Communication, July 24, 2025).

Empirical derivation of the Support dimension

Across the preceding themes, several mechanisms repeatedly appeared as practical responses to weaknesses in starting conditions and collaboration. Rather than treating these mechanisms as recommendations added after the analysis, the revised manuscript makes their empirical origin explicit. Table 2 shows how the Support dimension was derived from patterns already reported in the case.

Table 2. Thematic derivation of the Support dimension

Empirical pattern in Ciamis	Analytical problem	Support mechanism	Adaptive function
Differences between bureaucratic language and community cultural priorities	Cognitive and cultural distance between actors	Cultural mediation	Translates policy into locally legitimate meanings and reduces conflict
Uneven organizational and technical capacity among local actors	Participation does not equal effective influence	Local champions and capacity-building	Strengthens voice, implementation capability, and continuity
Fragmented flow of information among government, academics, community, business, and media	Information asymmetry and repeated misunderstanding	Information and technical scaffolding	Improves shared understanding, evidence access, and coordinated decisions
Dependence on project cycles and individual leaders	Loss of knowledge and trust when personnel or priorities change	Institutional memory and continuity mechanisms	Retains learning and stabilizes collaboration across governance cycles

The Support dimension therefore represents a set of enabling mechanisms located between the initial conditions of collaboration and the collaborative process itself. It does not replace institutional design or facilitative leadership. Instead, it operationalizes how those dimensions become usable by actors with unequal resources and different cultural frames. The distinction is analytically important: institutional design establishes the rules of participation, while Support helps stakeholders acquire the capacity, information, cultural translation, and continuity needed to use those rules effectively.

DISCUSSION

From collaborative governance to adaptive collaborative governance

The Ciamis case confirms several established findings in collaborative-governance theory: collaboration is sensitive to power and resource asymmetry, leadership quality, institutional rules, trust, and repeated dialogue (5,10,11). The empirical contribution of this study lies not in disputing those dimensions but in showing that rural-tourism collaboration must also survive changing actors, incomplete information, uneven capacity, and project cycles. These conditions bring the case closer to adaptive-governance theory, which emphasizes social learning, bridging mechanisms, flexibility, and feedback under uncertainty (6–9).

Adaptive governance adds two ideas that are especially relevant to Ciamis. First, collaboration should generate learning that modifies subsequent institutional choices rather than ending at a single outcome. Second, bridging mechanisms are necessary when actors operate with different knowledge systems, resources, and organizational capacities. Folke et al. describe bridging organizations and networks as mechanisms that lower collaboration and conflict-resolution costs (6). Berkes similarly emphasizes knowledge partnerships, bridging organizations, and social learning in the evolution of co-management (9). In Ciamis, the empirical patterns synthesized as Support perform a comparable bridging function, although in a rural-tourism rather than natural-resource management setting.

Causal logic of the proposed Adaptive Collaborative Governance framework

The revised framework retains the core Ansell-Gash logic but makes the process explicitly iterative. Starting conditions remain the input: they include asymmetries in power, resources, knowledge, incentives, and prior relationships. Institutional design and facilitative leadership constitute the enabling architecture. Support then operates as a mechanism that reduces cognitive, cultural, informational, and capacity gaps before and during collaboration. The collaborative process converts these conditions into dialogue, trust, commitment, shared understanding, and joint action. Outcomes are not the terminal point. They feed back into the next cycle by changing trust, actor capacity, rules, available knowledge, and stakeholder expectations.

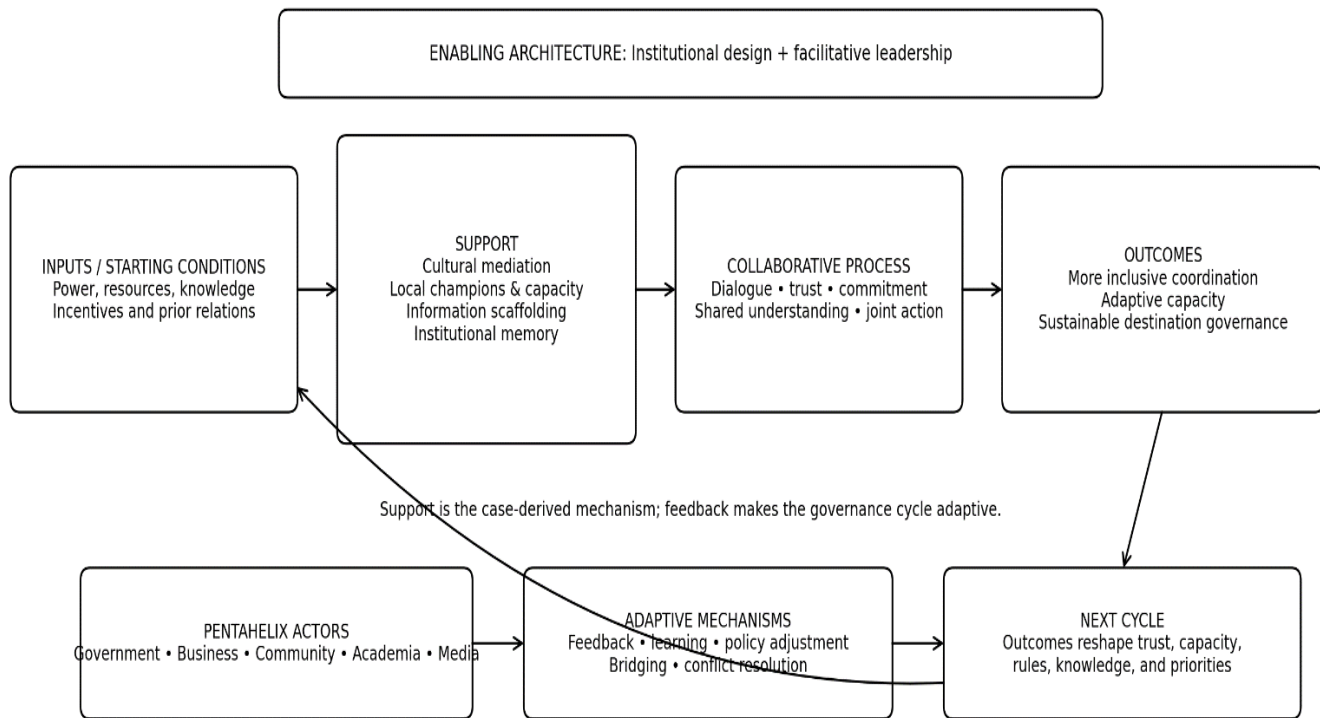


Figure 1. Adaptive Collaborative Governance framework for sustainable rural tourism in Ciamis Regency

This feedback architecture is consistent with adaptive-governance scholarship, which treats governance as an evolving response to changing social-ecological and institutional conditions rather than as a fixed institutional design (6,7). The model also clarifies the relationship between evidence and interpretation. The four Ansell-Gash dimensions are established theoretical categories; the Support dimension is a case-derived analytical extension; and the explicit feedback loop is a theoretical synthesis that connects the empirical findings with adaptive-governance literature. Making these layers visible avoids treating recommendations as if they were direct empirical observations.

Established findings and policy recommendations

The established empirical findings are bounded to Ciamis. They indicate unequal stakeholder resources, strong but person-dependent facilitative leadership, flexible yet episodic institutional arrangements, fragmented communication, and recurring reliance on culturally grounded mediation, local champions, capacity-building, information support, and institutional continuity. These findings explain why collaboration can proceed in specific projects while remaining vulnerable at the system level.

Policy recommendations follow from, but should not be conflated with, those findings. The first recommendation is to institutionalize a permanent cross-sectoral tourism forum with clearly defined representation from all pentahelix groups. The second is to strengthen institutional memory through documented decisions, shared data, and handover mechanisms that survive administrative turnover. The third is to fund soft governance infrastructure - facilitation, mediation, capacity-building, and knowledge translation - alongside physical tourism infrastructure. The fourth is to use small-scale joint initiatives as learning experiments whose outcomes are

reviewed and incorporated into subsequent planning. These recommendations reflect adaptive-governance principles of learning and adjustment rather than evidence that such mechanisms have already been fully institutionalized in Ciamis.

Scope and theoretical transferability

The empirical scope of this study is Ciamis Regency. Accordingly, claims are limited to the institutional and socio-cultural conditions observed in this case. The framework may nevertheless have theoretical transferability to other rural-tourism settings when three conditions are present: multi-stakeholder interdependence, unequal resources or knowledge, and a need to adjust governance arrangements over time. Transferability should be assessed through contextual comparison, not assumed from the label “emerging economy.” Comparative studies across Indonesian regions or other decentralized rural-tourism systems are therefore necessary before broader generalization.

CONCLUSION

This study reframed rural-tourism governance in Ciamis as an empirical problem of both collaboration and adaptation. The evidence shows that the pentahelix configuration provides complementary resources, but collaboration remains constrained by unequal influence, fragmented communication, dependence on individual leaders, and the absence of a permanent cross-sectoral platform. These conditions mean that successful coordination requires more than formal participation.

The central analytical contribution is the Support dimension, derived from recurrent case patterns involving cultural mediation, local champions and capacity-building, information and technical scaffolding, and institutional memory. Support is positioned between starting conditions and the collaborative process and is reinforced by institutional design and facilitative leadership. When combined with an explicit feedback loop in which outcomes reshape subsequent starting conditions, the model becomes adaptive rather than linear.

The resulting Adaptive Collaborative Governance framework should be understood as a context-specific model for Ciamis, not as proof of a universal solution for emerging economies. Its broader value lies in specifying mechanisms that can be tested elsewhere. Future research should validate the framework through comparative and longitudinal studies, examine how Support mechanisms change as destinations mature, and assess whether stronger institutionalization improves both community inclusion and destination sustainability.

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