

Collaborative Governance and Distributed Capacity in Sustainable Rural Tourism Development

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800566>

Received: 25 August 2026; Accepted: 30 August 2026; Published: 12 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Rural tourism development involves multiple stakeholders with different resources, knowledge, capacities, and interests. This paper discusses how collaborative governance can connect these distributed capacities to support joint action and sustainable rural tourism development. Using a literature-based discussion approach, the paper synthesizes studies on collaborative governance, stakeholder participation, capacity for joint action, facilitative government, leadership, trust, and rural tourism. The discussion shows that stakeholder participation alone is insufficient to produce effective collaboration. Joint action requires coordination, relationships among actors, and mechanisms that enable different stakeholders to contribute their respective capacities. The discussion also highlights the important role of village government as a facilitator in connecting local communities with external actors and resources. Edu Wisata Mekarsari Awi is used as a local illustration of how distributed capacities may operate within rural tourism development. Overall, the paper argues that collaborative governance provides an important mechanism for transforming distributed stakeholder capacities into joint action while supporting community interests and sustainable rural tourism development.

Keywords: collaborative governance; distributed capacity; joint action; rural tourism; stakeholder participation

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism development involves multiple actors whose resources, knowledge, institutional authority, and interests are rarely concentrated within a single organization. The development of rural tourism therefore requires governance arrangements capable of coordinating relationships among public authorities, local communities, tourism managers, businesses, and external stakeholders. Recent research identifies collaborative governance as an increasingly important approach in rural tourism, reflecting a broader movement from hierarchical forms of governance toward more horizontal relationships among stakeholders. At the same time, stakeholder participation remains an important concern because the involvement of multiple actors does not necessarily explain how participation develops into deliberation and joint decision-making (Reina-Usuga et al., 2024; Sentanu et al., 2023).

Collaborative governance provides a theoretical basis for examining how public and non-public actors can work together toward shared objectives (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Emerson et al. (2012) extend this perspective through the concept of capacity for joint action, emphasizing the ability to connect resources and capacities located across different actors. This perspective is particularly relevant to rural tourism because the resources required for destination development may include financial resources, knowledge, skills, social relationships, institutional authority, and access to external networks. The central issue is not simply whether stakeholders are present, but whether their different capacities can be connected through collaborative processes to support joint action.

Research on rural tourism provides evidence that local communities do not always possess sufficient capacity to manage all tourism-related activities independently. Sutomo et al. (2024), for example, identify differences

in community capacity across tourism activities in tourism villages in Sleman Regency and highlight the continued importance of external support and collaborative networks. Research on community-based tourism also emphasizes self-organization and networking as mechanisms for strengthening community capacity and enabling stakeholders to participate more effectively in tourism development (Romero-Medina et al., 2024). These findings indicate that rural tourism development may depend on the ability to connect local capacities with external resources while simultaneously strengthening local organizational capabilities.

The distribution of capacities across actors raises an important question for collaborative governance: how can stakeholder participation and distributed capacity be transformed into joint action that contributes to sustainable rural tourism? Existing rural tourism research has identified stakeholder participation, public-sector support, trust, communication, shared goals, learning, and planning as important elements of cooperation, but the mechanisms connecting these elements to joint action remain insufficiently developed (Leite et al., 2023; Reina-Usuga et al., 2024). Research on rural tourism and sustainable territory development further suggests that collaborative governance can play an important role in connecting tourism development with broader territorial objectives (Valderrama & Polanco, 2024; Valderrama et al., 2025). This indicates a need to examine collaborative governance not only as a form of stakeholder coordination but also as a mechanism for connecting capacities distributed across different actors.

Government has a particular position within this process because village governments possess formal institutional authority while operating in governance environments that involve actors beyond the public sector. Research on public-sector interorganizational networks shows that leadership can operate through coordination, facilitation, and relationship management among actors with different levels of autonomy (Akerboom et al., 2024). Trust also has an important relational dimension because it can influence administrators' willingness to support citizen participation, although trust alone does not guarantee successful collaboration (Vento, 2024). These perspectives suggest that facilitative government, leadership, and trust may support collaborative processes by creating conditions in which different actors are able to contribute their respective capacities.

The sustainability of rural tourism also requires attention beyond tourism growth or economic benefits alone. A systematic review by Li et al. (2024) shows that rural tourism can generate social and economic benefits while also producing spatial, economic, social, and cultural changes in traditional villages. Sustainable rural tourism consequently requires consideration of community benefits, employment and local economic opportunities, environmental quality, local participation, and long-term destination management. Collaborative governance becomes relevant to these concerns because different stakeholders may hold different priorities regarding economic development, community well-being, environmental protection, cultural values, and the long-term management of rural destinations (Li et al., 2024; Valderrama & Polanco, 2024).

This paper develops a literature-based conceptual argument concerning the relationship between stakeholder participation, distributed capacity, collaborative governance, joint action, and sustainable rural tourism outcomes. The paper positions collaborative governance as a mechanism for connecting capacities distributed across actors and facilitating their transformation into joint action, while facilitative government, leadership, and trust are treated as supporting conditions for the collaborative process. Edu Wisata Mekarsari Awi is used as a local illustration to contextualize the conceptual argument at the village level, not as a formal case study or as empirical evidence for testing causal relationships. The paper contributes a conceptual framework that clarifies how distributed capacity may help explain the relationship between stakeholder participation and joint action in rural tourism development, while identifying sustainable rural tourism outcomes that can be examined through future empirical research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Governance in Rural Tourism Development

Rural tourism development involves multiple stakeholders whose interests, institutional positions, and capacities may differ. Collaborative tourism governance therefore requires mechanisms for coordinating relationships among public authorities, communities, tourism organizations, businesses, and other stakeholders. A systematic review of collaborative tourism governance identifies diverse stakeholder configurations across local and regional settings, highlighting inter-actor coordination as an important

component of collaborative processes (Sentanu et al., 2023). Collaborative governance provides a framework for bringing public and non-public actors into shared processes oriented toward common objectives (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Emerson et al. (2012) further emphasize capacity for joint action as an important component of collaborative governance, linking collaboration to the ability of actors to connect resources and capacities in support of collective action.

Research on rural tourism and sustainable territory development extends this perspective by emphasizing relationships among actors and the role of collaborative governance in connecting tourism development with broader territorial objectives. Valderrama and Polanco (2024), through a systematic literature review, develop a conceptual explanation of how collaborative governance mediates the relationship between rural tourism and sustainable territory development. Subsequent empirical research involving civil society, government, and productive-sector stakeholders in rural areas of Colombia provides evidence supporting the mediating role of collaborative governance in this relationship (Valderrama et al., 2025). These studies position collaborative governance as a process concerned with relationships, coordination, and the integration of stakeholder interests rather than merely the presence of multiple actors.

Stakeholder participation remains an important dimension of this process, but participation does not necessarily result in joint decision-making or joint action. Reina-Usuga et al. (2024) identify stakeholder participation as a recurring theme in rural tourism governance while highlighting the need for greater attention to deliberative mechanisms and joint decision-making. The diversity of stakeholders can also increase the complexity of collaborative processes because actors may have different interests, capacities, and institutional positions (Sentanu et al., 2023). The literature therefore suggests that understanding collaborative governance in rural tourism requires attention not only to who participates but also to how their different capacities and interests are connected through collaborative processes.

The concept of capacity for joint action provides an important link between participation and collaboration. Emerson et al. (2012) describe collaborative capacity in terms of the ability to connect resources and capacities held by different actors in ways that support joint action. Applied to rural tourism, this perspective draws attention to the possibility that the resources required for tourism development may not be concentrated within a single organization. Collaborative governance becomes significant when the governance process enables these different resources and capacities to be recognized, coordinated, and mobilized toward shared objectives.

Resource Constraints and Distributed Capacity

Rural tourism development does not occur with equal levels of local capacity across destinations or tourism activities. Research on tourism villages in Sleman Regency demonstrates differences in community capacity to manage various tourism activities and identifies continuing dependence on external support and collaborative networks (Sutomo et al., 2024). These findings indicate that capacity constraints concern not only the availability of resources but also the ability of local actors and organizations to manage different functions involved in tourism development.

The distribution of resources and capabilities across actors provides a useful way to understand these constraints. Rural tourism development may require financial resources, knowledge, technical skills, social relationships, institutional authority, and access to external networks. These resources may be held by different actors rather than concentrated within the village government or a single tourism organization. Emerson et al. (2012) conceptualize capacity for joint action as the ability to connect resources and capacities across actors. Building on this perspective, this paper uses the term distributed capacity to describe the condition in which the resources, knowledge, skills, relationships, and institutional capabilities relevant to rural tourism are located across multiple actors.

Distributed capacity does not imply that all actors possess equal resources or capabilities. Differences in capacity may create opportunities for complementarity, but they may also create dependence and unequal influence within collaborative processes. Sutomo et al. (2024) demonstrate that external collaboration can remain necessary where local capacity is insufficient for particular tourism activities. Research on community-based tourism also highlights self-organization and networking as mechanisms through which communities can strengthen their capacity to manage tourism activities and engage more effectively with other stakeholders (Romero-Medina et al., 2024). The challenge is therefore to connect external resources with local capabilities

without reducing collaboration to permanent dependence on external actors.

Collaborative governance provides a mechanism for addressing this distribution of capacity because it can create processes through which different actors coordinate their respective resources and capabilities. Valderrama and Polanco (2024) emphasize the importance of formal and informal relationships in understanding the connection between rural tourism, collaborative governance, and sustainable territory development. The literature suggests that the effectiveness of collaboration depends partly on whether these relationships enable actors to combine complementary capacities and contribute to shared objectives. Distributed capacity is therefore treated in this paper as a condition that makes collaborative coordination relevant, while capacity for joint action describes the ability to connect those capacities through collaborative processes (Emerson et al., 2012; Valderrama & Polanco, 2024).

This distinction is important for understanding why stakeholder participation alone may not produce joint action. A collaborative arrangement may involve many stakeholders while still leaving important resources, knowledge, or institutional capabilities disconnected. Participation becomes more consequential when governance processes enable actors to recognize complementary capacities, coordinate their contributions, and assume shared responsibility for agreed actions. This provides the conceptual basis for positioning distributed capacity between stakeholder participation and collaborative governance in the framework developed in this paper.

Facilitative Government, Leadership, and Trust in Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance involves actors who may differ in authority, resources, organizational position, and degree of autonomy. Leadership in such settings does not necessarily depend on formal hierarchical authority. Research on public-sector interorganizational networks shows that leadership can be expressed through coordination, facilitation, relationship management, and other behaviors distributed across network actors (Akerboom et al., 2024). This perspective is relevant to rural tourism because destination development often involves relationships among public authorities, communities, businesses, tourism organizations, and external institutions that cannot be governed solely through hierarchical control.

Leadership can therefore support collaborative processes by helping actors coordinate relationships, maintain direction, and manage differences among stakeholders. Its role is not to replace the capacities of other actors but to help create conditions under which those capacities can be connected. A facilitative form of leadership is particularly relevant where authority and resources are distributed across organizations and where collaboration requires actors to work across institutional boundaries (Akerboom et al., 2024). In the framework developed in this paper, leadership is consequently positioned as a supporting condition rather than as a sequential stage leading to collaborative governance.

Trust provides a complementary relational dimension. Vento (2024) finds that administrators' trust in citizens' capacity to participate is associated with their willingness to implement participation initiatives, while also showing that this relationship is influenced by perceptions of procedural legitimacy. Trust can therefore support participation and engagement in collaborative processes, but its presence does not by itself guarantee effective collaboration. Foundational collaborative governance literature similarly places trust within broader collaborative dynamics involving interaction, commitment, and shared understanding (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012).

Leadership and trust perform different but complementary functions in collaborative governance. Leadership concerns coordination and relationship management among actors, whereas trust concerns confidence in the intentions, capacities, and participatory processes involving other actors. Both can support the development of collaborative processes, but neither should be interpreted as a sufficient condition for joint action (Akerboom et al., 2024; Vento, 2024). Their position in this paper is therefore as supporting conditions that may strengthen the ability of collaborative governance to connect distributed capacities and facilitate joint action.

The role of government can also be understood through this facilitative perspective. Village governments possess formal institutional authority, but rural tourism governance frequently requires interaction with actors whose resources and authority lie outside government. A facilitative government can help create opportunities for interaction, connect local actors with external institutions, and provide institutional support without

assuming exclusive control over the collaborative process. This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature on horizontal governance, stakeholder coordination, and leadership in interorganizational networks (Akerboom et al., 2024; Reina-Usuga et al., 2024). It also provides the basis for positioning facilitative government alongside leadership and trust as supporting conditions in the conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

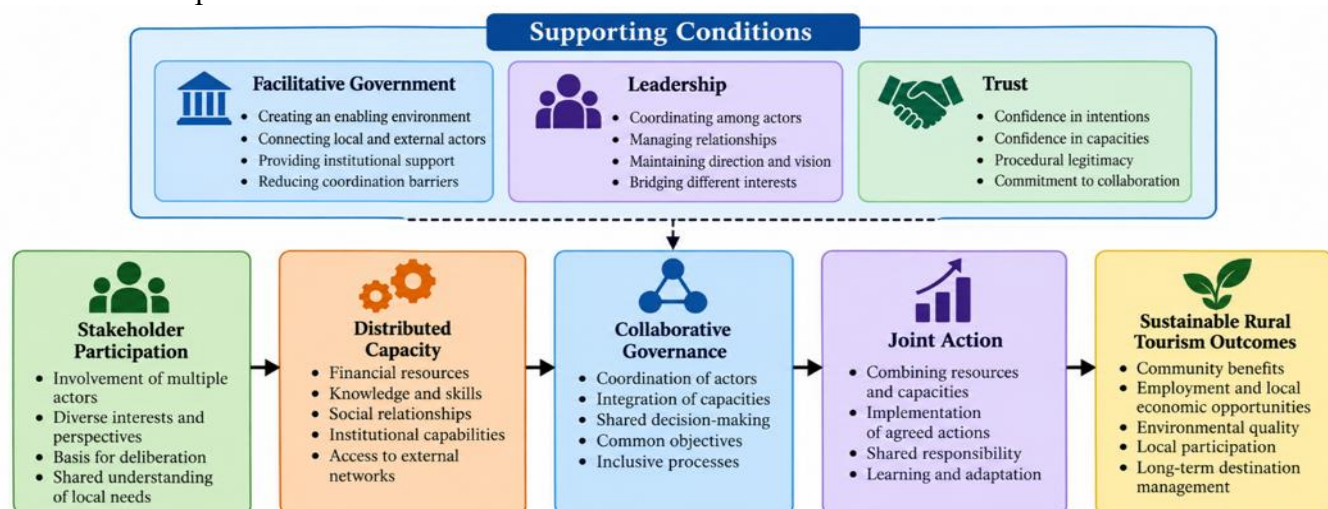
The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that stakeholder participation alone does not explain how rural tourism actors develop effective joint action. The resources, knowledge, skills, relationships, and institutional capabilities required for rural tourism development may be distributed across different actors. Collaborative governance becomes relevant because it provides processes through which these distributed capacities can be connected, coordinated, and directed toward shared objectives (Emerson et al., 2012; Reina-Usuga et al., 2024; Valderrama & Polanco, 2024).

Based on this synthesis, the conceptual framework positions stakeholder participation as the starting point for recognizing and involving actors with different interests, resources, and capabilities. Distributed capacity refers to the resources, knowledge, skills, relationships, and institutional capabilities located across different actors. Collaborative governance functions as the central mechanism through which these capacities can be coordinated and integrated into collaborative processes. Joint action represents the process through which actors combine their respective capacities to pursue shared objectives. The resulting action is directed toward sustainable rural tourism outcomes, including community benefits, employment and local economic opportunities, environmental quality, local participation, and long-term destination management.

Facilitative government, leadership, and trust are positioned as supporting conditions for the collaborative process rather than as sequential stages in the model. Facilitative government can help create an enabling environment and connect actors with institutional resources, while leadership can support coordination and relationship management across actors with different levels of autonomy (Akerboom et al., 2024). Trust can support actors' willingness to participate and engage in collaborative processes, although it should not be treated as a guarantee of successful collaboration (Vento, 2024). These supporting conditions may strengthen the ability of collaborative governance to connect distributed capacities and facilitate joint action.

Figure 1 summarizes the conceptual relationship developed from the literature synthesis. The framework is proposed as an analytical model rather than an empirically tested causal model. It is intended to clarify how stakeholder participation, distributed capacity, collaborative governance, and joint action may be connected in sustainable rural tourism development, while recognizing that the strength and direction of these relationships require empirical examination across different rural tourism settings.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Collaborative Governance and Distributed Capacity in Sustainable Rural Tourism Development



Source: Authors' conceptualization based on the literature synthesis.

Note: Arrows indicate conceptual relationships proposed from the literature synthesis; they do not represent empirically tested causal effects.

DISCUSSION

Collaborative Governance as a Mechanism for Connecting Local and External Capacity

The literature indicates that collaborative governance in rural tourism is associated with stakeholder coordination and the development of more horizontal relationships among actors. Reina-Usuga et al. (2024) identify collaborative governance as an important approach for coordinating rural tourism stakeholders, while Valderrama et al. (2025) provide empirical evidence that collaborative governance can mediate the relationship between rural tourism and sustainable territory development. Emerson et al. (2012) place capacity for joint action at the center of collaborative governance by emphasizing the ability to connect resources and capacities held by different actors. These perspectives suggest that collaborative governance is not simply a structure for bringing stakeholders together but a process through which distributed capacities can be connected to support joint action.

The concept of distributed capacity provides a further explanation of why stakeholder participation alone may not be sufficient. Rural tourism development may require financial resources, knowledge, skills, social relationships, institutional authority, and access to external networks that are not concentrated within a single actor. Collaborative governance becomes relevant when these different forms of capacity can be recognized, connected, and coordinated through shared processes. The issue is therefore not simply whether actors participate, but whether the collaborative arrangement enables their respective capacities to contribute to common objectives (Emerson et al., 2012; Sutomo et al., 2024; Valderrama & Polanco, 2024).

The development experience of Edu Wisata Mekarsari Awi can be used as a local illustration of this condition. The involvement of the village government, community members, tourism managers, local artisans, and external stakeholders represents a setting in which different actors may hold different resources, knowledge, skills, and institutional connections. The illustration does not demonstrate that collaborative governance has caused particular tourism outcomes. It instead provides a local setting for interpreting the conceptual proposition that rural tourism capacity may be distributed across actors and requires mechanisms for coordination and joint action.

Evidence from rural tourism research also shows that formal collaborative arrangements do not necessarily produce the same governance practices. Chen et al. (2025) found differences in de facto collaborative governance between two Chinese villages despite similarities in their formal administrative structures and collaborative governance objectives. The village characterized by broader stakeholder engagement performed better on several reported dimensions, including habitat improvement, job creation, economic scale, long-term planning, and residents' perceived quality of life. This finding reinforces the distinction between the existence of collaborative structures and the capacity of actors to use those structures for meaningful joint action.

The Role of Village Government as a Facilitator of Collaboration

The literature indicates that government remains an important actor in rural tourism governance, while collaborative processes increasingly involve relationships that cannot be managed solely through hierarchical authority. Research on public-sector interorganizational networks shows that leadership can operate through coordination, relationship management, and facilitation among actors with different levels of autonomy (Akerboom et al., 2024). Research on rural tourism similarly identifies a movement toward more horizontal governance relationships and greater attention to stakeholder coordination (Reina-Usuga et al., 2024). These developments support a view of village government as a potential facilitator of collaborative processes rather than only as a formal decision-making authority.

A facilitative role involves creating conditions in which different actors can contribute their resources and capabilities to shared processes. Village governments may help connect community groups with external institutions, create opportunities for stakeholder interaction, provide administrative support, and facilitate access to resources. Such functions are particularly relevant where community capacity is uneven and external support remains necessary for some tourism activities (Sutomo et al., 2024). The facilitative role should not be interpreted as government controlling the collaboration; its significance lies in enabling interaction among actors whose resources and authority are distributed across the local governance system.

Edu Wisata Mekarsari Awi provides a local illustration of this facilitative perspective. The village government can be understood within the conceptual framework as one of the actors capable of connecting community initiatives with tourism-related actors, local businesses, artisans, and external stakeholders. The illustration is not presented as evidence that these facilitative functions have produced measurable tourism outcomes. It is used to show how the role of village government can be interpreted through the broader literature on facilitation, coordination, and distributed capacity.

The facilitative role of government also needs to be considered alongside the distribution of power among stakeholders. Chen et al. (2025) demonstrate that similar formal administrative arrangements can produce different patterns of actual collaborative governance depending on how stakeholders are engaged. Sarhan et al. (2025) further highlight the relevance of power asymmetries, institutional barriers, and limitations in community participation in collaborative tourism and conservation. A facilitative government therefore cannot be understood simply as a government that invites stakeholders to participate. Its role also involves creating conditions in which participation can contribute meaningfully to deliberation, coordination, and joint action.

Stakeholder Participation and Collaborative Capacity in Rural Tourism

Stakeholder participation is a necessary component of collaborative governance, but participation alone does not explain whether actors can develop joint action. Reina-Usuga et al. (2024) identify stakeholder participation as a recurring theme in rural tourism governance while also noting the need for greater attention to deliberative mechanisms and joint decision-making. Sentanu et al. (2023) similarly show that stakeholder diversity can create both opportunities and challenges for collaborative tourism governance because actors may hold different interests, institutional positions, and capacities. Participation therefore needs to be considered in relation to the mechanisms through which actors can contribute to shared processes.

Distributed capacity provides one way of explaining this relationship. Actors involved in rural tourism may contribute different forms of capacity, including financial resources, knowledge, skills, social relationships, institutional authority, and access to networks. Emerson et al. (2012) conceptualize capacity for joint action as the ability to connect resources and capacities across actors, while Romero-Medina et al. (2024) show the importance of self-organization and networking for strengthening community-based tourism capacity. Sutomo et al. (2024) further demonstrate that community capacity varies across tourism activities and that external support can remain important. Participation therefore becomes more meaningful when collaborative processes enable different capacities to be connected rather than simply increasing the number of actors involved.

The experience of Edu Wisata Mekarsari Awi can illustrate this distinction at the village level. The involvement of the village government, community members, tourism managers, local artisans, and external stakeholders represents a configuration in which different actors may contribute different resources and capabilities. The literature provides a conceptual basis for interpreting such a configuration as distributed capacity rather than assuming that participation itself constitutes successful collaboration. Mekarsari is therefore used to contextualize the argument, not to establish that the proposed mechanism has been empirically demonstrated in the village.

The distinction between participation and joint action is particularly important for understanding collaborative governance. Participation may create opportunities for interaction, but joint action requires actors to coordinate their capacities and assume some degree of shared responsibility for implementation. Collaborative governance is therefore positioned in this paper as the mechanism that can connect stakeholder participation and distributed capacity with joint action. The strength of this relationship, however, remains an empirical question that cannot be determined from the literature synthesis or the Mekarsari illustration alone.

Collaborative Governance and Sustainable Rural Tourism

Sustainable rural tourism needs to be considered beyond the expansion of visitor numbers or tourism-related economic activity. Rural tourism can generate social and economic benefits, but it can also produce spatial, economic, social, and cultural changes in rural communities and traditional villages (Li et al., 2024). The literature emphasizes the importance of community participation, community values, and diversified livelihoods when tourism is developed in traditional rural settings. These findings suggest that sustainability

requires attention to how tourism benefits and pressures are distributed across local communities and territorial systems.

Collaborative governance becomes relevant because sustainable rural tourism involves interests that may not always be aligned. Local residents may prioritize community benefits and cultural values, tourism businesses may emphasize economic opportunities, public authorities may focus on development and territorial objectives, while environmental and cultural actors may emphasize resource protection. Valderrama and Polanco (2024) conceptualize collaborative governance as part of the relationship between rural tourism and sustainable territory development, while Valderrama et al. (2025) provide empirical evidence from Colombia supporting the mediating role of collaborative governance. These findings support the argument that governance arrangements can influence how different stakeholder interests are connected to rural tourism development, although the specific relationships remain dependent on local institutional and social conditions.

The framework proposed in this paper therefore defines sustainable rural tourism outcomes through five related dimensions: community benefits, employment and local economic opportunities, environmental quality, local participation, and long-term destination management. Community benefits refer to the extent to which tourism contributes to local well-being and livelihoods rather than concentrating benefits among a limited number of actors. Employment and local economic opportunities concern the ability of tourism activities to create livelihood opportunities and strengthen local economic participation. Environmental quality concerns the protection and management of the natural and built resources on which rural destinations depend. Local participation concerns the continued involvement of residents in tourism-related decisions and activities. Long-term destination management concerns the capacity to maintain tourism development over time while balancing economic, social, cultural, and environmental considerations.

These dimensions also provide a more concrete way to interpret the relationship between joint action and sustainability. Joint action should not be understood simply as the implementation of agreed tourism activities. Its relevance to sustainable rural tourism depends on whether different actors can use their distributed capacities to address community, economic, environmental, participatory, and long-term management concerns. Chen et al. (2025), for example, found that broader stakeholder engagement in one of the studied villages was associated with stronger outcomes across habitat improvement, job creation, economic scale, long-term planning, and residents' perceived quality of life. Such evidence illustrates why governance processes need to be assessed not only by the existence of collaboration but also by the outcomes associated with how collaboration is organized.

Edu Wisata Mekarsari Awi is used here only as a local illustration of how these dimensions may be considered when interpreting rural tourism development at the village level. The illustration does not provide empirical measurements of community benefits, employment, environmental quality, participation, or long-term destination management. These dimensions are derived from the literature and constitute areas that future empirical research could examine in Mekarsari and other rural tourism destinations. The central proposition of the paper is therefore that collaborative governance becomes more consequential for sustainable rural tourism when it can connect stakeholder participation and distributed capacity to joint action directed toward these broader sustainability outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a structured literature-based Discussion Paper design rather than an empirical research design. The methodological orientation is consistent with approaches to conceptual research that emphasize a clear research design, explicit selection of information sources, and a transparent logic for developing analytical arguments (Jaakkola, 2020). The literature was used as the primary basis for examining the relationships among stakeholder participation, distributed capacity, collaborative governance, capacity for joint action, facilitative government, leadership, trust, and sustainable rural tourism.

Literature identification focused on studies addressing the core concepts of the paper and their relationships. Searches were conducted using combinations of the terms “collaborative governance,” “rural tourism,” “stakeholder participation,” “collaborative capacity,” “distributed capacity,” “joint action,” “facilitative government,” “leadership,” “trust,” “sustainable rural tourism,” and “sustainable territory development.” The

identification process prioritized peer-reviewed journal articles and included both foundational studies and recent research relevant to rural tourism governance, community capacity, participation, and sustainability. Additional relevant studies were identified through the reference lists of key publications when they contributed directly to the conceptual argument. The search was therefore designed to identify a focused and conceptually relevant body of literature rather than to constitute an exhaustive systematic review.

Literature selection was guided by explicit conceptual relevance to the research argument. Studies were retained when they provided theoretical, conceptual, review-based, or empirical insights into at least one of the central dimensions examined in the paper: stakeholder participation, distributed or collaborative capacity, collaborative governance, joint action, facilitative government, leadership, trust, and sustainable rural tourism. Studies were considered relevant when their arguments or findings helped explain relationships among these dimensions, whereas publications that did not make a substantive contribution to the conceptual relationships examined in the paper were excluded from the discussion. The selected literature was then organized and compared according to the conceptual dimensions of the study, allowing foundational theoretical arguments to be connected with contemporary evidence from rural tourism and governance research. This focused selection approach is consistent with the use of literature as the basis for conceptual development rather than as an exhaustive systematic review (Kraus et al., 2022).

The selected literature was analyzed through thematic synthesis and critical comparison. The analysis was organized around three interconnected dimensions: stakeholder participation, distributed capacity, and joint action. Studies were compared to identify converging findings, complementary explanations, and areas in which the literature provides different or incomplete explanations of collaborative processes. Particular attention was given to how resources, knowledge, skills, relationships, and institutional capabilities are distributed across actors; how collaborative governance can connect these capacities; and how facilitative government, leadership, and trust may support the development of joint action. The synthesis was then used to construct the conceptual framework proposed in this paper. This analytical approach moves beyond a chronological listing of studies by integrating existing knowledge into a coherent conceptual argument (Ketchen & Craighead, 2023; Kraus et al., 2022).

Edu Wisata Mekarsari Awi is used as a local illustration to clarify how the literature-based argument may be understood at the village level. The illustration is not treated as a formal case study and is not used to validate the proposed relationships, establish causal effects, or generalize empirical findings. Its purpose is to provide a concrete local setting for interpreting the concepts of stakeholder participation, distributed capacity, collaborative governance, and joint action in rural tourism development.

The analytical boundaries of the paper follow its Discussion Paper design. The main argument is derived from the synthesis and critical comparison of existing literature, whereas the Mekarsari illustration serves only to contextualize the conceptual discussion. The paper therefore does not measure the effectiveness of particular governance arrangements, assess actual tourism outcomes, or establish causal relationships between collaborative governance and sustainable rural tourism. Empirical research is required to examine whether and under what conditions the proposed relationships operate across different rural tourism settings.

CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that collaborative governance in rural tourism cannot be understood solely through the presence of multiple stakeholders or the establishment of collaborative structures. The central issue concerns how resources, knowledge, skills, relationships, and institutional capabilities distributed among different actors can be connected through collaborative processes to generate joint action. Stakeholder participation provides an important basis for involving different actors, but participation becomes more consequential when collaborative governance enables their distributed capacities to contribute to shared objectives (Emerson et al., 2012; Reina-Usuga et al., 2024).

The conceptual framework developed in this paper positions collaborative governance as a mechanism connecting stakeholder participation and distributed capacity with joint action. Facilitative government, leadership, and trust are positioned as supporting conditions that may strengthen collaborative processes rather than as sequential stages or guarantees of successful collaboration. This framework extends the discussion of

rural tourism governance by emphasizing that the capacity required for joint action may be located across different actors and that the effectiveness of collaboration depends on how these capacities are connected and coordinated.

The discussion also identifies five dimensions through which sustainable rural tourism outcomes can be considered: community benefits, employment and local economic opportunities, environmental quality, local participation, and long-term destination management. These dimensions broaden the assessment of rural tourism beyond economic growth and visitor numbers by recognizing community well-being, livelihood opportunities, environmental conditions, participation, and the long-term management of rural destinations (Li et al., 2024; Valderrama & Polanco, 2024). Collaborative governance is therefore relevant not simply as a mechanism for coordinating stakeholders, but as a process through which different capacities and interests may be connected to broader sustainability objectives.

Edu Wisata Mekarsari Awi provides a local illustration of the conceptual argument developed in this paper. Its role is limited to contextualizing how stakeholder participation, distributed capacity, facilitative government, and joint action may be understood at the village level. The illustration does not constitute empirical validation of the framework and does not provide sufficient evidence to establish causal relationships or measurable tourism outcomes. The main contribution of the paper therefore lies in the literature-based conceptualization rather than in an empirical assessment of Mekarsari.

Future research should empirically examine the relationships proposed in the framework across different rural tourism settings. Qualitative case studies could investigate how village governments, tourism managers, community members, local businesses, and external stakeholders contribute different resources and capabilities to collaborative processes. Surveys could examine relationships among stakeholder participation, distributed capacity, collaborative governance, and joint action, while mixed-methods research could combine measurement of these relationships with detailed examination of how collaboration operates in practice. Empirical studies could also assess whether collaborative processes are associated with the five proposed sustainability dimensions, including community benefits, employment and local economic opportunities, environmental quality, local participation, and long-term destination management. Such research would help determine whether the conceptual relationships identified in this paper operate consistently across different institutional, social, and tourism contexts.

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