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Strengthening Destination Management Organization for Community-Based Tourism Development: Evidence from Sawahan Village, Trenggalek Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) play an important role in coordinating stakeholders and strengthening tourism governance, yet many rural destinations continue to experience fragmented institutions, limited managerial capacity, and weak integration of local communities. This study examines how strengthening a village-level DMO contributes to community-based tourism development in Sawahan Village, Trenggalek Regency, an emerging rural destination characterized by waterfall ecotourism and community-managed services. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 key informants, supported by field observations and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify governance patterns and community outcomes. The findings show that institutional strengthening led to more structured coordination, evidenced by the formation of formal tourism management units and the implementation of routine coordination meetings among stakeholders. In addition, the adoption of digital-based promotion, particularly through social media platforms managed by local operators, increased destination visibility as reflected in more consistent monthly visitor flows reported by tourism managers. Community participation also expanded, as local residents became directly involved in homestay provision, guiding services, and micro-scale tourism enterprises, indicating observable changes in local economic engagement rather than solely perceived benefits. These results demonstrate that clearer institutional roles, improved coordination mechanisms, and inclusive participation practices contribute to more effective and locally grounded tourism governance. This study offers an empirical contribution by showing how DMO strengthening at the village level translates governance principles into practical outcomes, while highlighting the importance of context-specific institutional capacity building for sustainable rural tourism development.

KEYWORDS

destination management organization; community-based tourism; rural tourism development; institutional strengthening.

Introduction

Tourism has become a strategic sector for regional development, particularly in rural areas where it contributes to employment generation and local income diversification. However, in many developing regions, including Indonesia, rural tourism development often faces practical governance challenges such as fragmented institutional roles, overlapping authority between village actors, and unequal distribution of tourism

benefits. These issues indicate that the effectiveness of destination governance is not only determined by growth potential but also by how local institutions are structured and coordinated (Pike & Page, 2014). In this context, Destination Management Organizations function as coordinating bodies that align marketing, resource management, and stakeholder collaboration. Their role extends beyond promotion toward strategic planning and long term destination development. For rural areas, institutional coordination is often weaker compared to urban destinations. Therefore, strengthening governance mechanisms becomes a crucial step in improving rural tourism performance (Gabriel-Campos et al., 2021).

Rural tourism destinations frequently face structural constraints such as fragmented stakeholder coordination, limited managerial capacity, and weak integration between marketing and governance functions (X. Wang et al., 2026). In many tourism villages, including those in Indonesia, these challenges are reflected in unclear role distribution between village governments, Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), and local micro-enterprises, which often leads to inefficiencies in decision-making and program implementation. This condition highlights the need for a governance approach that not only integrates stakeholders but also strengthens institutional arrangements at the village level. (Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2014). Without an integrated management structure, rural tourism initiatives tend to rely on informal coordination, which may reduce effectiveness. In many developing countries, rural destinations are promoted by regional authorities but lack strong local destination management entities. This gap creates challenges in aligning community participation with broader tourism strategies. Consequently, strengthening local DMOs becomes relevant for sustainable rural development.

Community-based tourism has gained attention as a development approach that prioritizes local participation, shared benefits, and social inclusion. It emphasizes active involvement of residents in planning, managing, and benefiting from tourism activities. Creative and participatory experiences are increasingly valued in destination competitiveness (Gato et al., 2022). However, effective community-based tourism requires structured coordination mechanisms to avoid elite capture or unequal benefit distribution. The presence of a capable DMO can help mediate stakeholder interests and ensure transparent governance processes. In this regard, institutional design directly influences community empowerment outcomes (Natalia et al., 2024).

Destination Management Organizations have evolved from purely promotional agencies into strategic coordinators responsible for stakeholder networking and resource integration (Y. Wang, 2011). Their functions include brand development, product coordination, partnership facilitation, and market positioning. In rural contexts, these roles are even more complex because tourism resources are closely linked to local culture and livelihoods. A DMO must therefore balance commercialization with cultural preservation. This

dual responsibility demands managerial competence and collaborative leadership. When institutional capacity is weak, rural tourism development becomes inconsistent and vulnerable to external shocks.

Indonesia has experienced significant growth in tourism villages as part of national rural development policies. Village-based tourism initiatives aim to diversify local economies while preserving cultural identity (Soltani & Ghaderi, 2025). Nevertheless, many tourism villages struggle with coordination issues, limited marketing reach, and inconsistent stakeholder collaboration. The absence of a strong destination management structure often leads to overlapping responsibilities among village government, tourism awareness groups, and private actors. Such fragmentation reduces efficiency and accountability. Addressing this institutional gap is essential for long term sustainability.

Sawahan Village in Trenggalek Regency represents a growing rural tourism destination characterized by waterfall-based ecotourism, community-managed attractions, and the involvement of local micro-enterprises. The village has been actively promoted as part of regional tourism development initiatives, with increasing visitor interest in recent years. However, despite these developments, field observations indicate persistent governance challenges, including overlapping institutional roles, limited coordination between stakeholders, and uneven participation among community groups. These conditions make Sawahan Village a relevant case for examining how institutional strengthening can improve community-based tourism governance (Samarathunga & Naria, 2025).

Previous research on Destination Management Organizations has predominantly focused on marketing communication, destination branding, and competitiveness enhancement (Pike & Page, 2014). Other studies have explored organizational capabilities and strategic coordination at the destination level. However, these studies largely emphasize macro-level functions of DMOs and give limited attention to how institutional strengthening operates at the village level, particularly in community-based tourism settings where governance structures are more informal and participatory. Despite growing attention to Destination Management Organizations, there remains a limited understanding of how DMO strengthening produces concrete governance and empowerment outcomes in community-based tourism at the village level. Existing studies tend to focus on structural roles or marketing functions, without clearly explaining the mechanisms through which institutional arrangements influence community participation and local economic benefits.

This study advances the literature by developing a governance-mechanism explanation of how strengthening a Destination Management Organization (DMO) at the village level translates into community-based tourism outcomes, with Sawahan Village as the unit of analysis. It focuses on the interaction between the village government, Tourism

Table 1. Selected Indicators of Tourism Development in Sawahan Village

Indicator	Description	Empirical Observation from Field Data
Institutional Structure	Tourism managed by village government and Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis)	Coordination exists but formal DMO structure not yet fully institutionalized
Tourism Attractions	Natural and cultural attractions developed gradually	Community participation in attraction maintenance observed
Stakeholder Involvement	Village officials, local MSMEs, youth groups	Collaboration present but role distribution not clearly defined
Marketing Practices	Promotion through social media and local networks	Limited integration with regional tourism branding
Economic Impact	Increased local income from tourism-related activities	Benefits distributed unevenly among community members

Source: data processed by researchers, 2025

Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis), and local micro-enterprises in shaping coordination, participation, and benefit distribution within a rural tourism system. Unlike prior studies that emphasize destination competitiveness, marketing communication, and branding (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Pike & Page, 2014), this research highlights how institutional design and stakeholder alignment operate in practice at the grassroots level. By doing so, it addresses the limited empirical attention to governance mechanisms in community-based tourism, particularly in rural contexts where institutional arrangements remain emergent (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2022). The study contributes conceptually by proposing a village-level DMO strengthening model that links institutional structure with community empowerment outcomes, empirically by providing in-depth evidence of governance processes in Sawahan Village, and practically by offering policy-relevant insights for improving institutional capacity and stakeholder coordination. In this regard, the findings extend existing governance perspectives that often underexplore local institutional dynamics in destination management (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

Table 1 summarizes key institutional and operational indicators that reflect the current condition of tourism governance in Sawahan Village. The first indicator highlights the existing institutional structure, which is primarily managed by the village government and the Tourism Awareness Group. Although coordination mechanisms are present, the absence of a formally structured Destination Management Organization limits strategic planning capacity and long term vision development. This condition confirms that rural destinations often rely on semi formal arrangements rather than integrated governance models (Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2014). The second indicator emphasizes tourism attractions, which are gradually developed through community initiatives. This participatory approach reflects the foundation of community-based tourism, yet it requires stronger institutional coordination to ensure product standardization and sustainability (Miczka & Poulain, 2026).

The third and fourth indicators relate to stakeholder involvement and marketing practices. Field findings indicate that multiple actors, including micro-enterprises and youth groups, are involved in tourism activities, particularly in service provision and event support. However, the distribution of roles among these actors appears to remain informal and not fully specified, which may affect coordination and clarity in decision-making processes. This observation aligns with the view that effective destination management depends on structured stakeholder coordination to reduce fragmentation and improve organizational coherence (Y. Wang, 2011). In terms of marketing practices, promotional activities are primarily conducted through social media and informal communication channels managed by local actors. While these efforts contribute to destination visibility, they are not yet systematically integrated into broader regional branding strategies. Previous studies emphasize that marketing communication capacity plays a key role in shaping destination positioning and competitiveness (Bornhorst et al., 2010).

The final indicator concerns the economic impact of tourism, particularly the distribution of benefits within the community. The findings suggest that tourism has created additional income opportunities, especially for residents involved in homestays, guiding services, and small-scale businesses. However, participation and benefits appear to be concentrated among certain groups, indicating variation in access and involvement across the community. This pattern reflects the broader challenge in rural tourism development of ensuring inclusive participation and equitable benefit sharing. Existing frameworks highlight that destination management should balance managerial and marketing

functions while considering community well-being (Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2014). Overall, the data presented in Table 1 suggest that while elements of stakeholder engagement, marketing activity, and economic contribution are present, their organization and distribution remain uneven, pointing to the need for further examination of governance arrangements within the local tourism system.

The complexity of the problem lies in balancing institutional efficiency with participatory governance. Rural tourism development involves multiple actors including village authorities, tourism awareness groups, micro enterprises, youth organizations, and external stakeholders. Each actor holds different interests and capacities. Without structured coordination, conflicts or inefficiencies may arise. A strengthened DMO can serve as a platform for negotiation and collective decision making. Therefore, examining governance mechanisms becomes central to understanding tourism sustainability.

This study formulates the research question as follows: How does strengthening the Destination Management Organization enhance community-based tourism development in Sawahan Village? The question captures both institutional capacity and empowerment dimensions. It seeks to explore the relationship between governance structure, stakeholder collaboration, and socio economic outcomes. The objective is not only to describe institutional arrangements but also to analyze their effectiveness. By doing so, the study contributes to both theoretical discourse and policy practice. The findings are expected to inform rural tourism governance models.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative case study approach to capture contextual realities in Sawahan Village. Data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and direct observation. The analysis focuses on management roles, stakeholder engagement, marketing practices, and empowerment outcomes. The approach allows in depth understanding of institutional processes rather than surface level indicators. Empirical findings are then interpreted using established DMO frameworks. This methodological alignment ensures theoretical relevance and empirical rigor.

The purpose of this study is to examine institutional strengthening as a strategic driver of community-based tourism in a rural destination. The research is conducted to fill the empirical gap regarding village-level DMO governance in Indonesia. By integrating destination management theory with community empowerment principles, the study offers a contextualized governance model (J. Wang et al., 2026). The introduction presented here sets the foundation for the subsequent literature review, methodology, and findings sections. It outlines the significance, complexity, and objectives of the research. Ultimately, the study seeks to demonstrate that strong destination governance is fundamental for sustainable rural tourism development.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach to examine the strengthening of the Destination Management Organization in Sawahan Village. A qualitative case study is appropriate for investigating governance processes within real-life contexts, particularly when institutional dynamics and stakeholder interactions are central to analysis (Y. Wang, 2011). The approach enables an in-depth exploration of organizational roles, collaboration patterns, and community empowerment mechanisms rather than focusing on quantitative performance indicators. The research model integrates rural destination management frameworks with community-based tourism principles (Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2014).

To operationalize this framework, the study focuses on four analytical dimensions: (1) institutional capacity, including role clarity and decision-making structures; (2) stakeholder coordination, including collaboration patterns and interaction mechanisms; (3) marketing practices, including promotional strategies and digital engagement; and (4) community participation, including involvement in decision-making and benefit distribution. These dimensions guide both data collection and analysis, ensuring alignment between empirical observations and theoretical constructs.

The population of this research includes stakeholders directly involved in tourism management and development in Sawahan Village. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement, decision-making roles, and experience in tourism-related activities. Key informants consist of village government officials, members of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), local micro-enterprise actors, youth representatives, and community leaders. These stakeholders represent the core actors within the local tourism governance structure (Gonzaga-Vallejo & Guamán-Camacho, 2021).

A total of 15 informants participated in this study, comprising 4 village officials, 4 Pokdarwis members, 3 micro-enterprise actors, and 4 community representatives. The sampling strategy prioritizes information richness and relevance rather than statistical representation, ensuring that the data reflect diverse perspectives within the governance system.

Fieldwork was conducted between May and August 2025. Data collection was carried out through face-to-face interviews in Bahasa Indonesia, with each interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. In addition, field observations were conducted for approximately 40 hours across tourism activities and coordination meetings to capture real-time governance practices. This fieldwork profile provides transparency regarding the scope and depth of empirical data collected.

The research was conducted in Sawahan Village, Watulimo District, Trenggalek Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The village was selected due to its formal designation as a tourism village and its active community participation in tourism development. Despite these advancements, its destination management structure remains in a developmental stage, making it a relevant case for examining institutional strengthening. This context allows for an in-depth analysis of how governance mechanisms operate within a specific socio-cultural and institutional environment.

Instrumentation in this study includes semi-structured interview guides, observation checklists, and document analysis frameworks. The interview guides were designed based on the four analytical dimensions of destination management, covering institutional roles, stakeholder coordination, marketing practices, and community participation. Observations were conducted to examine tourism activities, governance practices, and stakeholder interactions in real settings. Relevant documents, including village regulations, tourism development plans, and promotional materials, were analyzed to support data triangulation. The use of multiple instruments enhances the validity of findings through cross-verification of data sources (Pike & Page, 2014).

The data collection procedure was conducted in several systematic stages. First, preliminary mapping was undertaken to identify key stakeholders and institutional arrangements. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore governance practices, roles, and perceived challenges. Third, direct observations were carried out during tourism activities and coordination processes to assess operational dynamics. Finally, documentary analysis was conducted to contextualize and validate interview findings. This structured procedure

ensures transparency and methodological rigor in qualitative data collection.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through a systematic coding process. The first stage involved open coding to identify key concepts emerging from interview transcripts and field notes. The second stage applied axial coding to group related codes into broader categories based on the analytical dimensions of destination management. The final stage involved selective coding to develop core themes that explain the relationship between institutional strengthening and community-based tourism outcomes. A codebook was developed iteratively to ensure consistency in coding and interpretation.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were applied, including data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents; member checking with selected informants to validate interpretations; peer debriefing to minimize researcher bias; and maintaining an audit trail to document analytical decisions. These procedures enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. All informants were informed about the research objectives and provided voluntary informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by removing identifying information from transcripts and reports. This study did not involve sensitive personal data or vulnerable populations; therefore, formal institutional ethical approval was not required. However, the research adhered to standard ethical principles in social research, including respect for participants, voluntary participation, and data protection.

As a qualitative case study, this research does not aim for statistical generalization. Instead, it provides context-specific insights into governance mechanisms in rural tourism. To enhance transferability, the study presents detailed descriptions of the research context, institutional arrangements, and stakeholder interactions. Nevertheless, the findings are limited to the specific conditions of Sawahan Village, and future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across multiple tourism villages.

Result and Discussion

Strengthening the Destination Management Organization and Its Contribution to Community-Based Tourism Development in Sawahan Village

The findings indicate that changes in the local Destination Management Organization (DMO) are associated with more structured coordination practices in tourism development in Sawahan Village. In this study, institutional strengthening refers to the establishment of a more formal organizational arrangement, including the clarification of roles among village government, Pokdarwis, and local tourism actors, as well as the introduction of routine coordination meetings and basic administrative procedures. Prior to these changes, tourism activities were described as fragmented and largely dependent on informal leadership, with no clear division of responsibilities and coordination occurring on an ad hoc basis. Informants noted that decision making and activity planning were often reactive and situational rather than systematically organized. As one informant stated:

“Previously, activities were carried out individually, depending on who initiated them. There was no fixed structure or coordination schedule” (Informant 3, Pokdarwis member).

After the strengthening process, a clearer organizational structure was established, including defined roles for the village government, Pokdarwis, and community groups. Regular coordination meetings are now held once every month, supported by written agendas and activity reports. A village decree (SK Desa) was also issued to formalize the



Figure 1. Promotion of Sawahan Tourism Village via Instagram

organizational structure. These changes indicate a shift from informal coordination toward structured governance practices.

Strategic planning capacity has increased following institutional strengthening. Previously, tourism programs were event-based and reactive, without clear annual targets or budget alignment. Currently, the DMO prepares an annual work plan (Rencana Kerja Tahunan) that is integrated with the Village Development Plan (RKP Desa). An informant explained:

"Now we already have an annual tourism program. It is discussed together and adjusted to the village budget, so implementation is more consistent" (Informant 1, village official).

The planning documents include activity schedules, budget allocation, and responsible units. This indicates a transition toward more systematic and program-based tourism management.

Changes are also evident in marketing coordination practices. Previously, promotional activities relied on individual initiatives, mainly through personal social media accounts, resulting in inconsistent messaging. After institutional strengthening, marketing activities are managed collectively through an official village tourism account.

Concrete changes include the introduction of a monthly content calendar, standardized visual branding, and centralized content management. One youth member stated:

"Now we manage Instagram together. There is a posting schedule and content guidelines, so promotion is more consistent" (Informant 7, youth group).

The Instagram account is regularly updated with destination photos, visitor information, and event promotions, with local administrators reporting more frequent interactions such as comments, direct messages, and content sharing from potential visitors. Based on observations and informant accounts, these activities indicate a growing level of online engagement, although no formal analytics records or

quantified performance metrics were systematically documented during the study period.

Figure 1 illustrates the official Instagram promotion managed by the DMO.

Financial management practices have become more transparent following institutional restructuring. Previously, tourism income was not systematically recorded, and revenue distribution was unclear. After strengthening, a simple financial recording system was introduced, including a cash ledger and monthly financial reports. Revenue-sharing mechanisms have also been formalized, with allocations for operational costs, community contributions, and reinvestment in infrastructure. An informant stated:

"Now all income is recorded and reported during meetings. Everyone knows how much we earn and how it is used" (Informant 5, community leader).

These practices indicate improved financial accountability and transparency at the village level.

Capacity development activities have become more structured as coordination improves. Training programs are now conducted in collaboration with external institutions, covering hospitality services, digital marketing, and small business management. For example, in 2025, at least three training sessions were conducted involving local residents and tourism actors. One participant noted:

"We received training on how to serve guests and promote products online. It helps us improve our services" (Informant 9, micro-enterprise actor).

These initiatives demonstrate increased access to skill development opportunities for local stakeholders.

Participation mechanisms have become more structured through regular coordination forums. Monthly meetings are attended by representatives of the village government, Pokdarwis, and community members. These meetings serve as platforms for discussing tourism plans, evaluating activities, and addressing operational issues. An informant explained:

"Now meetings are held regularly, and anyone can give input. Decisions are no longer taken by a few people only" (Informant 6, community representative).

Meeting attendance lists and minutes are documented, indicating a more inclusive and transparent decision-making process.

The findings indicate several observable changes associated with institutional strengthening, particularly in coordination, planning, marketing practices, financial management, capacity development, and participation mechanisms. Case materials directly document the establishment of more formal organizational structures, the introduction of routine coordination meetings, and the use of basic planning and reporting practices by local tourism managers. There is also evidence of more consistent use of social media for promotion and the organization of training activities involving local participants. Other aspects, such as improvements in financial transparency, capacity development outcomes, and the effectiveness of participation mechanisms, are primarily derived from informant perceptions and researcher interpretation rather than systematically recorded performance data. In this context, the DMO can be understood as increasingly functioning as a coordinating platform that connects various actors within the village tourism system, although the extent of its effectiveness remains contingent on the evolving institutional practices observed in the field.

Roles of Stakeholders in Tourism Development

Tourism development in Sawahan Village involves multiple stakeholders with distinct roles that can be observed in practice. The village government provides regulatory and financial support, particularly through the allocation of village funds for tourism infrastructure and facilitation of coordination



Figure 2. Sawahan village handicraft business



Figure 3. Sawahan village tourism awareness group



Figure 4. Sawahan Village Home Stay Room

meetings. One informant explained, "The village government usually supports us through funding for basic facilities and helps coordinate meetings when there are larger tourism programs."

The Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) is responsible for managing daily operations, including visitor services, site maintenance, and coordination of local activities. Local micro-enterprises contribute to service provision, such as operating homestays and small food stalls, with one business owner noting,

"We manage our own homestay, but we coordinate with

Pokdarwis when there are group visitors."

Youth groups are mainly involved in digital promotion, particularly by managing social media content and documenting tourism activities. These examples illustrate how stakeholder roles are enacted in practice, although the level of coordination among actors remains dependent on informal communication and situational collaboration.

Figure 2 shows local handicraft products produced by community members as part of tourism activities.

The village government plays a strategic role in policy alignment and infrastructure support. It integrates tourism programs into village development planning and allocates funding for facility improvement. Such involvement ensures institutional legitimacy and sustainability. Government support is essential for rural tourism destinations lacking private investment capacity (Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2014). In Sawahan Village, regulatory backing strengthens organizational stability. This foundation enables long term planning beyond short term promotional activities.

The Tourism Awareness Group functions as the operational core of the destination (see Figure 3). It coordinates tour packages, manages visitor experiences, and oversees attraction maintenance. Its leadership role corresponds with the managerial dimension of DMOs identified in destination literature (Y. Wang, 2011). The group also mediates communication between residents and government authorities. This bridging function enhances collaboration and reduces misunderstandings. Operational coordination by this group ensures service consistency.

Local entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises contribute by diversifying tourism products. They provide accommodation, culinary services, and creative souvenirs that enrich visitor experiences (figure 4). Marketing research highlights the importance of product innovation in enhancing destination competitiveness (Gato et al., 2022). In Sawahan Village, small businesses benefit directly from visitor spending. Their participation strengthens the local economic multiplier effect. This integration demonstrates how stakeholder synergy supports community-based tourism (Garzón et al., 2026). Youth groups and community volunteers play supportive yet strategic roles. They actively manage social media accounts and assist in organizing cultural events. Digital engagement increases destination exposure among younger audiences. Community involvement at various levels reflects participatory governance principles. Their enthusiasm also strengthens social ownership of tourism initiatives. Collectively, stakeholder roles form an interconnected governance ecosystem (see Table 2).

Community Participation in Tourism Development

Community participation in Sawahan Village is reflected in active involvement in planning, implementation, and benefit-sharing. Residents participate in village meetings, manage tourism services, and contribute to cultural activities. For instance, community members operate homestays, food stalls, and parking services, generating additional household income. One resident explained:

"Tourism gives us additional income from selling food and renting rooms" (Informant 10).

Participation also includes involvement in cultural performances and environmental activities such as site maintenance. Meeting records and activity documentation confirm consistent community engagement across different tourism programs.

The forms of involvement can be categorized into several practical dimensions:

- Participation in Planning Meetings
Residents attend coordination forums where tourism strategies, budgeting priorities, and annual work plans are discussed. This ensures transparency and collective

Table 2. Roles of Stakeholders in Sawahan Village Tourism Development

Stakeholder	Primary Role	Contribution to DMO Strengthening
Village Government	Policy support and budget allocation	Institutional legitimacy and infrastructure development
Tourism Awareness Group	Operational management and coordination	Service quality and daily destination governance
Micro-Enterprises	Product and service provision	Economic diversification and local income growth
Youth Organizations	Digital promotion and event support	Increased marketing outreach and innovation
Community Leaders	Social mediation and cultural preservation	Strengthening trust and collective participation

Source: data processed by researchers

decision making, which are central to sustainable destination governance (Pretty, 1995).

- Engagement in Tourism Services

Community members manage homestays, culinary businesses, parking services, and local guiding activities. These roles generate direct income and broaden household economic opportunities. Such participation reflects the empowerment dimension of community-based tourism (Scheyvens, 1999).

- Contribution to Cultural Preservation

Local traditions, rituals, and artistic performances are incorporated into tourism packages. Residents serve as cultural custodians who safeguard authenticity while adapting to visitor expectations. Cultural integration enhances experiential value and destination distinctiveness (Richards & Raymond, 2000).

- Volunteerism in Events and Environmental Activities

Community members collaborate in organizing festivals, cleaning attractions, and maintaining facilities. Volunteer engagement strengthens environmental stewardship and reinforces sustainable tourism practices (Murphy, 1985)

These forms of engagement demonstrate that participation occurs across planning, implementation, and evaluation phases. Active involvement enhances local skills, confidence, and economic resilience (Zhong et al., 2025). Inclusive participation also strengthens governance legitimacy and destination performance. In Sawahan Village, participatory mechanisms reduce dependency on external actors and encourage endogenous development. Tourism initiatives therefore emerge from local aspirations rather than external imposition.

Community engagement has also strengthened social cohesion and collective identity. Joint activities such as festival preparation and infrastructure maintenance promote cooperation and mutual trust. Social capital generated through collaboration enhances community resilience during market fluctuations or seasonal downturns (Putnam, 1993). Informal networks complement formal DMO structures by facilitating rapid communication and collective problem solving. This integration between formal governance and social bonding increases adaptive capacity. As a result, tourism development is embedded within community values and shared responsibility.

Nevertheless, ensuring equitable participation remains a challenge. Differences in capital ownership, skills, and time

availability create varying levels of involvement among households. Participation barriers are common in community-based tourism initiatives, particularly in developing rural contexts (Tosun, 2000). Strengthening the DMO can mitigate these disparities by formalizing inclusive mechanisms and transparent recruitment procedures. Continuous training programs are necessary to broaden access and enhance confidence among less active residents. Addressing inclusivity strengthens both fairness and long term sustainability.

Furthermore, participation contributes to local learning and innovation. As residents gain experience in hospitality, digital promotion, and service management, they develop adaptive competencies. Community learning processes are central to sustainable tourism transitions (Moscardo, 2008). In Sawahan Village, exposure to visitor feedback has encouraged product improvement and service refinement. Learning by doing enhances professionalism while maintaining cultural authenticity. Such experiential capacity building reinforces empowerment outcomes.

Finally, sustained participation supports long term destination competitiveness. When residents perceive tangible benefits and fair recognition, commitment to tourism development increases. Community support is widely acknowledged as a determinant of tourism sustainability and visitor satisfaction (Gursoy et al., 2002). In Sawahan Village, positive perceptions toward tourism encourage continued involvement and collaborative maintenance of attractions. The strengthened DMO plays a coordinating role in maintaining this engagement. Overall, community participation functions as both a governance asset and a developmental catalyst in rural tourism.

The findings indicate that strengthening the Destination Management Organization enhances governance through identifiable causal mechanisms rather than general institutional reinforcement. Evidence from Sawahan Village suggests a sequential pathway in which institutional formalization establishes clear roles and responsibilities, thereby reducing overlap and minimizing coordination conflicts among stakeholders. This clarity enables more consistent coordination practices, including routine meetings and structured communication channels. Improved coordination subsequently supports better service delivery and integrated marketing activities, which contribute to enhanced visitor experiences and broader community benefits.

Based on this mechanism, the study proposes a three-dimensional village-level DMO strengthening model consisting of: (1) institutional formalization, (2) coordinated marketing integration, and (3) structured community participation. These dimensions operate in an interconnected manner, where institutional clarity facilitates coordination, and coordination strengthens both marketing effectiveness and participatory engagement. This finding extends destination governance literature by demonstrating how DMO functions are operationalized through practical institutional processes in small-scale rural contexts (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Presenza et al., 2005).

The findings further indicate that governance improvement is driven by the reduction of coordination failures and the alignment of stakeholder roles. In Sawahan Village, clearly defined institutional arrangements reduced duplication of activities and informal competition, enabling stakeholders to perform complementary roles more effectively. This process improves efficiency and supports more coherent planning and implementation, consistent with governance perspectives emphasizing institutional coordination (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Moreover, the DMO functions as a coordinating and strategic platform that integrates stakeholders and resources, supporting the view that DMOs act as governance mechanisms rather than solely promotional entities (Pike & Page, 2014; Y. Wang, 2011).

The results also show that marketing effectiveness is influenced by the interaction between coordination mechanisms and organizational capacity. The transition from fragmented promotion to centralized content management reduced inconsistencies in messaging and enabled the development of a unified destination identity. This process contributed to increased digital engagement and stronger destination recognition. These findings suggest that marketing outcomes depend not only on promotional intensity but also on institutional arrangements that regulate communication processes, in line with integrated destination marketing perspectives (Y. Wang & Pizam, 2011).

Despite these improvements, the findings also reveal several challenges and uneven participation patterns. Not all community members were equally involved in DMO activities, particularly small-scale informal actors and older residents with limited digital capacity. In some cases, resistance emerged due to concerns about increased regulation and perceived constraints on autonomy. The DMO addressed these challenges through gradual engagement strategies, including informal consultations, targeted training, and the inclusion of community representatives in decision-making processes. However, participation disparities persisted, indicating that institutional strengthening does not automatically ensure inclusivity. This is consistent with previous studies highlighting structural barriers in community participation (Cole, 2006; Tosun, 2000).

Although this study adopts a qualitative approach, observed improvements such as enhanced coordination, increased digital activity, and more structured tourism programs indicate potential gains in tourism performance. However, these outcomes were not measured using quantitative indicators such as visitor numbers or revenue growth. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive (Morrison, 2013). Further research is needed to validate these relationships using quantitative methods.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide several actionable recommendations for village and regency-level stakeholders. First, institutional design should prioritize clear role distribution and coordination mechanisms to improve accountability (Pike & Page, 2014). Second, transparency can be strengthened through regular financial reporting and open community forums (Hall, 2011). Third, participation rules should ensure inclusive representation of diverse community groups (Tosun, 2000). Fourth, capacity-building programs should be implemented in a structured manner, focusing on digital marketing, hospitality, and organizational management. Fifth, digital marketing governance should be centralized to ensure consistent branding and communication (Y. Wang & Pizam, 2011). Sixth, multi-level coordination between village institutions and local governments should be strengthened to align policies and resources (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

This study provides empirical insights from a rural tourism context that remains underexplored in DMO literature. However, the findings are shaped by specific characteristics of Sawahan Village, including relatively strong leadership, existing tourism potential, and community willingness to participate. These conditions may limit direct generalization. Nevertheless, key elements such as institutional formalization, coordination mechanisms, and capacity-building strategies can be adapted to other contexts, depending on local governance capacity and social conditions (Hall, 2011).

Future research should examine how contextual variations influence the effectiveness of DMO strengthening across different rural settings. Comparative studies and mixed-method approaches are recommended to assess both institutional processes and measurable economic outcomes.

Longitudinal research could further evaluate the sustainability of governance reforms, while studies on digital transformation may enhance understanding of competitiveness in rural tourism.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that strengthening the Destination Management Organization improves governance through a causal pathway involving institutional clarity, coordination efficiency, and participatory engagement. These mechanisms enable more structured and accountable tourism management while supporting community involvement. The case of Sawahan Village illustrates that institutional strengthening is most effective when formal structures are combined with adaptive and inclusive practices, reinforcing the importance of strong institutional foundations in achieving sustainable and equitable community-based tourism development.

Conclusion

This study answers the research question by demonstrating that strengthening the Destination Management Organization improves rural tourism governance through three main mechanisms: clearer institutional roles, more effective stakeholder coordination, and structured community participation. When roles and responsibilities are formally defined, coordination becomes more consistent, decision making is more transparent, and tourism activities are better aligned. As a result, governance quality improves and contributes to stronger community involvement as well as more inclusive economic outcomes at the village level.

The findings show that DMO strengthening functions as a practical governance tool rather than a purely administrative arrangement. Institutional formalization reduces overlapping responsibilities and minimizes coordination gaps among stakeholders. This enables more efficient planning, integrated marketing efforts, and clearer financial management practices. In addition, structured participation mechanisms allow community members to be involved in decision making processes in a more predictable and organized way. These dynamics confirm that governance quality and tourism sustainability are closely interconnected, particularly in community-based tourism settings.

From a practical perspective, several priority actions can be implemented to strengthen rural tourism governance. First, local governments and village stakeholders should establish clear institutional structures by defining roles, responsibilities, and coordination procedures within the DMO. Second, a regular coordination system should be developed, including scheduled meetings, transparent reporting mechanisms, and shared planning frameworks. Third, capacity building programs should be prioritized, especially in digital marketing, hospitality management, and organizational governance. These steps are essential to ensure that institutional strengthening produces consistent and measurable improvements in tourism management.

In addition, inclusive participation should be operationalized through formal mechanisms such as community forums, representation systems, and participatory decision making processes. Special attention should be given to groups that are often less involved, including small scale actors and individuals with limited access to digital tools. Strengthening participation in this way will help ensure that tourism development remains equitable and broadly beneficial. Without such mechanisms, institutional improvements may not fully translate into inclusive outcomes.

This study provides important insights into rural destination governance; however, its findings should be interpreted within the specific context of Sawahan Village. The research applies analytical generalization, meaning that the findings contribute

to theoretical understanding rather than broad statistical claims. While the identified governance mechanisms may be relevant to similar rural tourism contexts, their application will depend on local institutional capacity, leadership dynamics, and community characteristics.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study is based on a single case and does not include longitudinal data or quantitative performance measurement. Therefore, the findings primarily explain processes rather than measure long term impacts. These limitations indicate the need for further research to strengthen the empirical basis of rural tourism governance studies.

Future research should focus on three specific directions. First, comparative studies across multiple tourism villages are needed to examine how different institutional contexts influence DMO effectiveness. Second, mixed methods approaches should be used to combine qualitative insights with quantitative indicators such as visitor growth, income generation, and employment effects. Third, longitudinal studies should be conducted to assess the sustainability of governance reforms over time, including the role of digital governance and network collaboration in supporting adaptive capacity.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that strengthening the Destination Management Organization improves governance by creating institutional clarity, enhancing coordination, and supporting structured participation. These mechanisms enable more organized, transparent, and inclusive tourism management. The findings highlight that effective rural tourism development depends not only on local potential but also on the strength of institutional arrangements that guide and sustain collective action.

Author contributions

The first author conceptualized the research idea, formulated the research questions, and developed the analytical framework that integrates Destination Management Organization theory with community-based tourism governance. He conducted fieldwork, analyzed the data, and led the development of the manuscript, including the articulation of the study's theoretical contribution to rural destination governance.

The second author contributed to refining the research

design and strengthening the intellectual positioning of the study. He played a key role in developing the conceptual insight related to village-level DMO strengthening and its implications for governance theory. He also critically revised the manuscript to enhance its academic rigor, coherence, and contribution to the literature on sustainable tourism governance. He conducted the fieldwork in Sawahan Village, including interviews, observations, and document collection. He was also responsible for data analysis, interpretation of findings, and drafting the initial manuscript. In addition, he integrated the theoretical framework on Destination Management Organizations and community-based tourism into the analysis and ensured alignment between empirical findings and relevant literature.

The second author contributed to the refinement of the research design and provided methodological guidance throughout the study. He reviewed and validated the analytical framework, assisted in interpreting the results, and ensured theoretical consistency with existing destination governance literature. He also critically revised the manuscript for intellectual content, improved the structure of the discussion section, and contributed to strengthening the policy implications and academic positioning of the article. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

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