International Conference on Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship

Vol. 01 No.01 August 2026, ISSN: 3163-2912

Community-Based Communication in Tourism Governance: Ngilngof Village Case Study

Andreas Sainyakit[1*], Prasetya Yoga Santoso[2]

[1] *STPAK Santo Yohanes Penginjil Ambon, Indonesia*
[2]*Doctoral Program in Communication Studies, Universitas Sahid Jakarta, Indonesia*

[*]*Corresponding author. Email: sainandre19@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of community-based communication in shaping tourism governance at Ngurbloat Beach, Southeast Maluku, with a particular focus on Ngilngof Village as both a landowner and a local manager. The central challenge lies in the reliance on traditional practices that have not yet evolved into professional governance capable of balancing tourism growth, ecological preservation, and equitable benefit distribution. Guided by the frameworks of community-based tourism, participatory governance, and communication for development, the research employs a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through field observation, semi-structured interviews with customary elders, community leaders, government representatives, and local business actors, as well as analysis of policy documents and customary records.Findings reveal that internal community communication is relatively strong, rooted in customary deliberation, yet external communication with government remains weak. This gap has resulted in uneven benefit distribution, limited institutional capacity, and policy misalignment. While customary deliberations provide space for participation, the dominance of traditional leaders restricts equality of voice. Moreover, local narratives are often treated as cultural symbols rather than as legitimate epistemologies of policy, thereby weakening their integration into formal governance structures.The study concludes that empowering communities through transparent and inclusive communication is essential for strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring fair benefit distribution, and integrating local narratives into policy. Addressing these challenges, Ngurbloat can model sustainable community-based tourism governance in Eastern Indonesia, offering theoretical insights and practical policy implications.

Keywords: *Community-Based Communication, Tourism Governance, Ngilngof Village, Sustainable Tourism, Southeast Maluku*

1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism (CBT) has emerged as one of the most significant paradigms in contemporary tourism development, particularly in regions where natural and cultural resources form the backbone of local livelihoods. CBT emphasizes community empowerment, equitable benefit distribution, and integrating ecological and cultural sustainability into tourism governance. Scholars argue that CBT is not merely an economic strategy but a holistic framework that strengthens social cohesion, cultural identity, and environmental stewardship [1].

In Indonesia, CBT has gained prominence as a strategy for sustainable development, especially in rural and coastal areas. The archipelagic nature of the country, with its diverse cultural traditions and ecological landscapes, provides fertile ground for the application of CBT principles. Government initiatives, academic research, and community practices have increasingly recognized CBT as a pathway to balance tourism growth with sustainability. However, challenges remain in institutional capacity, policy integration, and equitable benefit distribution.

Ngilngof Village in Southeast Maluku offers a compelling case study within this discourse. With a population of 1,312 across 335 households, the majority of residents depend on tourism, followed by fisheries and agriculture. Its strategic location, only 15 kilometers from Langgur City, makes it accessible to both domestic and international visitors. The village's social fabric is deeply

rooted in Kei customary traditions, characterized by communal land ownership and strong customary leadership. These features provide social legitimacy for resource management but also present challenges when interfacing with formal governance structures.

1.1. Tourism Assets of Ngilngof

Ngilngof's tourism assets are diverse and culturally rich. Ngurbloat Beach, renowned for its exceptionally fine white sand—recognized by MURI and National Geographic—has been a flagship destination since the 1990s. Other attractions include Ohoiew Island, offering snorkeling and diving opportunities; Yanroa Beach, notable for mangrove conservation and the "meti Kei" phenomenon; Ablel Lake, steeped in folklore; and the Nen Te Idar cliff corridor, which reinforces local cultural identity. Beyond natural attractions, Ngilngof offers traditional dances, customary rituals, local cuisine, Catholic spiritual tourism, and annual events such as the Meti Kei Festival, which involves thousands of dancers and has achieved national recognition. Supporting infrastructure, including cottages, gazebos, souvenir shops, a Tourist Information Centre, fiber-optic internet, and 24-hour electricity, further demonstrates Ngilngof's capacity as an advanced tourism village with integrated natural, cultural, and spiritual attractions.

1.2. Governance Challenges

Despite these strengths, empirical realities reveal significant governance challenges. Customary deliberation remains the primary decision-making mechanism, attended by elders and community leaders. While these forums provide space for participation, the dominance of customary figures limits equality of voice. Interaction with local government often occurs informally, leaving community aspirations insufficiently reflected in formal policies. The distribution of tourism benefits is uneven, with economic gains concentrated among certain groups, while many residents receive only indirect benefits. Institutional capacity is limited, with weak written regulations, suboptimal transparency, and inconsistent conflict resolution mechanisms [2].

1.3. Normative Frameworks

Normatively, sustainable tourism governance requires strengthening community institutions, ensuring transparency and accountability, and integrating customary narratives into public policy. Local narratives should not merely serve as cultural symbols but must be institutionalized as legitimate epistemologies of policy, thereby reinforcing legitimacy and sustainability [3]. Community communication can serve as a bridge between customary deliberation practices and local government policies. Consequently, multi-actor collaboration involving customary communities, government, private sector, and tourists can be established in a more inclusive and sustainable manner.

1.4. Research Gap

From an academic perspective, a significant research gap exists. Most CBT studies emphasize economic and social aspects, but few examine how community communication practices can be integrated into local government policy [4]. Previous research often treats communities and government as separate entities, underscoring the need for a collaborative model that connects customary communities, local government, business actors, and tourists. Customary narratives are often perceived as symbolic or folkloric rather than epistemic sources capable of strengthening sustainable tourism governance. This gap opens opportunities for research focusing on the integration of community communication into government policy and on how customary narratives can serve as legitimate and effective policy instruments.

1.5. Research Objectives

This study aims to analyze how community communication practices shape sustainable tourism governance in Ngilngof Village and how the integration of local narratives into government policy can strengthen multi-actor collaboration. The research should bridge empirical realities with normative ideals, contributing theoretically and practically to developing community-based tourism governance models in Indonesia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this study provides a conceptual foundation for understanding community-based tourism governance in Ngilngof Village, Southeast Maluku. It integrates governance theory [5], participatory communication [6], community-based tourism (CBT) [7], the integration of local narratives into public policy [8], and multi-actor collaboration [9]. Together, these perspectives explain how community communication practices, local narratives, and collaborative engagement among diverse actors can shape sustainable tourism governance. The framework bridges empirical realities—such as limited institutional capacity, uneven benefit distribution, and weak policy integration—with normative ideals that emphasize collaborative governance, participatory communication, and the institutionalization of local narratives.

Governance Theory

In sustainable tourism, governance theory highlights that destination management is an interactive process involving multiple actors with diverse interests, not solely dependent on formal government structures.

Governance encompasses collaboration, transparency, accountability, and informal mechanisms rooted in cultural practices and customary deliberation. It is understood as a dynamic arena of negotiation in which government, local communities, businesses, NGOs, academics, and tourists interact to achieve sustainability goals [5]. This perspective underscores the importance of local participation, the integration of customary practices to strengthen policy legitimacy, and the balancing of economic and socio-ecological interests.

Participatory Communication Theory

Participatory communication theory provides a crucial lens for understanding how communities actively engage in development processes. Servaes [6] argues that development communication should not be a top-down process dominated by formal actors, but must be rooted in community participation. By positioning communities as active subjects, participatory communication creates space for them to voice their aspirations, negotiate, and build consensus around local needs. In sustainable tourism, participatory communication is evident in deliberations that involve government officials, customary leaders, religious figures, and community representatives. Such forums enhance policy legitimacy, maintain social harmony, and ensure that community interests are incorporated into governance.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Theory

CBT empowers communities through ownership, participation, and equitable benefit distribution. Scheyvens [7] argues that CBT is not merely an economic strategy to increase community income, but also reinforces cultural identity and social cohesion. By placing communities at the center, CBT ensures that tourism functions as both an instrument of economic growth and a medium for preserving local values. In practice, CBT involves communities in decision-making, managing visitor contributions, and maintaining environmental sustainability. Yet challenges persist, particularly in the uneven distribution of benefits, which highlights the need for stronger internal mechanisms to ensure inclusivity.

Integration of Local Narratives in Public Policy

Hall [8] emphasizes that sustainable tourism policy cannot rely solely on universal formal regulations, but must draw upon local narratives embedded in society. Customary practices such as communal land ownership, traditional deliberation, and cultural values serve as sources of policy legitimacy. Integrating these narratives into public policy enhances social acceptance and strengthens community cohesion in destination management. This approach bridges the gap between formal government regulations and living customary practices, institutionalizing local narratives as part of public policy to reinforce institutional capacity and ensure fair benefit distribution.

Multi-Actor Collaboration Theory

Multi-actor collaboration theory highlights that tourism sustainability can only be achieved when communities, government, private-sector actors, and tourists work together within a collaborative framework. Hampton and Jeyacheya [9] argue that sustainable tourism governance requires models involving diverse actors, transparent communication, equitable benefit distribution, and conflict-managing institutions. In coastal village contexts, collaboration entails government providing regulations and infrastructure, communities managing customary governance through deliberation, businesses offering services and facilities, and tourists contributing economically while respecting local rules. Despite its potential, challenges remain in benefit distribution and conflict resolution, underscoring the need to strengthen local institutions to ensure more effective and inclusive collaboration.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine community-based tourism governance in Ngilngof Village, Southeast Maluku. A qualitative approach was chosen to capture meanings, experiences, and social dynamics that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative data [10]. Ngilngof was selected as the case because of its unique characteristics of customary land ownership and traditional deliberation practices, which play a central role in the management of Ngurbloat Beach.

3.1 Research Design

The case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena within their real-life context. Yin [10] emphasizes that case studies are particularly suitable when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, making them appropriate for analyzing tourism governance embedded in customary practices.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through three complementary methods:

In-depth interviews: Conducted with customary elders, community leaders, government representatives, and local business actors to explore perceptions and narratives of tourism governance.

Participatory observation: Undertaken by attending customary deliberations, beach management activities,

and community-government interactions, enabling direct insight into communication dynamics [11].

Document analysis: Including customary regulations, deliberation records, and local government policies, to assess the integration of local narratives into formal governance. Spradley highlights that participant observation provides researchers with contextual understanding of cultural practices, while document analysis strengthens triangulation by linking observed practices with formal records.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke [12]. This involved systematic coding of interviews, observations, and documents to identify key themes such as customary communication practices, benefit distribution, institutional capacity, and policy integration. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and ability to capture both manifest and latent meanings within qualitative data.

Triangulation of sources and methods was applied to ensure validity and reliability. Denzin [13] argues that triangulation enhances credibility by combining multiple data sources and perspectives. Member checking with key informants was also conducted to verify the accuracy of interpretations, thereby strengthening trustworthiness.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were upheld throughout the research process. Community rights were respected, confidentiality was maintained, and findings were shared with local stakeholders to ensure tangible benefits for Ngilngof. The research design aligns with qualitative ethics that prioritize reciprocity, respect, and transparency in community-based studies [14].

Through this methodology, the study aims to generate findings that are both academically rigorous and practically relevant, contributing to the advancement of sustainable community-based tourism governance in Indonesia.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research on community-based tourism governance in Ngilngof Village, Southeast Maluku, reveals complex dynamics between customary communication practices, institutional capacity, benefit distribution, and the integration of local government policies. Customary deliberation remains the primary mechanism for decision-making in the management of Ngurbloat Beach, attended by customary elders, community leaders, and family representatives. Although opportunities to speak are relatively open, the dominance of customary leaders remains strong, limiting equal participation. The outcomes of deliberations are conveyed through village forums or customary announcements, indicating that internal communication is rooted in tradition but not fully connected to formal institutional mechanisms. Interaction with the local government tends to be informal; community aspirations are sometimes positively received but often misaligned with government policies. Benefit distribution is uneven, with economic gains concentrated among certain groups, while many residents receive only indirect benefits. Institutional capacity is limited, with weak written regulations, suboptimal transparency, and inconsistent conflict resolution mechanisms [15], [16].

From an academic perspective, these findings highlight a gap between empirical realities and normative ideals. In terms of sustainable governance, Ngilngof demonstrates an imbalance between informal customary deliberations and formal government structures. Sustainable governance requires systematic multi-actor collaboration with transparency and accountability [17], yet such collaboration has not been fully realized in Ngilngof. From the perspective of participatory communication, customary deliberations provide space for participation, but the dominance of customary leaders restricts equality of voice. Servaes [18] emphasizes that development communication must be grounded in broad participation, suggesting that practices in Ngilngof need to be strengthened to become more inclusive. Within the framework of community-based tourism (CBT), uneven benefit distribution remains a major challenge. Scheyvens [19] stresses that CBT must ensure social and economic justice, indicating the need for fairer policies in Ngilngof to make CBT a genuine instrument of community empowerment. Regarding the integration of local narratives into public policy, Hall [20] argues that sustainable policy must draw on local narratives. However, in Ngilngof, customary narratives are still treated as cultural symbols rather than epistemologies of policy. From the perspective of multi-actor collaboration, Hampton and Jeyacheya [21] highlight the importance of involving communities, government, the private sector, and tourists. In Ngilngof, such collaboration remains weak, characterized by informal communication and uneven benefit distribution.

Previous studies have also examined tourism dynamics in Ngurbloat. Cole [22] emphasizes that the strong customary structure in Kei provides social legitimacy for resource management, but simultaneously creates tensions when confronted with formal government policies. Andreani [23] shows that although Ngilngof residents maintain customary control over land, their involvement in regional policy remains limited, resulting in imbalances between local aspirations and formal regulations. Pattinama [24] notes that tourism in Ngurbloat often reflects unequal benefit distribution,

with groups possessing greater capital dominating ordinary residents. These findings align with Hampton and Jeyacheya's [21] analysis of weak local institutional capacity for managing tourism in Eastern Indonesia. Taken together, Ngilngof represents broader challenges for CBT in Indonesia: limited institutional capacity, uneven benefit distribution, and weak integration of local narratives into formal policy.

Comparative cases highlight Ngilngof's distinctive challenges. In Bali, desa pakraman have customary regulations formally recognized by the local government, enabling more integrated tourism governance. Customary villages in Bali manage tourism with clear written rules, and the local government provides formal legitimacy to their role [25], [26]. In Yogyakarta, community-based tourism in Kasongan Village demonstrates more equitable benefit distribution through village cooperatives [27], [28]. This contrasts with Ngilngof, where benefit distribution remains unequal. In Thailand, particularly Chiang Mai, CBT has been developed with strong support from the local government and international NGOs. Multi-actor collaboration is more systematic, with institutional capacity-building and the integration of local narratives into regional tourism policies [29].

5. CONCLUSIONS

Research on community-based tourism governance in Ngilngof Village, Southeast Maluku, demonstrates that customary communication practices through traditional deliberation remain the primary mechanism for decision-making. Internal community communication is relatively strong, but external communication with local government is weak, creating policy tensions and uneven benefit distribution. Institutional capacity is also limited, with weak written regulations, suboptimal transparency, and inconsistent conflict-resolution mechanisms.

REFERENCES

[1] H. Goodwin, "Sustainable tourism and poverty elimination," *Development Policy Review*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 377–402, 1998.

[2] E. Okazaki, "A community-based tourism model: Its conception and use," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 511–529, 2008.

[3] B. Bramwell and B. Lane, "Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 19, no. 4–5, pp. 411–421, 2011.

[4] M. P. Hampton and J. Jeyacheya, "Power, ownership and tourism in small islands: Community perspectives from Indonesia," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 714–730, 2015.

[5] B. Bramwell and B. Lane, "Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 19, no. 4–5, pp. 411–421, 2011.

[6] J. Servaes, *Communication for Development: One World, Multiple Cultures*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999.

[7] R. Scheyvens, "Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities," *Tourism Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 245–249, 1999.

[8] C. M. Hall, "Policy learning and policy failure in sustainable tourism governance: From global to local," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 19, no. 4–5, pp. 497–518, 2011.

[9] M. P. Hampton and J. Jeyacheya, "Power, ownership and tourism in small islands: Community perspectives from Indonesia," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 714–730, 2015.

[10] R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014.

[11] J. P. Spradley, *Participant Observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980.

[12] V. Braun and V. Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 77–101, 2006.

[13] N. K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.

[14] S. J. Tracy, "Qualitative quality: Eight 'big-tent' criteria for excellent qualitative research," *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 16, no. 10, pp. 837–851, 2010.

[15] E. Okazaki, "A community-based tourism model: Its conception and use," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 511–529, 2008.

[16] G. Moscardo, "Building community capacity for tourism development," *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 199–216, 2008.

[17] B. Bramwell and B. Lane, "Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 19, no. 4–5, pp. 411–421, 2011.

[18] J. Servaes, *Communication for Development: One World, Multiple Cultures*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999.

[19] R. Scheyvens, "Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities," *Tourism Management*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 245–249, 1999.

[20] C. M. Hall, "Policy learning and policy failure in sustainable tourism governance: From global to local," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 19, no. 4–5, pp. 497–518, 2011.

[21] M. P. Hampton and J. Jeyacheya, "Power, ownership and tourism in small islands: Community perspectives from Indonesia," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 714–730, 2015.

[22] S. Cole, "Beyond authenticity and commodification: Transforming tourism in Indonesia," *Tourist Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 305–323, 2007.

[23] D. Andreani, "Customary land tenure and tourism development in Kei Islands," *Indonesian Journal of Geography*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 145–160, 2015.

[24] M. Pattinama, "Tourism and inequality in Southeast Maluku," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 55–72, 2018.

[25] I. N. Suprapta, "Customary villages and tourism governance in Bali," *Journal of Tourism Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 233–248, 2019.

[26] N. M. Ariani and N. M. Sukerti, "The role of customary law in Bali's tourism development," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 24, no. 5, pp. 678–692, 2018.

[27] W. Nuryanti, "Village tourism in Indonesia: A case study of Kasongan," *Tourism Management*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 205–213, 1993.

[28] B. Sunaryo, *Tourism Policy and Community Development in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2013.

[29] N. Kontogeorgopoulos, "Community-based ecotourism in Thailand: The Case of Mae Kampong," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 123–146, 2005.