

Research Article

Beyond Growth-Centricity: A Sound Governance Framework for Sustainable Tourism through Multi-Stakeholder Co-Management and SDG-Based Evaluation

Fathimah Azzahro^{1*}, Bayu Irwansyah², Galih Gumilar³, Apri Kuntariningsih⁴

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Pariwisata Indonesia Semarang; e-mail : fathimahazzahro6@gmail.com

² Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Pariwisata Indonesia Semarang; e-mail : irwansyahbayu909@gmail.com

³ Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Pariwisata Indonesia Semarang; e-mail : galih_gumilar1991@yahoo.com

⁴ Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Pariwisata Indonesia Semarang; e-mail : aprikuntariningsih@stiepari.ac.id

* Corresponding Author : Fathimah Azzahro : fathimahazzahro6@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines the integration of Sound Governance principles within the sustainable tourism policy cycle to address institutional fragmentation and evaluation inefficiencies in developing economies. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the research develops a multidimensional evaluation framework aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), analyzing policy performance across five strategic domains: Economy, Social-Welfare, Culture-Education, Environment, and Governance. The quantitative phase utilizes 17 adapted SDG indicators to measure policy efficacy, while the qualitative phase employs semi-structured interviews and stakeholder mapping to deconstruct power dynamics in multi-actor co-management structures. The findings reveal that Sound Governance—specifically transparency and accountability serves as a critical catalyst for policy effectiveness, significantly influencing destination sustainability through an input-process-output-outcome-impact pathway. Empirical evidence from the case of Penglipuran Village, Bali, corroborates these results, demonstrating that indigenous institutional legitimacy enhances social responsiveness but remains vulnerable to overtourism-driven economic dependency. Notably, the study demonstrates that integrating SDGs into the policy evaluation cycle transforms assessments from mere administrative formalities into strategic instruments for long-term demand stability and ecosystem preservation. These findings position Sound Governance as a strategic intangible asset, offering theoretical contributions to development administration and practical guidance for policy-makers navigating the complexities of sustainable destination management in competitive global markets.

Keywords: Co-Management; Mixed-Methods; Policy Evaluation; SDGs; Sound Governance; Sustainable Tourism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism sector has increasingly developed into a complex socio-ecological system in which conventional approaches to destination management are continually reshaped by sustainability imperatives. Within this evolving landscape, policy governance functions as a core institutional mechanism, particularly in emerging tourism economies across Southeast Asia, where governance capacity significantly influences long-term destination resilience (Bhati & Pearce, 2024). Unlike purely profit-oriented industries, tourism destinations operate within a multi-stakeholder governance setting, where performance assessment extends beyond visitor numbers to encompass the protection of cultural heritage and environmental assets. Consequently, sustainable destination viability is often evaluated through

Integrated Policy Performance, a multidimensional construct that combines regulatory quality, stakeholder participation, and ecological stewardship (Bramwell et al., 2017b; World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2022). Recent studies further highlight that the incorporation of digital governance tools strengthens this integrated performance by improving coordination among actors and enhancing real-time resource monitoring (Chen & others, 2023). Collectively, these dimensions position integrated policy performance as a critical benchmark for assessing a destination's capacity to balance efficiency, legitimacy, and sustainability within public sector decision-making. The theoretical nexus between "soft" governance constructs, such as Sound Governance, and "hard" developmental outcomes like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is rooted in the Public Value Chain framework. This model posits that institutional quality drives policy productivity and service value, which in turn fosters stakeholder trust and community resilience, ultimately translating into robust sustainable growth (Farazmand, 2023). However, the operationalization of this chain in the tourism sector is complex. Sound Governance does not merely result in administrative compliance; it functions as an Institutional Signaling Mechanism. Destinations with high governance transparency are more likely to achieve specific SDG targets, such as decent work and economic growth, by fostering inclusive local entrepreneurship (Hansen & Kim, 2024). In the digital and post-pandemic age, transparent and accountable destinations generate "social gold" high levels of institutional trust and international legitimacy which directly influence a destination's attractiveness to responsible investment and its ability to maintain policy stability during crisis periods (Albrecht & Haid, 2022).

The post-pandemic era (2019–2024) has introduced a structural shift in governance expectations across Indonesia and neighboring nations. Stakeholders, particularly indigenous communities and local actors, have become increasingly discerning, prioritizing transparency, participatory decision-making, and service agility over top-down regulatory mandates (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). This behavioral recalibration has elevated Sound Governance from a bureaucratic objective to a Strategic Intangible Asset. When a destination demonstrates high governance integrity, stakeholder friction diminishes, granting policy-makers the "social hallnse" to implement rigorous sustainability measures such as carrying capacity limits and waste management protocols without triggering a "race to the bottom" through unsustainable mass-tourism exploitation (Munar, 2022)

Despite the intuitive link between robust governance and healthy sustainable performance, a significant empirical gap persists in the tourism administration literature. Existing studies have extensively explored the relationship between policy formulation and visitor behavior, yet few have successfully mapped subjective governance perceptions onto objective, multidimensional indicators like the SDGs, especially within the context of indigenous-managed destinations in Asia. Empirical evidence suggests that community-led governance often outperforms state-centric models in rural Asian contexts by leveraging local ecological knowledge (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2023; Tan & others, 2025). Most research remains either Western-centric or focused on urban centers, leaving the "backbone" of cultural tourism the rural and community-based destination under-researched. This study addresses this void by employing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to investigate the direct and indirect impacts of Sound Governance on Integrated Policy Performance, specifically examining the mediating role of Stakeholder Co-management as a conduit for holistic sustainability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sound Governance as a Post-Managerial Paradigm

The theoretical evolution of tourism administration has moved beyond the procedural limitations of "Good Governance" towards the more robust and value-centric framework of Sound Governance. Unlike traditional models that prioritize top-down regulatory compliance, Sound Governance integrates moral accountability, institutional legitimacy, and social responsiveness as non-negotiable pillars for destination resilience. This study adopts the Sound Governance framework to analyze how institutional health serves as the foundational engine for integrating creative economy sectors into sustainable tourism development (Farazmand, 2023).

Creative Economy and Sustainable Tourism: The Value-Creation Linkage

The creative economy acts as a catalyst for experiential consistency, where cultural assets and intellectual capital are hybridized to enhance destination competitiveness. Unlike mass tourism, creative-based tourism prioritizes high-value stakeholder interactions, aligning with

the principles of Community-Based Tourism (CBT). This linkage is critical for the Economic Pillar, as it diversifies local income streams and increases the value-added component of regional tourism products through innovation (Bhati & Pearce, 2024).

The Four Pillars of Sustainable Development in Tourism

In accordance with contemporary development standards, this research evaluates tourism policy through four integrative pillars:

The Institutional Pillar (Sound Governance)

Focuses on policy frameworks, stakeholder collaboration, and the legitimacy of governance structures in managing creative resources. High institutional integrity functions as a "Social License to Operate," ensuring long-term policy stability (Munar, 2022).

The Economic Pillar

Analyzes the contribution of creative industries to regional income generation and employment multipliers within the tourism ecosystem. Strategic investments in creative assets are shown to reduce economic leakage in developing destinations (Roxas et al., 2022).

The Social Pillar

Emphasizes community empowerment, social inclusion, and the protection of cultural heritage as living creative capital. Participatory governance ensures that tourism development does not marginalize local identities (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

The Environmental Pillar

Examines the adherence to conservation principles and the implementation of eco-friendly practices within creative tourism activities. Integrating environmental accountability into the governance cycle is essential for mitigating the negative externalities of destination growth (Bramwell et al., 2017a).

Theoretical Synthesis and Research Gap

Despite the intuitive link between governance and sustainability, an empirical disconnect persists in mapping how specific institutional dimensions directly influence SDG-based outcomes in Asian creative tourism contexts. Most studies remain descriptive, failing to provide a sequential explanatory analysis of the governance-to-sustainability pathway (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2023). This study addresses this void by synthesizing Sound Governance principles with the four pillars of sustainable development to provide a granular diagnostic of tourism policy effectiveness.

3. PROPOSED METHOD

Research Design: Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods

This study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, an approach characterized by an initial phase of extensive quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by a qualitative phase to further refine and interpret the statistical results. This design was selected to empirically map the relationship between Sound Governance variables and sustainable tourism performance, while simultaneously deconstructing the contextual role of the creative economy within the four pillars of development: economic, social, institutional, and environmental (Huang et al., 2025; Jackson-Gordon & Plano Clark, 2024). By utilizing this method, the complex phenomena of destination governance are not only measured numerically but are also deeply understood through the subjective perspectives of key stakeholders.

Proposed Method: Phase I (Quantitative)

The first phase of this study employs a quantitative approach to empirically test the relationship between Sound Governance mechanisms and the Four Pillars of Sustainable Tourism.

Data Collection

Instrument Design: Quantitative data are gathered via a structured survey instrument utilizing a 5-point Likert scale to ensure statistical reliability and psychometric consistency.

Sampling Frame: A purposive sampling technique is used to select N=150 stakeholders, including local creative entrepreneurs, community members, and policy-makers, to capture a representative cross-section of the tourism ecosystem.

Variable Operationalization: Indicators are meticulously mapped across the Economic, Social, Institutional (Sound Governance), and Environmental pillars to evaluate the direct impact of creative economy integration on destination sustainability.

Statistical Analysis

Analytical Tools: Data are processed using descriptive statistics and inferential modeling (such as Multiple Regression or PLS-SEM) to quantify the strength of the governance-to-sustainability pathway.

Validation: Reliability is assessed through Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha > 0.70$), ensuring that the quantitative instruments are robust enough for subsequent integration with qualitative narratives.

Proposed Method: Phase II (Qualitative)

The second phase employs a qualitative approach aimed at contextualizing and deepening the understanding of the quantitative findings through a managerial and institutional perspective. This phase is essential for explaining the underlying mechanisms that cannot be fully captured by statistical analysis alone specifically, how Sound Governance is translated into measurable sustainable outcomes.

Data Collection

In-depth Interviews: Qualitative data are collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants, including village leaders, government officials, and creative hub managers. These participants are selected due to their direct involvement in the Pilar Kelembagaan (Institutional Pillar) and the operationalization of creative economy policies. The selection of these elite informants is crucial for accessing "behind-the-scenes" institutional knowledge that dictates how governance structures adapt to local socio-economic pressures (Vada & others, 2022).

Interview Protocol: The semi-structured format allows for a flexible yet disciplined inquiry into the challenges of policy implementation. This approach is particularly effective in identifying the "Governance Gap" the discrepancy between formal regulations and practical, on-the-ground execution in emerging tourism markets (Zahra & others, 2024).

Institutional Mapping: By interviewing actors across different tiers of authority, the study maps the horizontal and vertical coordination required for Sound Governance. Effective multi-stakeholder co-management relies heavily on the communicative competence and leadership styles of these key institutional actors (Ahmad & others, 2023).

Data Saturation: Interviews are conducted until data saturation is reached the point at which no new thematic insights are emerging from the informants. In the context of rural and indigenous-managed tourism, saturation typically reveals the deep-seated cultural nuances that drive or hinder SDG-based policy performance (Saha & others, 2025).

Triangulation of Perspectives: The inclusion of both government officials and grassroots leaders ensures a balanced perspective, mitigating the risk of institutional bias. This multi-perspective triangulation is essential for validating the "Social License to Operate" within community-driven creative hubs (Moyle & others, 2026).

Methodological Rigor: Following (Ruslin, 2022) the semi-structured format is utilized to acquire in-depth evidence while maintaining thematic focus on the four pillars of development. This allows for adaptive flexibility in uncovering the "Social License to Operate" and indigenous institutional reasoning.

Integration Mechanism: The interview protocol is developed based on the Phase I quantitative results, serving as a key integration mechanism to bridge the two phases and resolve residual questions regarding policy implementation (Jackson-Gordon & Plano Clark, 2024b).

Data Analysis and Meta-Inference

Thematic Analysis: Data are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and latent explanatory narratives across the four pillars. The use of systematic coding allows for a rigorous cross-comparison between perceived governance quality and actual SDG implementation (Kiger & Varpio, 2021).

Synthesis: As affirmed by (Christou, 2023), this method is highly appropriate for mapping participant experiences onto theoretically grounded frameworks like Sound Governance.

Meta-Inferences: The qualitative findings are systematically cross-referenced with quantitative results to yield meta-inferences that provide a richer understanding of how creative-based strategies contribute to long-term destination resilience (Huang et al., 2025).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Results: Statistical Indicators of the Four Pillars

The first phase of the analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between Sound Governance and the integrated performance of the creative economy within the destination. Descriptive statistics indicated that the Institutional Pillar received the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 4.42$), suggesting that stakeholders perceive transparency and regulatory clarity as the primary drivers of sustainable growth. (a) Economic Pillar: Quantitative data showed a 15% increase in local revenue tied to creative industries, confirming the economic multiplier effect of tourism-creative hybridization. (b) Environmental Pillar: Survey results indicated a moderate ($\bar{x} = 3.65$) regarding the adoption of green practices, highlighting a potential area for policy intervention.

Qualitative Contextualization: Managerial and Institutional Insights

The second phase of the study provided a deeper understanding of these statistical trends through the lens of local managers and institutional leaders. This phase is essential for explaining the underlying mechanisms that cannot be fully captured by statistical analysis alone, particularly how policy governance is translated into measurable sustainable outcomes.

The Institutional Pillar and Sound Governance

In-depth interviews with village leaders and policy-makers confirmed that the destination's resilience is rooted in Institutional Legitimacy. The "Sound Governance" framework was observed in practice through the active involvement of indigenous structures (e.g., *Lembaga Adat*), which provide the necessary social capital to enforce sustainability protocols. Managers highlighted that "transparency in revenue sharing" was the most critical factor in maintaining the "Social License to Operate" among local creative entrepreneurs.

The Social and Economic Pillars: Creative Empowerment

The qualitative inquiry revealed that the creative economy functions as a Social Signaling Mechanism. Beyond direct income (Economic Pillar), creative hubs provide a platform for social inclusion and cultural preservation (Social Pillar). As documented in the interviews, the integration of traditional crafts into the modern tourism value chain has prevented "cultural commodification" by allowing local artisans to maintain ownership over their intellectual property.

The Environmental Pillar: Conservation Challenges

While Phase I indicated moderate environmental performance, Phase II interviews uncovered "operational friction" between rapid creative industry growth and conservation efforts. Managers identified a lack of "service agility" in waste management infrastructure as a primary barrier to achieving full environmental sustainability.

Discussion: Synthesis of the Governance-Sustainability Nexus

The integration of qualitative and quantitative outcomes yields meta-inferences that are more robust than either method could produce in isolation. The findings suggest that Sound Governance acts as a Strategic Intangible Asset that optimizes the pathway from policy formulation to integrated sustainability. When governance integrity is high, stakeholder friction diminishes, granting policy-makers the "social license" to implement rigorous SDG-based measures without triggering community alienation. This confirms the theoretical shift from growth-centric metrics to a multidimensional "Public Value" assessment, as advocated in contemporary tourism administration literature.

5. COMPARISON

The results of this study offer a significant contribution to the discourse on creative economy-led tourism, particularly when compared to existing national and international literature.

Sound Governance vs. Traditional Good Governance

While traditional "Good Governance" models often focus on procedural checklists and market efficiency, this study's findings align with the Sound Governance paradigm, which emphasizes institutional health and moral accountability. Previous studies in Southeast Asia have noted that destinations often suffer from "Institutional Decoupling" where formal sustainability policies exist but are not implemented. In contrast, our qualitative findings suggest that when indigenous institutional legitimacy is integrated (e.g., the Institutional Pillar), policy effectiveness increases significantly, echoing the resilience frameworks proposed by (Bhati & Pearce, 2024).

Economic Multipliers and the Creative Economy

Consistent with the Economic Pillar objectives, our findings on the 15% revenue increase from creative sectors parallel research by (Roxas et al., 2022), who argued that strategic investment in creative assets reduces economic leakage. However, this study goes further by identifying that without the mediation of Stakeholder Co-management, economic gains often fail to reach the most vulnerable community segments a "Research Gap" frequently highlighted in Asian tourism contexts.

The Social License vs. Cultural Commodification

A key point of comparison lies in the Social Pillar. While some scholars warn that rapid creative tourism development can lead to cultural commodification, our results demonstrate that Sound Governance acts as a protective shield. By maintaining the "Social License to Operate" through transparent revenue-sharing, the destination avoids the community alienation observed in more top-down managed rural destinations. This supports the "Social Governance" theories recently advanced by (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020) and (Munar, 2022).

Environmental Accountability

Unlike studies that report a direct positive link between tourism growth and conservation, our comparison reveals an "Operational Friction" in the Environmental Pillar. While quantitative scores were moderate, qualitative insights show that service agility in waste management remains a bottleneck. This aligns with (Bramwell et al., 2017a), who suggest that environmental sustainability is often the most difficult pillar to optimize in rapidly developing emerging markets.

Table 1. Key Comparison Summary Table

Dimension	Previous Research Findings	This Study's Findings (SDG-Based & Integrated)
Institutional Pillar (Sound Governance)	Primarily focused on top-down administrative compliance and procedural "checklists" (<i>Good Governance</i>).	Governance is viewed as "Institutional Health" and a strategic engine. Success is driven by transparency, indigenous legitimacy, and moral accountability. (Kuntariningsih, 2026); (Farazmand, 2023); (Bhati & Pearce, 2024)
Economic Pillar	Performance measured by quantitative growth (visitor volume and GDP contribution).	Focuses on the Creative Multiplier Effect. Tourism-creative hybridization increases local value-added and reduces economic leakage. (Roxas et al., 2022); (Albrecht & Haid, 2022)
Social Pillar	Often highlights risks of cultural commodification and community marginalization	Achieves Social Inclusion through the "Social License to Operate." Creative economy protects cultural assets via community empowerment. (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020); (Munar, 2022)
Environmental Pillar	Environmental policies often exist but lack integration with creative industries.	Identifies the need for Policy Agility in integrating green practices within creative hubs to mitigate growth-related externalities. (Bramwell et al., 2017a); (Roxas et al., 2022)
Methodological Approach	Frequently relies on single-method descriptive analysis.	Employs a Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods design to yield robust meta-inferences. (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2023); (Huang et al., 2025)

Comparison of Statistical Indicators

The following table compares the descriptive metrics observed in the study.

Table 2. Comparison of Statistical Indicators.

Development Pillar	Statistical Indicator (Mean Score / Δ)	Comparison with Global Benchmarks / Previous Research	This Study's Findings (Integrated SDG-Based Perspective)
Institutional (Sound Governance)	$\bar{x} = 4.42$ (High)	Higher than the average for emerging markets = 3.80 as noted by Farazmand (2023) regarding procedural efficiency.	Indicates that "Institutional Health" and moral accountability are prioritized, serving as the foundational engine for all other pillars (Kuntariningsih, 2026)

Development Pillar	Statistical Indicator (Mean Score / Δ)	Comparison with Global Benchmarks / Previous Research	This Study's Findings (Integrated SDG-Based Perspective)
Economic	+15.2% Revenue Growth	Surpasses the standard 8-10% growth rate in traditional mass-tourism models (Roxas et al., 2022).	Confirms the Creative Multiplier Effect; hybridization of local wisdom with modern industry creates higher value-added per visitor (Albrecht & Haid, 2022)
Social	$\bar{x} = 4.15$ (High Inclusion)	Significantly higher than top-down managed rural destinations where community friction is common (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).	High scores in "Cultural Pride" and "Policy Participation" reflect a robust Social License to Operate, preventing cultural modification (Munar, 2022)
Environmental	$\bar{x} = 3.65$ (Moderate)	Consistent with the "Green Gap" identified in (Bramwell et al., 2017; Dwivedi & others, 2024)) where economic growth often outpaces conservation infrastructure.	Reveals a need for enhanced Policy Agility to align creative hub expansion with rigorous waste and energy conservation protocols (Bhati & Pearce, 2024)

Analytical Discussion: The Governance-Performance Nexus

The statistical comparison demonstrates that the Institutional Pillar is the strongest predictor of overall destination success. While traditional studies often view governance as a secondary administrative layer, this study identifies it as a Strategic Intangible Asset.

(1) The Decoupling Gap: Unlike the "Institutional Decoupling" often found in South-east Asian tourism—where formal policies exist but lack ground-level impact—the high statistical correlation between Governance and Social Inclusion in this study suggests a High-Fidelity Implementation of Sound Governance principles (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2023) (2) Meta-Inference of the Mixed-Methods Design: By cross-referencing the quantitative scores (\bar{x}) with qualitative insights, it is evident that the high Economic Pillar performance is not a result of increased visitor volume, but rather the increased *value* of creative products. This validates the theoretical shift toward Public Value Chain optimization (Huang et al., 2025).

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the integration of the creative economy into the tourism sector, governed by the principles of Sound Governance, significantly enhances destination sustainability across four critical dimensions. The quantitative findings, supported by qualitative managerial insights, demonstrate that the Institutional Pillar (Sound Governance) serves as the primary engine for sustainable performance. High levels of transparency, indigenous institutional legitimacy, and stakeholder collaboration create a robust Social License to Operate, which in turn optimizes the Economic Pillar through high-value creative multipliers rather than mere visitor volume.

Furthermore, the research highlights that while the Social Pillar thrives under participatory governance, the Environmental Pillar requires greater policy agility to align rapid creative growth with conservation protocols. Ultimately, this study proves that Sound Governance (Kuntariningsih, 2026) is a strategic intangible asset that bridges the gap between high-level SDG policy rhetoric and ground-level implementation, providing a resilient framework for post-pandemic tourism recovery.

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