

GOVERNMENT-LED DMO AND COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES: CASE STUDY IN LABUAN BAJO, FLORES, INDONESIA

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Keywords: Government-led DMO, Collaborative governance, Destination management, Participatory leadership, Sustainable tourism, Island tourism destination</p> <p>Received: April 30, 2026</p> <p>Approved: June 2, 2026</p> <p>Published: June 29, 2026</p>	<p>Sustainable tourism in island destinations requires governance approaches that balance ecological preservation, community well-being, and economic development. The present study examines the collaborative governance practices of the Tourism Authority Board in Labuan Bajo, Flores, Indonesia, a government-led Destination Management Organisation (DMO). Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with informants representing government agencies, private sector actors, local communities, NGOs, and media, complemented by document analysis and field observations across Komodo National Park, Labuan Bajo, and surrounding areas in Flores, Lembata, and Alor. The findings indicate that the Board effectively coordinates across multiple agencies and jurisdictions, aligning national and regional tourism strategies. However, community stakeholders report limited influence in decision-making process. Mechanisms such as multi-stakeholder workshops, regional forums, and community networks facilitate local participation and adaptive governance. The study proposes a hybrid institutional model integrating participatory governance, cross-sector coordination, and transformational leadership, enhancing policy coherence, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable tourism outcomes. The research demonstrates that government-led DMOs can act as orchestrators of inclusive and adaptive governance, bridging centralized authority with local priorities in complex island tourism destination systems.</p>

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INTRODUCITON

The governance of island tourism destinations requires integrated and adaptive approaches that balance ecological preservation, community well-being, and economic development. In archipelagic contexts such as Indonesia, governance complexity is intensified by geographical fragmentation, overlapping jurisdictions, and uneven institutional capacity. These conditions often lead to coordination failures, environmental degradation, and social inequality when governance systems lack contextual adaptability and participatory mechanisms (Naqvi, Ahmed, & Pervez, 2023; UN Tourism, 2024).

Indonesia, an archipelagic nation comprising more than 17,000 islands, provides a distinctive setting for examining tourism governance. Rich in marine and cultural resources, Indonesia holds significant potential to utilise tourism as a driver of regional development, environmental conservation, and cultural revitalization. Within this context, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province—particularly the islands of Flores, Lembata, and Alor—offers a compelling case study. The region's rich ecological diversity and cultural heritage position it as an emerging hub for sustainable tourism development.

Despite these advantages, tourism development in eastern Indonesia faces persistent structural challenges. Limited infrastructure, fragmented administration, and weak intergovernmental coordination hinder equitable and sustainable growth (World Bank, 2020). The designation of Labuan Bajo as a Key Tourism Destination in 2016, subsequently formalised through Presidential Regulation No. 32/2018, led to the establishment of the Labuan Bajo Flores Tourism Authority Board (BPOLBF) as a government-led DMO. The Board is tasked with managing a defined tourism zone in Parapuar, Labuan Bajo, while coordinating broader development across the Floratama area, which encompasses Flores, Lembata, Alor, and parts of Bima. While BPOLBF addresses coordination challenges inherent in multi-island governance, the centralised nature of its authority risks marginalising local stakeholders if not complemented by collaborative mechanisms (Naqvi et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship emphasises the critical role of destination governance leadership—the capacity of governing authorities to coordinate diverse actors, foster stakeholder participation, and adapt governance strategies to socio-ecological contexts—in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes (de Araujo & Scott, 2018; Wan et al., 2022). Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) have therefore evolved from primarily marketing-oriented institutions into multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms responsible for aligning government agencies, private sector actors, and local communities toward shared development goals. Effective destination governance leadership requires a careful balance between centralised decision-making authority and meaningful participatory engagement, ensuring that strategic priorities do not marginalise local stakeholders while maintaining institutional coherence. Contemporary scholarship further demonstrates that multi-stakeholder participation enhances sustainability performance while strengthening the legitimacy and accountability of policy processes (Panagiotopoulou & Skoultos, 2025).

Within government-led DMOs, transformational leadership serves as a critical governance mechanism that enables collaboration among diverse stakeholders while maintaining strategic direction. Rather than merely coordinating administrative functions,



transformational leaders facilitate the development of shared goals, trust, and collective commitment, which are essential for effective destination governance. Recent tourism governance scholarship increasingly suggests that successful destinations are governed through network-based arrangements in which outcomes depend not only on formal authority but also on the ability of leaders to align the interests of public agencies, private-sector actors, and local communities around a common vision (Beritelli et al., 2021; Nunkoo, 2022).

This perspective aligns closely with collaborative governance theory, which conceptualises leadership as a form of meta-governance that shapes the conditions under which stakeholders engage, cooperate, and mobilise collective resources (Emerson et al., 2012; Torfing et al., 2020). From this viewpoint, transformational leadership contributes to governance effectiveness by fostering principled engagement, strengthening relational trust, and creating shared motivation among actors who may otherwise possess divergent interests. The significance of transformational leadership therefore, lies not simply in inspiring followers but in building the institutional and relational foundations necessary for sustained collaboration.

Studies of destination governance further indicate that transformational leaders enhance stakeholder commitment by articulating long-term strategic visions and encouraging mutual accountability across organisational and administrative boundaries (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Sharma & Kaur, 2023). In complex tourism destinations, where governance responsibilities are distributed across multiple actors, these leadership practices help reduce coordination failures and improve policy coherence. Consequently, the effectiveness of government-led DMOs depends not only on their formal authority but also on their capacity to cultivate trust-based relationships and facilitate cooperation among interdependent stakeholders (Dredge et al., 2021; Wang & Ap, 2022).

Evidence from Indonesian DMO initiatives reinforces this argument by demonstrating that government leadership and participatory governance are not necessarily contradictory. Empirical findings show that structured mechanisms for community involvement in planning and implementation can enhance socio-economic resilience and environmental stewardship while preserving strategic coordination and administrative coherence (Harefa, 2025; Purwanti et al., 2024). Taken together, these studies suggest that transformational leadership functions as a bridging mechanism between centralised governance and collaborative participation, enabling government-led DMOs to balance strategic control with stakeholder empowerment in pursuit of sustainable destination development.

Despite the growing body of literature on collaborative destination governance, empirical research on government-led DMOs in archipelagic contexts remains notably limited. Existing studies have predominantly focused on land-based destinations, metropolitan tourism regions, or geographically integrated destinations where governance structures, stakeholder networks, and administrative jurisdictions are relatively consolidated. Such contexts differ substantially from archipelagic destinations, where geographical fragmentation, inter-island connectivity constraints, overlapping administrative boundaries, and uneven distributions of tourism resources create distinct governance challenges (Rahayu, Damayanti, & Mahardika, 2024; Sekianti & Sucipto, 2024).



More importantly, current empirical studies provide only limited insight into how government-led DMOs coordinate multiple islands while balancing centralised strategic control with local stakeholder participation. Although collaborative governance theory emphasises multi-actor engagement, consensus-building, and shared decision-making, relatively little empirical evidence explains how these governance mechanisms operate in highly dispersed island systems characterised by asymmetrical power relations, varying institutional capacities, and geographically distant stakeholders. Consequently, the applicability of conventional collaborative governance models to island destinations remains insufficiently tested.

From a theoretical perspective, several issues remain underdeveloped. First, the interaction between collaborative governance and destination governance theories has rarely been examined in contexts where a government agency assumes a dominant coordinating role. Existing studies often assume relatively balanced stakeholder relationships, providing limited explanation of how government-led coordination can simultaneously foster collaboration, maintain legitimacy, and avoid excessive centralisation. Second, the concepts of institutional legitimacy, stakeholder trust, and local agency have not been adequately explored within fragmented island governance systems, where physical separation may affect participation, representation, and accountability. Third, limited attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which centralised destination leadership can achieve strategic coherence across multiple islands while accommodating diverse local interests and development priorities.

A significant empirical and theoretical gap remains in understanding governance arrangements that enable government-led DMOs to effectively manage island tourism destinations. While collaborative governance literature in tourism offers important insights, it provides limited explanation of how governance structures, stakeholder configurations, and coordination mechanisms operate in geographically dispersed island systems. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing destination governance theory and for developing context-sensitive understanding of how government-led collaborative governance can enhance destination competitiveness, institutional legitimacy, and sustainable tourism development in archipelagic contexts.

This study addresses this gap by examining BPOLBF's governance leadership across Flores, Lembata, and Alor in implementing collaborative governance principles. A qualitative case study approach is employed, using interviews, document analysis, and field observations to analyse governance processes and stakeholder engagement. Figure 1 depicts the geographic context of East Nusa Tenggara, highlighting the dispersed configuration of Flores, Lembata, and Alor within Indonesia's island tourism landscape.



Figure 1. Island Configuration of Flores, Lembata, and Alor within East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province

Recent literature in destination governance indicates that, although governing bodies often perform relatively well in coordinating across governmental and tourism-related actors, they commonly face challenges in promoting inclusive local participation and sustaining meaningful stakeholder engagement. These challenges are increasingly documented in research on sustainable destination governance, particularly regarding the complexity of multi-stakeholder frameworks and the need for greater integration of community voices in decision-making processes (Panagiotopoulou & Skoultzos, 2025; Amni Zarkasyi Rahman et al., 2025). Studies suggest that effective governance of tourist destinations requires institutional arrangements that balance inter-agency coordination with participatory mechanisms that empower local communities and stakeholders to co-shape tourism planning and management (Panagiotopoulou & Skoultzos, 2025).

This study contributes to the literature by proposing a hybrid institutional model for island tourism governance. It addresses the current research gap by positioning DMO performance within archipelagic governance, leadership, and institutional adaptation, offering insights into government-led models that operate across multiple islands rather than single-destination contexts. Practically, the study provides actionable guidance for policymakers and practitioners seeking to balance top-down authority with bottom-up participation in sustainable island tourism development.

Aligned with this aim, this study advances an integrated inquiry into island tourism governance in the Flores–Lembata–Alor region by addressing the following research questions: (1) How is island tourism governance currently structured and implemented across the Flores–Lembata–Alor destinations? (2) How can a government-led DMO model effectively integrate participatory governance, cross-sector coordination, and transformational leadership? and (3) What innovative institutional structure can simultaneously manage a defined tourism zone in Labuan Bajo while coordinating development across island destinations of Flores, Lembata, and Alor? Correspondingly, the study pursues three primary objectives: to analyse the existing governance arrangements of island tourism destinations in the region; to develop

a government-led DMO framework that embeds participatory governance, cross-sector coordination, and transformational leadership; and to examine the institutional innovation required to reconcile centralised authority with inclusive, multi-level stakeholder engagement. By integrating collaborative governance principles within a government-led structure, this research proposes a hybrid institutional model capable of aligning strategic oversight with participatory processes, thereby advancing sustainable tourism development in complex archipelagic systems.

Literature Review

Island Tourism Destination Governance and the Archipelagic Tourism Systems Approach

Island destinations are characterised by ecological sensitivity, spatial fragmentation, and multi-level institutional complexity. These conditions heighten governance challenges, particularly when tourism becomes a primary economic driver (Hall & Scott, 2021; Naqvi, Ahmed, & Pervez, 2023). Contemporary research highlights that effective governance in island tourism requires the integration of economic, environmental, and sociocultural objectives through adaptive, collaborative, and multi-stakeholder arrangements (Sarhan et al., 2024; Shang et al., 2025; Kesuma et al., 2025; Basyar et al., 2025). The archipelagic tourism systems approach provides a holistic lens to understand and manage tourism in multi-island regions. Unlike single-island management frameworks, this approach treats archipelagos as interconnected systems, recognising that islands are linked through mobility, resource flows, socio-economic networks, and shared ecological processes (Meneghello, 2024). By adopting this perspective, governance can move beyond fragmented, island-by-island strategies toward integrated, system-level planning that balances regional development, community engagement, and environmental stewardship.

Naqvi et al. (2023) highlight that sustainable island tourism depends on coordinated actions among government institutions, private actors, and local communities. Similarly, Hall and Scott (2021) argue that adaptive and network-based governance is essential to manage climate uncertainty, fragile ecosystems, and fluctuating tourism markets. Incorporating the archipelagic tourism systems perspective strengthens these arguments by emphasising the importance of inter-island linkages and network resilience, ensuring that policy interventions in one island consider spillover effects on others (Farsari & Prastacos, 2022).

Studies in UNESCO-type destinations demonstrate that collaborative governance strengthens policy coherence and helps navigate overlapping jurisdictions typical of island regions (UN Tourism, 2024; Guo & Li, 2025). Archipelagic systems thinking reinforces this, as governance mechanisms must coordinate not only vertically across national, provincial, and local levels but also horizontally across islands with shared tourism infrastructure, ecosystems, and cultural heritage.

Emerging scholarship has increasingly emphasised the importance of multi-level coordination and community-embedded governance. Farsari and Prastacos (2022) show that coordination between national and local authorities enhances institutional alignment, while Hoarau and Kline (2021) underscore that inter-island network resilience depends on transparent communication and participatory processes. Island resilience frameworks



increasingly recognise participatory governance as a mechanism for embedding community values into decision-making, thereby improving environmental stewardship and long-term development outcomes (Leguía-Cruz et al., 2024; Newig et al., 2023). Integrating an archipelagic systems lens highlights the need for cross-island participatory platforms, which allow communities from different islands to co-create sustainable tourism strategies and share best practices.

In Indonesia, research identifies persistent coordination barriers between national ministries, provincial bodies, and local governments—particularly in dispersed small-island clusters—rooted in overlapping authority, unclear division of responsibilities, and weak harmonisation mechanisms (Surahmi, Kartika Sari, & Supriyanti, 2025; Indrayanti & Rahayu, 2025). Strengthening governance capacities, data-driven planning, and institutional trust is therefore considered essential for improving competitiveness and sustainability in emerging destinations (Dredge et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2022; OECD, 2022; Newig et al., 2023). The archipelagic tourism systems approach adds an additional layer of strategic insight, advocating for regional planning instruments that recognise islands as interdependent nodes within a broader tourism network, rather than isolated units. Destination governance in archipelagic systems is inherently complex due to spatial fragmentation, administrative boundaries, and diverse stakeholder interests across multiple islands. Effective governance therefore requires integrated mechanisms that go beyond single-destination management, emphasising collaboration, coherence, and system-wide accountability. Table 1 synthesises key elements of destination governance that are particularly relevant to archipelagic contexts, drawing from recent scholarly perspectives. These elements collectively illustrate how governance structures can support sustainable, inclusive, and coordinated tourism development across interconnected islands.

Table 1. Elements of Destination Governance in Archipelagic Systems

Aspect	Explanation	Example
Multi-sectoral Actors	Inclusion of government, private sector, communities, and academia enhances participatory governance and collaboration in tourism development (Aribowo et al., 2022; Indrianti et al., 2024; Newig et al., 2023).	Joint management forums and multi-agency planning across islands.
Participation	Multi-stakeholder engagement increases legitimacy, co-ownership, and cross-sector engagement in destination planning (Meliana, Geusan Akbar, & Kania, 2025).	Inter-island community consultations on tourism plans.
Transparency	Collaborative governance frameworks build accountability and trust between actors by formalizing roles and shared responsibilities (Ansell & Gash, 2023).	Public release of governance and financial reports covering all islands.
Coordination	Reduces overlapping authority, enhances synergy, and connects islands (Farsari et al., 2025).	Multi-level and inter-island meetings between agencies.
Strategic Vision	Ensures long-term policy coherence and system-level planning (Epifani & Valente, 2023).	Archipelagic tourism master plans aligned with national and regional goals.
Monitoring & Evaluation	Assesses programme effectiveness and inter-island impacts (Panagiotopoulou & Skoultzos, 2025)	Annual review of destination performance across multiple islands.



Aspect	Explanation	Example
Legal Framework	Formal collaborative mechanisms harmonise regulations, integrate actors, and provide legitimacy for cross-sector decision making (Meliana, Geusan Akbar, & Kania, 2025).	Regional conservation and tourism regulations applicable to the archipelago.

Source: Researcher, 2026

As shown in Table 1, destination governance in archipelagic systems depends on the interaction of institutional, participatory, and strategic dimensions rather than isolated policy instruments. Multi-sectoral involvement, transparency, and coordination strengthen trust and reduce fragmentation, while strategic vision and monitoring ensure long-term coherence across islands. Supported by an enabling legal framework, these governance elements provide a foundation for managing archipelagic destinations as integrated systems, allowing tourism development to balance competitiveness, sustainability, and equity across island communities.

Indeed, destination governance is evolving toward network-based, system-oriented models that emphasise collaboration, transparency, and long-term strategic vision. For archipelagic regions, governance must bridge fragmented jurisdictions and link ecological protection, community participation, and regional development (Naqvi et al., 2023). The archipelagic tourism systems approach enriches this perspective by highlighting the interdependence of islands, promoting coordinated governance, and supporting resilient tourism networks that can adapt to socio-environmental and market fluctuations.

Government-Led DMO: Integrating Participatory Governance, and Cross-Sector Coordination

The role of DMOs has transformed from promotional agencies into strategic governance institutions that coordinate stakeholders, align policies, and manage destination-wide sustainability and competitiveness (UN Tourism, 2021). Contemporary analyses (2020–2025) have increasingly highlighted the importance of hybrid, government-led DMOs capable of integrating state authority with participatory governance. OECD (2022) and Naqvi et al. (2023) argue that hybrid or government-led DMOs are more effective in developing destinations where institutional capacity varies and market coordination is weak. Case studies in Southeast Asian and island contexts further show that hybrid governance arrangements in destination management can bridge national priorities and local needs while mitigating bureaucratic fragmentation (Putra, 2024; Rahaju et al., 2026).

Wan, Li, and Lau (2022) demonstrate that public–private partnerships enhance resilience during crises, especially when tourism-dependent islands face shocks such as pandemics or natural disasters. However, government-led DMOs continue to face challenges including overlapping mandates, siloed bureaucracy, and limited local participation, particularly where institutional roles are unclear and coordination mechanisms remain weak (Kemenparekraf, 2020; Kusumah, 2024). The contemporary literature identifies five governance dimensions that determine DMO effectiveness:

- Institutional integration across central, provincial, and local agencies (UN Tourism, 2024);



- Cross-sector coordination with environmental, transport, and creative economy sectors (Kemenparekraf, 2023);
- Integrated funding models combining government budgets with private and donor financing (OECD, 2022);
- Strategic alignment with national, regional, and local development frameworks (Guo & Li, 2025);
- Multi-stakeholder involvement through inclusive participation mechanisms (Nicholas et al., 2024).

Government-led DMOs have traditionally functioned as central integrators, orchestrators, and enablers of tourism governance through hierarchical coordination mechanisms. In this model, public authorities assume primary responsibility for aligning stakeholders, formulating policy, and directing tourism development processes. However, in dispersed and culturally embedded island destinations such as Flores, Lembata, and Alor, the limitations of hierarchical governance become increasingly evident due to fragmented geographies, strong local customary institutions, and uneven administrative reach. As a result, there is a gradual shift toward adaptive network governance, in which coordination is distributed across multiple actors and legitimacy is co-produced through collaboration rather than centralised authority.

The growing recognition of collaborative and adaptive governance approaches has prompted scholars and practitioners to explore institutional arrangements that extend beyond conventional government-led DMOs. While DMOs remain important mechanisms for strategic coordination, destination branding, and policy implementation, their effectiveness may be constrained in contexts where local participation, community ownership, and place-specific knowledge are critical to tourism development outcomes. This challenge has stimulated interest in governance models that can complement formal state-led structures while enhancing stakeholder engagement at the local level.

Within this evolving governance landscape, the Tourism Management Organisation (TMO) prototype initiated by local actors in Flores—facilitated through the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) tourism development project in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia between 2015 and 2019—provides a notable example of an alternative yet complementary governance arrangement. Rather than functioning as a substitute for government-led DMOs, TMOs emerged as intermediary governance platforms that bridge formal policy structures and community-level tourism management. Their primary role is to facilitate horizontal coordination among village communities, tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis), customary leaders, local entrepreneurs, and other destination stakeholders who are often insufficiently represented within formal government-led governance processes.

In practice, TMOs perform several functions traditionally associated with destination governance, including stakeholder coordination, conflict mediation, collective planning, knowledge sharing, and the mobilisation of local resources. However, unlike DMOs, whose authority is often derived from formal governmental mandates, TMOs rely primarily on negotiated legitimacy, social trust, and voluntary collaboration. Their capacity to influence

tourism development therefore stems less from hierarchical authority and more from their ability to build consensus, strengthen local networks, and facilitate collective action among diverse actors. This governance logic reflects a shift from command-and-control approaches toward more relational and participatory forms of destination management.

The significance of the TMO model extends beyond its operational role in tourism development. Conceptually, it illustrates how destination governance can evolve from a predominantly state-centric system toward a hybrid governance arrangement in which authority, responsibility, and decision-making are distributed across multiple actors and institutional levels. Rather than concentrating governance functions within a single organisation, hybrid arrangements combine the strategic leadership and regulatory capacity of government-led DMOs with the participatory and locally embedded capabilities of community-based organisations such as TMOs. This creates opportunities for more responsive and context-sensitive governance while maintaining broader strategic coherence.

From this perspective, the Flores TMO experience represents more than a localised institutional innovation; it provides empirical insight into the broader evolution of destination governance toward polycentric systems. Such systems are characterised by multiple centres of decision-making that interact through cooperation, negotiation, and mutual adjustment rather than strict hierarchical control. Tourism management becomes embedded within local social structures, while state actors continue to provide strategic direction, policy support, and institutional coordination. The TMO case therefore offers an important illustration of how hybrid governance arrangements can reconcile centralised destination objectives with community participation and local agency, contributing to more adaptive, legitimate, and sustainable tourism governance outcomes.

The Significance of Collaborative and Transformational Leadership

Destination leadership is a critical determinant of the effectiveness of government-led DMOs, particularly within complex, multi-actor and multi-scalar tourism systems (Scott et al., 2019; Bellini et al., 2017). Contemporary scholarship converges around two complementary leadership paradigms—collaborative leadership and transformational leadership—which together provide the relational and strategic capacities required to govern fragmented and dynamic destination environments (Ansell & Gash, 2020; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Dredge, 2016).

Collaborative leadership emphasises trust-building, shared accountability, and joint problem-solving among governmental, private-sector, and community stakeholders, enabling collective action in complex governance settings (Ansell & Gash, 2020; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Dredge, 2016). By fostering sustained dialogue and coordinated action, it reduces institutional fragmentation and strengthens participatory governance in contexts characterised by dispersed authority and competing interests (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Harrison & DeVere, 2022; Wan et al., 2022; Yuldosheva, 2025). In this capacity, collaborative leadership operates as a coordination architecture—facilitating cross-sector alignment and enhancing coherence across governance levels.

Transformational leadership, in contrast, provides strategic direction through the articulation of a long-term vision, institutional reform, and the empowerment of stakeholders



to co-create sustainable destination futures (Nguyen, Wechtler, & Lai, 2025; Lestari, 2025). Emerging empirical evidence indicates that transformational leadership strengthens adaptive capacity, innovation, and strategic learning—capabilities that are indispensable for destinations confronting environmental uncertainty, socio-economic transitions, and market volatility (SEGITTUR & Andrades, 2024).

Within government-led DMOs, these leadership paradigms should not be viewed as competing alternatives but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of effective governance. The ability to balance top-down strategic authority with bottom-up participatory engagement is critical for orchestrating multi-level governance, mitigating institutional silos, and ensuring meaningful stakeholder inclusion (Meliana et al., 2025; Santos & Rodrigues, 2025; Waligo & Ruhanen, 2024). In this sense, destination leadership functions as an institutional integrator—aligning actors, mobilising resources, and steering long-term destination transformation toward sustainable and resilient outcomes.

Table 2 contrasts these two leadership models, clarifying their distinct orientations, mechanisms, and implications within government-led DMOs.

Table 2. Collaborative and Transformational Leadership in Government-led DMOs

Aspect	Collaborative Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Focus	Trust-building, co-production, shared responsibility	Vision-setting, innovation, institutional change
Mechanisms	Dialogue, mutual learning, stakeholder engagement	Empowerment, inspiration, strategic direction
Strengths	Enhances legitimacy, inclusion, resilience	Drives long-term change, innovation, adaptability
Challenges	Time-intensive, requires consensus	Risk of over-reliance on individual leaders
Government Role	Facilitator, mediator, network orchestrator	Visionary, strategic agent, innovation champion

Source: Researcher, 2026

As summarised, collaborative and transformational leadership serve complementary functions in government-led DMOs rather than mutually exclusive roles. Collaborative leadership strengthens trust, inclusiveness, and shared ownership among diverse stakeholders, while transformational leadership provides strategic direction and drives systemic change. When effectively combined, these leadership approaches enable DMOs to balance participatory governance with visionary policy-making, enhancing both short-term coordination and long-term destination transformation. Simultaneously, collaborative and transformational leadership foster adaptive governance, enabling destinations to respond to ecological, social, and economic challenges while advancing long-term sustainability (Wan et al., 2022; SEGITTUR & Andrades, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Labuan Bajo is a small coastal town located on the western tip of Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Historically it is a fishing village that has rapidly transformed into the primary gateway for tourism to Komodo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site



known for the Komodo dragon, rich marine biodiversity, and pristine terrestrial landscapes. The town has experienced significant tourism-driven growth, including the expansion of hotels, resorts, and transportation infrastructure.

The research also covers Komodo National Park and the surrounding areas in Flores, Lembata, and Alor, which represent varying levels of tourism development and governance challenges. These areas collectively provide a rich context for studying destination governance, as they face ecological pressures, land-use conflicts, and social tensions arising from rapid tourism growth. Local communities in these regions experience both economic opportunities and challenges linked to modernisation, while multiple stakeholders—including government agencies, private-sector actors, NGOs, and media—engage in complex, multi-scalar governance arrangements.

Concurrently, Labuan Bajo, Komodo National Park, and the surrounding island clusters across western Flores, eastern Flores, Lembata, and Alor constitute a strategically significant spatial assemblage of emerging island destinations in eastern Indonesia. As illustrated in Figure 2, Labuan Bajo, located on the western tip of Flores, functions as the primary gateway hub and service node, concentrating tourism infrastructure such as accommodation, transport access (including Komodo International Airport), and visitor services that connect domestic and international tourist flows into the broader archipelagic landscape. From this gateway, tourism circulation extends westward and northward into the core conservation and attraction zone of Komodo National Park—encompassing Komodo Island, Rinca Island, Padar Island, and surrounding marine protected areas—where high-value ecological assets, including endemic species such as the Komodo dragon and globally significant coral reef systems, generate strong conservation-tourism interface pressures.



Figure 2. Map of the Labuan Bajo–Komodo National Park

Beyond this core, the destination system expands eastward and northeastward toward Flores, Lembata, and Alor, forming a discontinuous yet functionally interconnected seascape of secondary destinations, cultural villages, dive sites, and emerging community-based tourism



areas. This spatial configuration reflects a multi-scalar tourism landscape characterised by a dominant gateway (Labuan Bajo), a high-protection conservation nucleus (Komodo National Park), and peripheral island networks that absorb tourism diffusion while retaining strong customary governance structures and lower-density visitation patterns. Within this uneven spatial structure, sustainable tourism management, multi-stakeholder coordination, and adaptive destination leadership become essential to reconcile intensified tourism growth pressures in the core zones with ecological carrying capacity limits and socio-cultural integrity across the peripheral island communities.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design to examine tourism governance practices in the Labuan Bajo–Flores destination under the government-led DMO model implemented by the Flores Tourism Authority Board (BPOLBF). A qualitative case study approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of governance processes within their real-world context, particularly in destinations characterised by complex stakeholder interactions, institutional diversity, and evolving policy environments (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Naeem et al., 2023). The Labuan Bajo–Flores destination provides a strategically significant case due to its archipelagic geography, ecological sensitivity, social vulnerability, and designation as a national priority tourism destination. A single-case design was selected to generate contextually rich insights with broader theoretical relevance for destination governance in fragmented island settings.

Research was conducted across key tourism sites, including Komodo National Park, Labuan Bajo, and selected areas in Flores, Lembata, and Alor. These locations were chosen because they represent varying levels of tourism development, ecological pressure, community participation, and governance complexity. Data collection was undertaken between January and April 2025 using multiple sources of evidence to support methodological triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings.

Three complementary methods were employed. First, document analysis examined policy and planning documents, including the *Labuan Bajo Flores Tourism White Paper* (2024), the BPOLBF Strategic Plan 2025–2029, relevant government regulations, institutional reports, and selected academic literature. These materials provided insights into formal governance structures, policy objectives, and institutional arrangements. Second, field observations were conducted at tourism and community sites to assess governance-related dynamics, including ecological pressures, community responses to land-use changes, stakeholder interactions, and tensions between tourism-driven modernisation and social inclusion. Observations were carried out at different times of day to capture variations in tourism activity, community engagement, and environmental conditions. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 key informants representing government agencies, private-sector tourism actors, local communities, non-governmental organisations, and media organisations. Interviews explored perceptions of institutional coordination, collaborative governance, stakeholder participation, leadership practices, and challenges associated with sustainable tourism development.

Data from documents, observations, and interviews were analysed iteratively through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and governance mechanisms

across stakeholder groups. The integration of multiple data sources enabled triangulation between policy intentions, observed practices, and stakeholder experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of tourism governance within a multi-actor and multi-scalar destination system.

Ethical considerations were incorporated throughout the research process. Participation in interviews was voluntary, and all participants were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, the use of research data, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants prior to data collection. To protect confidentiality, personal identifiers were removed during data analysis and reporting, and interview responses were anonymised where appropriate. The study adhered to accepted principles of research ethics concerning informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and responsible data management.

To complement documentary and observational data, qualitative insights were gathered from 21 key informants representing government agencies, private-sector tourism actors, local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and media organisations. Data collection focused on stakeholders directly involved in tourism planning, destination management, community engagement, and policy implementation, enabling the study to capture diverse perspectives on governance processes across multiple institutional levels.

Documentary analysis and field observations were conducted between January and April 2025, while interviews and written responses were collected between March and April 2025. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or through WhatsApp-based communication, depending on participants' availability and geographic location. Face-to-face interviews took place at government offices, community centres, and selected field sites, while WhatsApp interviews allowed engagement with participants located in geographically dispersed areas across the destination. The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to explore key themes while allowing participants to elaborate on issues emerging from their experiences and organisational roles. Interview discussions focused on stakeholder collaboration, institutional coordination, leadership practices, decision-making processes, and local participation in tourism governance.

To supplement interview data, several participants provided written qualitative responses through Google Forms. These responses followed the same thematic framework as the interview protocol and were used to gather additional reflections from stakeholders who were unavailable for synchronous interviews. Accordingly, data obtained through Google Forms are treated as supplementary written qualitative responses rather than semi-structured interviews.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with participants chosen based on their direct involvement in tourism governance, destination planning, policy implementation, or community-based tourism initiatives. Selection criteria also emphasised participants' ability to provide informed perspectives on inter-organisational collaboration, multi-level governance, and stakeholder engagement. The final sample consisted of 21 informants, including 14 males and 7 females, ensuring representation across government, private-sector, community, civil society, and media stakeholders. To capture the complexity of destination governance,



participants were drawn from local, district, provincial, and destination-management levels, thereby incorporating perspectives from both policy-making and operational contexts.

This sampling strategy was designed not to achieve statistical representation but to obtain information-rich cases capable of illuminating governance dynamics within the Labuan Bajo–Flores tourism destination. The diversity of stakeholder backgrounds, organisational roles, and geographical locations enhanced the breadth of perspectives captured and strengthened the study’s capacity to examine tourism governance as a multi-actor and multi-scalar process.

Table 3 presents a detailed overview of the informants, including stakeholder category, institutional role, gender, and rationale for inclusion. The 21 informants were purposively selected to represent the principal stakeholder groups involved in tourism governance, including government agencies, private-sector actors, local communities, NGOs, and media organisations. The sample was designed to capture diverse perspectives across policy, operational, and community levels, thereby reflecting the multi-actor and multi-scalar nature of tourism governance in the Labuan Bajo–Flores destination. Rather than seeking statistical representativeness, participant selection focused on identifying information-rich cases capable of providing detailed insights into institutional coordination, stakeholder collaboration, and local participation in tourism development.

The adequacy of the sample was assessed through theoretical saturation. During data collection and preliminary analysis, interview and written-response data were reviewed iteratively to identify recurring themes and governance patterns. Saturation was reached when additional data no longer generated substantially new insights regarding leadership, coordination mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and destination management. The credibility of the findings was further enhanced through triangulation across multiple stakeholder groups and data sources, including interviews, documentary evidence, and field observations, enabling the validation of emerging themes and reducing dependence on any single source of information.

Table 3. Overview of The Informants

#	Stakeholder Type	Position / Role	Gender	Reason for Inclusion
1	Government	Head/Director of BPOLBF Planning Unit	M	Policy and strategic planning insights
2	Government	Tourism Development Officer, Labuan Bajo	F	Local implementation perspective
3	Government	Environmental Conservation Officer, Komodo NP	M	Ecological monitoring knowledge
4	Government	Provincial Tourism Representative	M	Multi-district governance coordination
5	Private Sector	Manager, Komodo Island Tour Operator	M	Operational & economic perspective
6	Private Sector	Hotel Manager, Labuan Bajo	F	Tourism infrastructure & local economy
7	Private Sector	Travel Agency Owner	M	Local tour coordination & stakeholder engagement
8	NGO	Environmental NGO Project Manager	M	Conservation initiatives & advocacy
9	NGO	Community Development Officer	F	Grassroots participation in tourism



#	Stakeholder Type	Position / Role	Gender	Reason for Inclusion
10	Community	Village Head, Flores	M	Land-use and social issues representation
11	Community	Community Tourism Leader, Manggarai	F	Local tourism operations and participation
12	Community	Fishermen Association Chair, Komodo	M	Socio-economic and ecological impacts
13	Community	Cultural Group Leader, Flores	F	Traditional practices & community voice
14	Media	Local Journalist	M	Media coverage & public communication
15	Media	Tourism Blogger / Influencer	F	Public perception and awareness
16	Government	Local Planning Bureau Officer	M	Data and policy analysis
17	Private Sector	ITDC Manager, Labuan Bajo	M	Tourism business perspective
18	NGO	NGO Research Officer	M	Monitoring collaboration & participation
19	Community	Fisherman Group Representative, Flores	M	Impacts of tourism on agriculture
20	Community	Women’s Cooperative Leader, Labuan Bajo	F	Gender and social inclusion in tourism
21	Government	Office of Komodo National Park	M	Carrying Capacity Policy

Source: Researcher, 2025

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Naeem et al., 2023). The analysis involved iterative familiarisation with interview transcripts, written responses, field notes, and documentary materials, followed by the generation of initial codes informed by both the empirical data and the study’s conceptual focus on destination governance, collaborative governance, leadership, and stakeholder participation. Codes were subsequently organised into broader themes, which were reviewed and refined to identify recurring patterns related to governance coordination, policy implementation, stakeholder collaboration, and local participation. The resulting thematic framework informed the development of an analytical narrative linking empirical findings to broader theoretical debates on tourism governance in archipelagic destinations. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was undertaken across interviews, documents, and field observations, while member checking was conducted with selected participants to validate preliminary interpretations. Consistent with qualitative case study research, the study aims for analytical rather than statistical generalisation, contributing contextually grounded insights to the broader literature on destination governance (Coombs, 2022).

Direct engagement in fieldwork further provided grounded, experiential insights into relational governance dynamics. Observations revealed persistent tensions between national development priorities and local community concerns, underscoring that effective destination management requires attention not only to tourism growth, but also to participation, social equity, and ecological sustainability. Accordingly, this study advocates for a context-sensitive and inclusive governance approach under BPOLBF, emphasising multi-stakeholder collaboration, adaptive management, and strategic destination leadership.



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Governance and Collaborative Arrangements in Island Tourism Destinations

The governance of island tourism destinations in eastern Indonesia involves a complex, multi-scalar network of actors. At the regional level, the Board for the Development of Labuan Bajo–Flores Tourism (BPOLBF) serves as the central coordinating agency, responsible for aligning policies, implementing strategic plans, and overseeing sustainable tourism initiatives. Key formal instruments include the *Labuan Bajo Flores Tourism White Paper (2024)*, the BPOLBF Strategic Plan (2025–2029), and relevant provincial and district regulations. These documents define the roles, responsibilities, and procedural mechanisms for inter-agency collaboration.

The Board operates as a boundary-spanning organisation, mediating between central and regional authorities while seeking to align national tourism strategies with local implementation priorities. Such positioning reflects collaborative and multi-level governance principles in destination management (Dredge et al., 2021; Zhang & Ryan, 2024). At the same time, fragmented coordination across districts and uneven stakeholder participation constrain institutional legitimacy and policy coherence. Community actors—including village officials, customary leaders, and local tourism representatives—report limited influence in decision-making processes, suggesting that formal inclusion does not necessarily translate into meaningful empowerment (Tolkach & King, 2022). Strengthening inter-jurisdictional coordination and participatory mechanisms is therefore essential for building trust, enhancing adaptive capacity, and achieving integrated destination governance (Sigala, 2023).

Interviews with 21 key informants revealed differentiated experiences of collaboration across the governance network. Government officials, representatives from state-owned enterprises, industry associations, and national media generally described the Board’s collaborative arrangements as effective, noting that formalised meetings, joint planning sessions, and working groups facilitated policy alignment, improved communication, and provided predictable engagement. Conversely, community-based informants—including local tourism associations and customary leaders—perceived collaboration as still developing and not fully inclusive, citing weak inter-regional coordination, limited structured forums, and occasional misalignment between local priorities and regional planning. These findings suggest power asymmetries, where actors with institutional authority benefit more, while local communities face barriers to substantive decision-making (Ansell & Gash, 2020; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2022). The governance network was found to encompass a variety of actors with distinct roles and collaboration mechanisms, summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Variety of Actors, Roles, and Collaboration Mechanism

Actor Category	Specific Actors	Roles Responsibilities	& Collaboration Mechanisms	Observed Challenges / Notes
Government	BPOLBF, provincial tourism office, district planning bureaus	Policy formulation, strategic planning, licensing, monitoring tourism activities, coordinating stakeholders	Multi-stakeholder meetings, working groups, joint planning sessions	Community representatives report limited inclusion in decision-making; coordination across districts sometimes weak
Private Sector	Tour operators, hotels/resorts, industry associations	Service delivery, destination promotion, investment, compliance with regulations	Engagement in Board-led forums, public-private partnerships	Smaller operators sometimes excluded from formal planning; influence concentrated among larger businesses
NGOs/Civil Society	Environmental NGOs, community development organisations	Conservation programmes, community empowerment, advocacy for sustainable practices	Project-based collaboration, consultation with BPOLBF and local government	Participation depends on project funding and access; limited influence in high-level policy decisions
Community Actors	Village officials, customary leaders, local tourism associations, cooperative groups	Local tourism operations, cultural programming, advocacy for community interests	Consultation in meetings, ad hoc participation in Board events	Often face barriers to formal decision-making; inclusion in planning forums limited; engagement usually reactive rather than proactive
Media / Information Actors	Local journalists, tourism bloggers, national media	Reporting, public awareness, influencing perception of governance	Information exchange via press releases, media briefings, Board communications	Limited capacity to influence internal decision-making; primarily serve as external observers and communicators

Source: Researcher, 2025

A core enabling factor in DMO performance is communication. Effective communication supports coordination, trust-building, and information sharing, while gaps can lead to fragmented implementation and weak stakeholder ownership. Table 5 provides an overview of key positive observations and persistent challenges in DMO communication practices:

Table 5. Strengths and Challenges of DMO Communication Practices

Theme	Positive Observations	Challenges
Institutional Role	Effective mediation between central and regional governments	Limited authority in peripheral regions
Stakeholder Involvement	Multi-sector actor inclusion	Uneven community participation and weak ownership
Programme Execution	Improved inter-agency communication	Lack of structured, routine coordination
Information & Media	Centralised data and promotion	Limited local media engagement

Source: Researcher, 2025



As illustrated in Table 5, DMOs demonstrate strengths in institutional mediation, inter-agency communication, and centralised information management, but these are constrained by structural and participatory challenges, including limited authority in peripheral regions, uneven stakeholder engagement, and insufficiently routinised coordination. Addressing these communication challenges is essential for strengthening DMO effectiveness, enhancing local ownership, and ensuring more inclusive and coherent destination governance.

The Labuan Bajo–Flores case illustrates the paradox of formal coordination with limited grassroots inclusion. While the Board demonstrates strong institutional mediation, constraints remain in participatory inclusion, inter-regional integration, and local legitimacy. Sustainable governance in archipelagic contexts requires institutionalised multi-actor engagement, adaptive mechanisms, and equitable power-sharing. Establishing recurring stakeholder forums, participatory monitoring, and transparent benefit-sharing can strengthen the Board as a transformative DMO, aligning national tourism objectives with socio-ecological sustainability across Flores, Lembata, and Alor.

Developing a Government-Led DMO Framework: Participatory Governance, Cross-Sector Coordination, and Transformational Leadership

Field research across Komodo National Park, Labuan Bajo, and surrounding areas in Flores, Lembata, and Alor reveals that the Board for the Development of Labuan Bajo–Flores Tourism (BPOLBF) functions as a multi-destination coordinating body responsible for aligning policies, integrating strategic planning, and facilitating tourism development across multiple administrative jurisdictions. Interviews with 21 key informants, including government officials, private-sector actors, community leaders, and NGOs, highlight differentiated experiences of the Board’s governance performance across three interrelated dimensions: participatory governance, cross-sector coordination, and transformational leadership.

Participatory governance is perceived as emergent but uneven. Community informants reported limited yet increasing opportunities to engage in tourism planning processes, primarily through consultative forums, working groups, or project-based involvement. Village leaders and customary representatives described participation as largely advisory rather than decision-making in nature, while NGO actors emphasised that although community engagement exists in implementation phases, structured mechanisms for continuous feedback, monitoring, and co-evaluation remain underdeveloped. This indicates that participatory governance is still in a formative stage, with inclusion primarily occurring through consultation rather than institutionalised co-governance arrangements.

Cross-sector coordination is more strongly institutionalised. Government officials and industry stakeholders consistently noted that the Board plays a central role in mediating between provincial and district authorities, aligning national tourism priorities with regional development strategies, and facilitating inter-agency collaboration. Private-sector actors highlighted the value of multi-stakeholder forums and joint planning sessions, which improve coordination across tourism operators, infrastructure developers, and government agencies. However, informants also noted access asymmetries, particularly for smaller enterprises and peripheral communities, which often remain outside formal coordination platforms.



Transformational leadership emerged as a key enabling mechanism underpinning the Board's governance functions. Empirical evidence indicates that leadership practices extend beyond administrative coordination to include strategic visioning, mediation, and relational trust-building across fragmented governance levels. Board leaders consistently frame Labuan Bajo–Flores as a unified destination system requiring integrated management across ecological, economic, and social domains. Government officials described instances where leaders actively reframed conflicts between conservation authorities and tourism developers by shifting negotiations toward shared concerns such as carrying capacity, long-term destination branding, and sustainability objectives.

Field evidence further shows that transformational leadership is operationalised through both formal and informal mechanisms. These include regular multi-stakeholder coordination forums, ad hoc mediation during inter-organisational disputes, and site-level engagement visits to emerging tourism zones such as Parapuar. Private-sector actors characterised Board officials as “boundary spanners” who translate policy objectives into operational terms while simultaneously communicating industry constraints back to government institutions. Community informants emphasised that trust is strengthened through direct engagement in villages, informal dialogue with customary leaders, and follow-up actions on grievances, which collectively reinforce perceptions of accountability and relational legitimacy.

Nevertheless, the data also reveal structural constraints that limit the full realisation of transformational leadership. Although Board leaders are effective in facilitating dialogue and generating temporary consensus, their capacity to enforce decisions across decentralized administrative jurisdictions remains limited. This produces a governance dynamic in which trust and coordination are continuously negotiated rather than institutionally secured. Smaller community groups, in particular, remain unevenly integrated into leadership-mediated processes, reflecting persistent asymmetries in access and influence.

Observational data and document analysis, including the *Labuan Bajo Flores Tourism White Paper* (2024) and the BPOLBF Strategic Plan (2025–2029), corroborate these findings by demonstrating the Board's role in enabling integrated destination planning across Flores, Lembata, and Alor. Designated tourism zones such as Parapuar illustrate how governance principles are operationalised at site level, balancing ecological sensitivity, community interests, and tourism development objectives.

Overall, the findings suggest that effective government-led DMO frameworks depend on the convergence of participatory governance, cross-sector coordination, and transformational leadership. While centralised coordination provides strategic coherence, governance effectiveness ultimately depends on relational leadership practices that build trust, facilitate mediation, and enable adaptive collaboration. In this sense, transformational leadership functions less as hierarchical control and more as a network-enabling mechanism that sustains cooperation across fragmented institutional and geographical landscapes.

Institutional Innovation to Reconcile Centralised Authority with Inclusive, Multi-Level Stakeholder Engagement

The Labuan Bajo–Flores case exemplifies the opportunities and challenges of a government-led, authority-based destination management model. The Board for the Development of Labuan Bajo–Flores Tourism (BPOLBF) was established under Presidential Regulation No. 32/2018, operating under the Ministry of Tourism, with a mandate to accelerate national tourism development in super-priority destinations. Its dual functions include: (a) authoritative management of a 400-hectare area in Parapuar Forest, West Manggarai, and (b) coordination across 11 districts in Flores, Lembata, Alor, and Bima (the Floratama region). While the authoritative function grants the Board full control over planning, development, and investment licensing within Parapuar, the coordinating role involves harmonising policies, strategies, and cross-sector collaboration with local governments, communities, and private actors. The interviews examined issues of collaboration, institutional coordination, and participatory practices. The qualitative findings are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. Actor, Key Insight and Observed Challenges

Category	Number of Informants	Key Insights on Collaboration	Observed Challenges
Government Agencies	6	Noted effective cross-district coordination and alignment with national tourism policies. Emphasized structured planning meetings.	Coordination is sometimes fragmented across districts; community input limited.
Private Sector	4	Highlighted participation in joint planning sessions and policy dialogues. Recognised Board’s role in promotional campaigns.	Smaller businesses reported limited access to decision-making forums; larger operators dominate influence.
Community Representatives	6	Provided feedback on tourism village programmes and local development initiatives. Expressed desire for more structured participation.	Felt largely excluded from substantive decision-making; engagement mostly consultative.
NGOs/Civil Society	3	Participated in conservation and capacity-building initiatives; supported adaptive governance projects.	Limited influence in high-level planning; dependent on project-based engagement.
Media	2	Observed DMO communication and policy dissemination; reported on stakeholder interactions.	Limited capacity to influence governance; often external observers rather than participants.

Source: Researcher Analysis (2026)

Key qualitative insights from the interviews reveal divergent perceptions of collaboration across stakeholder groups. Informants from government, the private sector, and national media generally perceive collaboration as effective, emphasising improved communication, stronger policy alignment, and more predictable patterns of engagement. In contrast, community representatives, local leaders, and local media view collaboration as not yet optimal, citing weak inter-regional coordination, limited stakeholder inclusion, and the absence of structured participatory forums. Power asymmetries remain evident: actors with formal authority—such as government officials and state-owned enterprises—benefit from

established decision-making structures, while local stakeholders continue to face barriers to meaningful participation (Andhika, 2025; Ginanjar et al., 2024; Lestari, 2025).

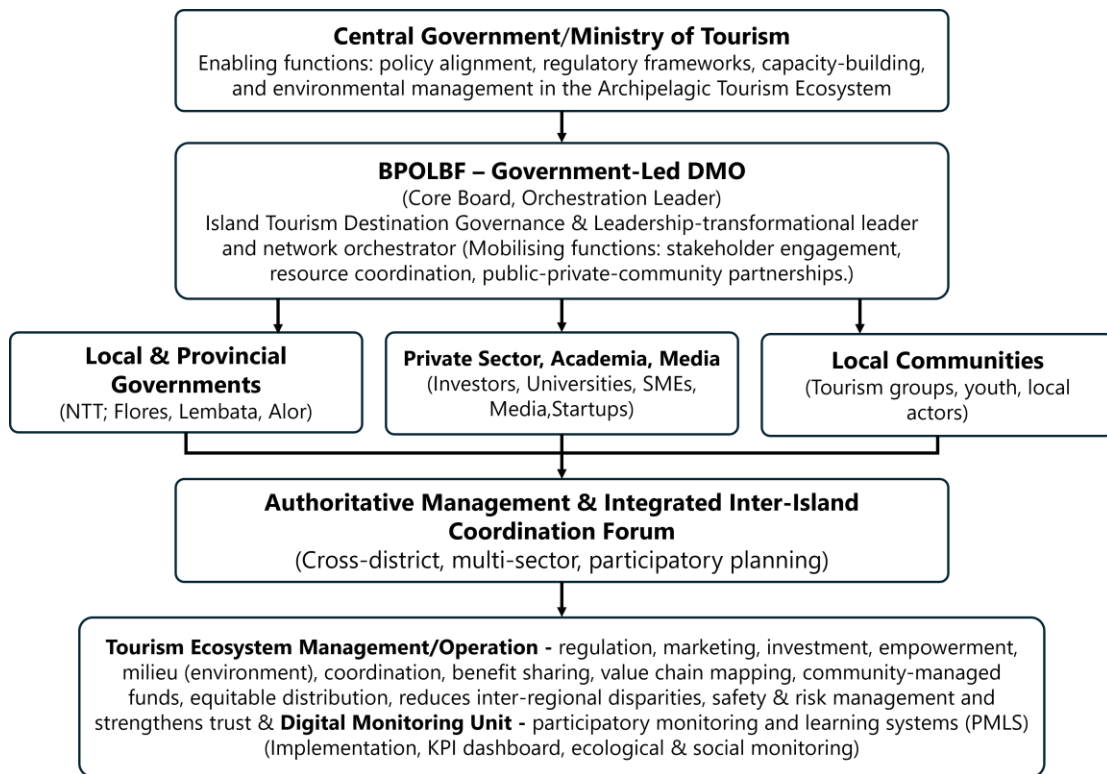
Despite these challenges, participatory governance and adaptive practices are beginning to emerge. The Board has introduced dialogical mechanisms—such as Regional Head Communication Forums, multi-stakeholder workshops, and strengthened community networks—to better incorporate local perspectives and ease tensions between national priorities and community interests.

The findings further suggest that institutional innovation is essential for reconciling centralised authority with inclusive, multi-level stakeholder engagement. In practice:

- Participatory governance mechanisms provide structured yet flexible channels for community input, enabling the co-production of local tourism initiatives while maintaining strategic oversight.
- Cross-sector coordination facilitates alignment across national, provincial, and district levels, while also harmonising efforts among government, private sector, and civil society actors.
- Transformational leadership is reflected in the Board's ability to orchestrate diverse stakeholders, fostering trust, a shared vision, and adaptive decision-making processes. Leaders' relational legitimacy empowers communities and strengthens participatory monitoring, thereby supporting more equitable benefit sharing (Yuli et al., 2025; Sutrisno et al., 2025; Andrades & SEGITTUR, 2024).

Simultaneously, these mechanisms allow the Board to balance authoritative control in core tourism zones with inclusive collaboration across multiple islands, providing a model for sustainable, equitable, and adaptive destination governance. As illustrated in Figure 3, a hybrid institutional model integrates participatory governance, cross-sector coordination, and transformational leadership, positioning BPOLBF as the central orchestrator that mediates between strategic national objectives and local development priorities (Ardana et al., 2025; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2024)

Figure 3. Hybrid Institutional Model For Island Tourism Governance by Government-Led DMO



Source:Researcher,2026

As depicted in Figure 3, the hybrid model balances top-down policy coherence with bottom-up participation. Central government provides legitimacy and strategic alignment, while BPOLBF functions as a transformational leader and network orchestrator connecting local governments, private actors, and communities. The establishment of an inter-island coordination forum and a dedicated operations and monitoring unit ensures integrated planning, implementation, and performance oversight. Collectively, this governance arrangement enhances coordination, accountability, and adaptive capacity in managing island tourism destinations as interconnected systems rather than isolated units.

Indeed, Island Tourism Destination Governance Leadership is explicitly embedded at the DMO core to guide vision, coordination, and stakeholder engagement across archipelagos. The model ensures top-down oversight from the DMO while maintaining bottom-up participation from local governments and communities. Operationalisation relies on digital monitoring, inter-island coordination, and adaptive management, ensuring sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience.

This model integrates destination leadership and governance orchestration by linking visionary leadership with participatory mechanisms, cross-sector coordination, and adaptive management. It operationalises six interrelated governance dimensions—regulation, marketing, investment, empowerment, milieu (environment), and coordination—thereby balancing strategic top-down direction with bottom-up stakeholder inclusion. In this hybrid

configuration, destination leadership is not confined to governmental authority alone, but distributed across institutional and non-institutional actors who collectively shape tourism development trajectories. Accordingly, tourism governance in Flores, Lembata, and Alor is framed as a dynamic process of co-production, where policy direction, resource management, and value creation emerge through continuous interaction between state agencies, private sector actors, community institutions, and civil society organisations (Holladay et al., 2024; Farsari et al., 2025).

In terms of participatory development processes, implementation has largely taken the form of multi-stakeholder engagement platforms, community-based tourism initiatives, and consultative planning mechanisms facilitated by government bodies and destination management institutions. Actors such as regional tourism authorities, BPOLBF, district governments, village administrations, Pokdarwis (tourism awareness groups), customary leaders, NGOs, and private operators participate in varying degrees of decision-making, ranging from policy formulation and investment planning to site-level tourism management and cultural resource stewardship. In practice, participation often manifests through workshops, planning forums, co-management arrangements at tourism sites, and collaborative marketing initiatives, reflecting an incremental shift toward more inclusive governance arrangements rather than fully decentralised authority.

However, the implementation of participatory governance across different levels of authority also reveals significant structural and institutional constraints. At the macro level, overlapping mandates between national, regional, and destination-level institutions can create coordination inefficiencies and fragmented decision-making. At the meso level, intermediary organisations such as destination management bodies often face limitations in enforcement capacity, financial autonomy, and institutional continuity. At the micro (community) level, participation may be constrained by uneven capacity, limited access to information, elite capture within local institutions, and dependency on external facilitation. These constraints are further compounded by asymmetries in power, resources, and technical knowledge among actors, which can lead to symbolic rather than substantive participation.

Despite these challenges, the hybrid DMO model remains a critical governance innovation for archipelagic tourism systems, as it enables adaptive management and iterative learning across scales. Table 7 operationalises this model by translating its governance logic into concrete functional domains—demonstrating how leadership, coordination, sustainability, and empowerment are embedded within a government-led yet participatory framework. Ultimately, the effectiveness of this model depends not only on institutional design, but also on the quality of inter-actor relationships, the depth of participation, and the capacity to continuously negotiate a balance between development objectives and socio-ecological sustainability.

Table 7. Role of Hybrid DMO Model and Actions

Dimension / Function	Role in Hybrid DMO Model	Recommendations / Actions
Island Tourism Leadership	Provides visionary, transformational, and facilitative guidance	Align cross-island planning, foster innovation, ensure inclusivity



Dimension / Function	Role in Hybrid DMO Model	Recommendations / Actions
Enabling Governance	Build collaborative ecosystem, inclusive regulation, participatory governance	Strengthen cross-sectoral policies, transparent decision-making
Mobilising Actors	Activate stakeholders, resources, investment, knowledge networks	Facilitate PPPs, community engagement, MSME empowerment
Collaborative Governance	Mediate conflicts, orchestrate forums, build trust	Multi-stakeholder platforms, quarterly coordination, shared planning
Results & Monitoring	Supervise programme implementation, track KPIs	Digital dashboards, open-data reporting, adaptive evaluation
Sustainability & Milieu	Integrate environmental, cultural, and social safeguards	Carrying capacity studies, zoning, ecological monitoring; safety and risk management system in tourism
Local Empowerment	Build institutional and community capacity	Leadership training, participatory tourism planning

Source: Researcher,2026

As summarised in Table 7, the hybrid DMO model functions as both a strategic leader and an enabling platform. It combines transformational leadership with collaborative governance to mobilise actors, coordinate across islands, and ensure sustainability and local empowerment. By linking clear roles with targeted actions—ranging from digital monitoring to participatory planning—the model provides a practical roadmap for strengthening destination governance, enhancing accountability, and fostering inclusive and resilient island tourism development. In this model, governance leadership is the central orchestrating function of the Board, connecting national strategic priorities with local island-specific dynamics. It integrates:

- Enabling functions: policy alignment, regulatory frameworks, capacity-building, and environmental management.
- Mobilising functions: stakeholder engagement, resource coordination, public-private-community partnerships, and a safety & risk management system in tourism .
- Operational oversight: implementation, supervision, and evaluation through digital monitoring and KPIs.

By institutionalising collaboration, adaptive leadership, and data-informed decision-making, the hybrid DMO model strengthens legitimacy, aligns inter-island development, and enhances the resilience and sustainability of Labuan Bajo–Flores and surrounding small islands. This approach demonstrates that government-led DMOs can simultaneously serve as regulatory enablers, mobilisers of multi-actor collaboration, and facilitators of local empowerment, bridging national objectives with community-driven outcomes.

Persistent governance challenges—limited participatory inclusion, uneven inter-regional integration, and weak local legitimacy—cannot be addressed through structural reforms alone and require institutionalised processes that embed collaboration, accountability, and trust. Formalising recurring stakeholder forums, participatory monitoring and learning systems (PMLS), and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms offers a coherent and mutually reinforcing governance approach.

Multi-level stakeholder forums, convened across local, inter-regional, and strategic scales, serve as a key mechanism for building trust, coordination, and legitimacy within the



hybrid tourism governance system. When these forums rotate across locations and are accompanied by formally documented institutional responses, they strengthen transparency and accountability, thereby reducing perceptions of exclusion. Trust is further reinforced through Participatory Monitoring and Learning Systems (PMLS), which position local actors as co-producers of knowledge by combining technical indicators (e.g., visitor flows and environmental carrying capacity) with locally defined measures (e.g., cultural integrity and livelihood outcomes). Public dissemination of monitoring results, alongside value chain mapping and community-managed benefit-sharing mechanisms, enhances transparency, reduces information asymmetry, and fosters a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits across core and peripheral regions.

Despite these mechanisms, conflicts among actors remain evident across Flores, Lembata, and Alor, particularly between conservation and development priorities, customary land governance and formal regulations, and local communities and private investors. The increasing penetration of capitalist investment in peripheral communal areas generates both development opportunities and structural risks, including land commodification, unequal bargaining power, cultural disruption, and spatially uneven benefit distribution. While investment can stimulate infrastructure development and employment, weak regulatory enforcement and limited local capacity often exacerbate dependency relations and inter-regional disparities. Consequently, sustainable trust-building depends not only on participatory platforms and monitoring systems, but also on robust governance capacity to mediate conflicts, regulate investment flows, and ensure socially embedded and equitable tourism development.

Collectively, these measures institutionalise voice, evidence, and fairness, transforming participation from symbolic consultation into durable collaborative governance. This integrated framework enables the Board to function as a credible network orchestrator, aligning strategic coordination with local empowerment, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the Tourism Authority Board in the Labuan Bajo–Flores, Lembata, and Alor destination represents an emerging hybrid model of government-led DMO and tourism governance that strengthens cross-sector and cross-regional coordination while maintaining strong state authority. Although the Board has improved policy alignment and institutional coordination across multiple jurisdictions, local participation remains largely consultative and uneven. As a result, the governance system reflects a technocratic and centralised orientation, where collaboration is facilitated but not yet fully institutionalised as shared decision-making. Persistent challenges include overlapping mandates, fragmented authority across administrative levels, and limited inclusion of marginalised groups such as local communities, women, and youth.

Theoretically, the study advances understanding of hybrid DMOs as meta-governance actors that operate at the intersection of state control and collaborative governance. It demonstrates that in islands and multi-scalar tourism systems, DMOs function not only as coordinating institutions but also as strategic intermediaries that shape conditions for



collaboration across fragmented governance landscapes. However, the findings also reveal inherent tensions within hybrid governance models, particularly between centralised authority and meaningful participation, highlighting that coordination capacity alone is insufficient without institutionalised mechanisms for inclusive decision-making.

Practically, the study suggests that government-led DMOs should evolve toward an authoritative–facilitative governance model. This requires strengthening inter-agency coordination while simultaneously institutionalising participatory structures that enable meaningful involvement of local communities, women, and youth. Key priorities include harmonising overlapping mandates across governance levels, establishing durable cross-regency and inter-island coordination platforms, and embedding community participation into planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes. In addition, the development of integrated data systems and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms is essential to enhance accountability and reduce territorial inequalities in tourism development outcomes.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, it is based on a single-case design, which limits generalisability beyond the Labuan Bajo–Flores context. Second, although data triangulation was employed, access constraints meant that some high-level policy processes could not be fully observed in real time. Third, the study primarily captures stakeholder perceptions rather than longitudinal governance performance outcomes, which may limit insights into long-term institutional change.

Future research could address these limitations by conducting comparative studies across multiple island destinations to examine variations in hybrid DMO performance under different institutional settings. Longitudinal research would also be valuable in assessing how governance reforms evolve over time and how participatory mechanisms influence destination sustainability outcomes. Further studies may additionally explore the role of digital governance tools and data-driven platforms in strengthening coordination, transparency, and stakeholder inclusion in government-led tourism systems.

In sum, this study contributes to advancing a more nuanced understanding of hybrid tourism governance by demonstrating that effective destination management in complex island systems depends not only on centralized coordination but also on the institutionalisation of inclusive, trust-based, and adaptive governance practices.

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