

Implementing Collaborative Governance to Realize Substantive Public Services: A Case Study of the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program

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Abstract

Collaborative-based public service delivery has emerged as a vital approach in fostering sustainable community development, particularly through participatory ecotourism management. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the practice of collaborative governance in realizing public services through the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program in Panglungan Village, Jombang Regency, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative research method with a case study approach, empirical data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, which were subsequently analyzed using an interactive data analysis model. The theoretical framework relies on the collaborative governance model proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008). The findings reveal four key dimensions: (1) the starting conditions of the program were deeply rooted in local grassroots initiatives driven by severe forest degradation and resource scarcity, which ultimately catalyzed the necessity for multi-actor collaboration; (2) the institutional design is robustly supported by formal legal frameworks (Memorandum of Understanding, Environmental Agency Decrees, and Regent Regulations), inclusive deliberative forums, and transparent communication channels; (3) facilitative leadership is effectively distributed among local community figures (Wagisan), Non-Governmental Organizations (Ecoton), and the local government (Environmental Agency/DLH); and (4) the collaborative process has successfully generated significant 'small wins,' including the ecological restoration of 70 hectares of conservation forest, the preservation of five vital water springs, and the enhancement of the local community's economic well-being. In conclusion, the practice of collaborative governance in this program has been highly adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable. It demonstrates that public service delivery is not merely an administrative procedure, but rather a substantive collective action toward environmental conservation and community empowerment.

Keywords: *collaborative governance; public service; ecotourism; community participation; sustainable development*

Introduction

Public service is the fundamental pillar in modern governance, aimed at fulfilling the basic needs and constitutional rights of citizens. Along with the increasing complexity of global challenges, particularly those related to environmental degradation and natural resource sustainability, the paradigm of public service delivery has undergone a significant shift. The hierarchical and centralistic top-down approach is no longer considered adequate to respond to multidimensional problems. The government can no longer act as a single entity; rather, it requires a responsive and adaptive governance system that involves broad participation from various elements of society (Wibowo et al., 2024). This shift demands cross-boundary institutional synergy that positions the community not merely as passive recipients of services, but as active subjects in the policy-making process.

Responding to this complexity, collaborative governance emerges as a highly relevant strategic framework. Ansell and Gash (2008) define collaborative governance as a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state

stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative. In the context of environmental management and ecotourism development, this approach is a necessity (Hayat, 2018). Natural resource management requires a fair distribution of roles, transparency, and the integration of resources from the government, civil society organizations (NGOs), local communities, and the private sector to ensure a balance between economic growth and ecological preservation.

Empirically, the urgency of collaborative governance is clearly reflected in the historical dynamics of Panglungan Village, Wonosalam District, Jombang Regency. In the 1990s, the forest area situated on the slopes of the Anjasmoro Mountains suffered severe ecological damage due to rampant illegal logging and land conversion. This massive deforestation triggered an environmental crisis that directly caused a drastic decline in the water discharge of the springs buffering the Brantas watershed (Hitchner et al., 2009). This crisis not only threatened the sustainability of the biodiversity ecosystem but also devastated the socio-economic foundations of local residents,

who rely heavily on the agricultural sector and the availability of clean water.

Facing this ecological threat, a grassroots initiative emerged, driven by the critical awareness of a local figure, Wagisan, who initiated independent reforestation efforts (Hayat, 2020). This self-reliant movement subsequently attracted the attention of an ecology-focused non-governmental organization, the Ecoton Foundation, in 2009 (Sholikin, 2024). This partnership catalyzed the formation of the Forest Protector Group (KEPUH) and became the embryo for the establishment of the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program (Perlindungan Mata Air dan Hutan Berbasis Partisipasi / Participatory-Based Forest and Water Spring Protection) (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Recognizing that local initiatives require legal protection and structural support to avoid conflicts with illegal loggers, the Environmental Agency (DLH) of Jombang Regency intervened by providing policy support. The transformation from an individual initiative to institutional collaboration marked the birth of tangible collaborative governance practices at the village level. Public service is serving all aspects of basic services needed by the community to be fulfilled in accordance with its provisions (S. Hayat, 2023).

Various previous studies have extensively explored collaborative governance practices in the tourism sector. For instance, Pratama (2023) examined the development of the Mudal River ecotourism, while Bahri (2024) studied the Pela Tourism Village. These studies demonstrate that multi-actor synergy can significantly enhance the effectiveness of regional tourism. Nevertheless, a review of the literature (state of the art) indicates a notable research gap. The majority of previous studies still focus primarily on collaboration for optimizing the economic benefits of tourism. They have not comprehensively examined how such collaboration integrally functions as a "substantive public service" instrument in the context of saving water springs and restoring protected forests in critical areas (Sholikin, 2025a).

Based on this literature gap and the empirical phenomenon, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of collaborative governance practices in realizing public services through the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program in Panglungan Village. Public service is a series of activities carried out by the state and the private sector to meet the basic needs and constitutional rights of citizens in a fair, equitable, and

responsible manner. Public service is the main key to achieving the goals of good governance (H. Hayat, 2020). According to Hayat, excellent public service is always expected as a natural part of public service procedures. The strategic position of government officials is reflected in their ability to provide excellent service, particularly in terms of the quality and quantity of government officials available to the public (Hayat, 2018).

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to comprehensively investigate the implementation of collaborative governance within the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program in Panglungan Village, Jombang. Primary data were meticulously collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and direct field observations, targeting purposively selected key stakeholders intimately involved in the collaboration, notably the local grassroots initiator (Wagisan), representatives from the Ecoton Foundation, and officials from the Jombang Regency Environmental Agency (DLH). To triangulate and substantiate the primary findings, secondary data were systematically gathered from

relevant institutional documents, the 2011 Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and regional legal frameworks, culminating in the Jombang Regent Regulation No. 71 of 2024. The collected data were subsequently analyzed utilizing the interactive qualitative model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which encompasses rigorous, cyclical phases of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification, thereby ensuring the analytical depth, credibility, and empirical validity required for this investigation.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings and theoretical interpretations regarding the implementation of collaborative governance in the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program. Utilizing the analytical framework proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008), the comprehensive analysis is systematically structured around four interconnected dimensions: starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and the collaborative process. By intertwining field data—derived from in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews—with existing collaborative governance literature, this section

explores how multi-actor synergy among the local community, government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector was established (Sholikin, 2025b). Ultimately, the following elaboration highlights the specific mechanisms through which these collaborative efforts have successfully transformed an initial ecological crisis into tangible, substantive public services that foster sustainable environmental conservation and socioeconomic empowerment at the grassroots level.

Result

The implementation of collaborative governance in the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program was analyzed using Ansell and Gash's (2008) framework, beginning with an assessment of the starting conditions. The collaboration was initially triggered by a severe environmental crisis and a history of conflict stemming from rampant deforestation in the 1990s. This ecological degradation prompted a local figure, Wagisan, to initiate independent reforestation efforts, which eventually catalyzed the involvement of the Ecoton Foundation and the Jombang Regency Environmental Agency (DLH) (Faried et al., 2025). Furthermore, there was a clear power and resource asymmetry among

the actors; the local community possessed grassroots strength but lacked political and financial power, while the DLH held regulatory legitimacy but faced personnel constraints. Instead of hindering the process, this asymmetry created a strong sense of interdependence, driven by varied participative incentives ranging from the community's pressing need for water and economic recovery to the government's institutional ecological targets.

The institutional design of the program provides a robust procedural framework that legitimizes and regulates the collaboration. The foundational ground rules were formally established through a Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2011 between the DLH, Ecoton, and the local Forest Protector Group (KEPUH). This legal legitimacy was progressively strengthened by regional regulations, culminating in the Jombang Regent Regulation No. 71 of 2024, which officially designated the ecotourism program as a recognized regional innovation. Decision-making processes were accommodated through both inclusive deliberative forums, which fostered social cohesion at the grassroots level, and exclusive forums reserved for formal administrative procedures such

as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) proposals. Additionally, transparency was predominantly maintained through intensive verbal communication and social proximity in the field, which effectively minimized horizontal conflicts among community members.

A critical finding in this study is the presence of distributed, facilitative leadership rather than a hierarchical or single-institution dominance. Leadership roles were synergistically divided among the key actors to ensure the program's sustainability. Wagisan acted as the primary grassroots mobilizer, commanding high social legitimacy and trust among the local residents. Concurrently, the Ecoton Foundation served as a crucial mediator and capacity builder, effectively bridging the communication gap between the community and the government. On the other hand, the DLH of Jombang Regency functioned as an institutional "enabler," providing the necessary legal umbrella and bureaucratic facilitation without exerting absolute control over the community's initiatives (Mabruri et al., 2026). This collective leadership style successfully suppressed sectoral egos and cultivated a strong sense of ownership among the villagers toward the conservation of their forest.

The collaborative process itself served as the dynamic core of the actors' interactions, characterized by high-intensity face-to-face dialogues during the planning phases and adaptive communication during the monitoring stages. These interactions frequently took place directly at the ecotourism site rather than in rigid bureaucratic spaces, thereby fostering an egalitarian climate. Trust-building was a gradual process; the community's initial skepticism toward external intervention was overcome through "proof of action," as DLH and Ecoton representatives consistently participated in field activities like tree planting rather than merely issuing administrative instructions. Through these continuous interactions, the actors developed a shared understanding that the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program is fundamentally an instrument for environmental conservation grounded in ecological justice, rather than a conventional project for mass tourism exploitation.

Ultimately, this collaborative synergy yielded highly significant intermediate outcomes, commonly referred to as "small wins," which directly impacted both the ecology and the local economy. Ecologically, the collaboration successfully facilitated the

reforestation of over 70 hectares of critical land with the planting of 50,000 trees (Shoimah et al., 2026). This restoration effectively protected five primary water springs, which consistently supply water to 575 households even during the dry season, and encouraged the return of endangered biodiversity such as the Javan hawk-eagle and hornbills. Economically, the initiative generated green employment opportunities for the community, including roles as tour guides, homestay operators, and local product producers, significantly empowering women's groups. These substantive achievements culminated in national recognition, notably receiving the Top 45 Public Service Innovation award from the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform in 2023.

Discussion

The findings regarding the starting conditions demonstrate a unique trajectory in collaborative governance that enriches existing theoretical frameworks. Ansell and Gash (2008) posit that severe power imbalances and a history of conflict typically pose significant barriers to the initiation of collaborative efforts. However, in the

Permata Hati program, these initial constraints paradoxically acted as a profound catalyst for collective action. The severe ecological crisis and the local community's lack of political and financial resources to combat powerful illegal logging networks compelled them to seek external alliances. This finding aligns with the notion that resource asymmetry can foster positive interdependence when stakeholders share a critical, urgent incentive—in this case, the preservation of vital water springs and fundamental economic survival.

Furthermore, the institutional design of the program highlights the necessity of layering formal and informal rules to secure procedural legitimacy. The evolution from a grassroots Partnership MoU in 2011 to formal state recognition via Jombang Regional Regulations and Regent Regulation No. 71 of 2024 provided a robust, multi-tiered legal umbrella. This contrasts starkly with the findings of Ariesmansyah et al. (2023) in Patengan Village, where collaboration stagnated largely due to weak formal rules and a lack of institutional binding. The Permata Hati model proves that while collaboration may organically start as an

informal community movement, the integration of state-backed legal frameworks is imperative to transform temporary initiatives into sustainable, formalized public services.

A prominent theoretical contribution of this study is the manifestation of distributed facilitative leadership. Unlike the collaborative model observed by Anhar et al. (2025) in Tirta Agung Tourism Village, where facilitative leadership was heavily centralized within the village government, the Permata Hati program distributes leadership dynamically across local grassroots figures (Wagisan), an NGO (Ecoton), and a government agency (DLH). This distributed model effectively mitigated the risk of bureaucratic domination and ensured that the community remained the primary subject, rather than a mere object, of the program. By acting as an enabler rather than an absolute controller, the government successfully nurtured a deep, enduring sense of local ownership.

The collaborative process was also significantly strengthened by the highly adaptive and context-specific nature of its face-to-face dialogues. Bachtiar et al. (2022) found that in

Rammang-Rammang, overly formal and bureaucratic dialogues often hindered genuine collaboration and marginalized local voices. In stark contrast, the Permata Hati program conducted intensive, egalitarian meetings directly at the ecotourism sites, supplemented seamlessly by informal digital communication. This spatial contextualization of dialogue dismantled hierarchical barriers, allowing stakeholders to deliberate based on actual field realities rather than abstract administrative procedures, thereby fostering a much more inclusive and democratic decision-making environment (Sholikin, 2026b).

The gradual development of trust and shared understanding further substantiates Ansell and Gash's theoretical assertions regarding the collaborative process. Consistent with Adinata's (2020) and Molla et al.'s (2021) observations, trust in the Permata Hati program did not materialize instantaneously; it was cultivated through continuous, tangible actions. The direct participation of government and NGO representatives in physical conservation activities—rather than mere policy dictation—served as crucial confidence-building measures.

Consequently, this shared labor forged a unified understanding that prioritized ecological justice and long-term forest sustainability over the short-term commercialization of mass tourism. This public service is carried out by the government, in the form of activities that have elements of attention, willingness, and readiness to provide satisfaction to customers, namely the community (Hayat et al., 2018).

The intermediate outcomes, or "small wins," generated by this collaboration fundamentally redefine the traditional scope of public service delivery. The successful restoration of 70 hectares of land, the safeguarding of water supplies for 575 families, and the creation of green jobs demonstrate that public service is not merely confined to administrative licensing or physical infrastructure provision. Instead, it encompasses substantive, life-sustaining ecological interventions. These tangible achievements functioned as a positive feedback loop, reinforcing the stakeholders' commitment to the collaborative regime and validating the efficacy of participatory governance in environmental preservation.

Despite these remarkable successes, the discussion reveals

inherent systemic challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term sustainability. The involvement of the private sector remained largely peripheral and transactional, limited primarily to CSR funding without deep integration into the strategic decision-making forums (Sholikin, 2026a). Furthermore, the heavy reliance on specific local figures raises valid concerns regarding leadership regeneration and the equitable distribution of participatory benefits among the wider community. Future collaborative models must institutionalize local capacity-building mechanisms and construct more inclusive avenues for private sector engagement to ensure that the ecological and socioeconomic triumphs of the Permata Hati program endure robustly beyond its founding generation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of collaborative governance in the Permata Hati Ecotourism Program has proven to be highly effective, adaptive, and inclusive in realizing substantive public services. Analyzed through the lens of Ansell and Gash's (2008) framework, the study reveals that the collaboration was successfully ignited by

urgent starting conditions—specifically, a severe ecological crisis and resource asymmetry—that fostered positive interdependence rather than prolonged conflict. This grassroots momentum was systematically legitimized through a robust institutional design, characterized by multi-tiered legal frameworks and egalitarian deliberative forums. Furthermore, the presence of distributed facilitative leadership among local figures like Wagisan, the Ecoton Foundation, and the Jombang Environmental Agency (DLH) prevented bureaucratic domination and nurtured a profound sense of community ownership.

The dynamic collaborative process, built upon intense face-to-face dialogues and consistent field-level trust-building, culminated in a strong shared understanding of ecological justice. Consequently, this synergy generated highly significant intermediate outcomes or "small wins". The ecological restoration of 70 hectares of critical land, the safeguarding of vital water springs, and the creation of green economic opportunities demonstrate a paradigm shift in public administration. This study theoretically affirms that public service delivery extends far beyond conventional

administrative duties; it effectively encompasses substantive, participatory interventions that actively protect environmental sustainability and elevate grassroots socio-economic resilience.

Despite these notable achievements, the collaborative model in the Permata Hati program faces systemic challenges that warrant future attention. The peripheral involvement of the private sector, which remains largely transactional and disconnected from strategic decision-making, alongside the heavy reliance on specific founding figures, highlights vulnerabilities in leadership regeneration. Therefore, future collaborative frameworks must institutionalize local capacity-building mechanisms to ensure continuous leadership succession and equitably distribute participatory benefits. Future research is highly recommended to employ mixed-method approaches or expand the scope to actively include private sector dynamics, thereby providing a more holistic blueprint for sustainable, multi-actor ecotourism governance.

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