

Stakeholder Engagement in Sustainable Tourism Planning: Synthesising Freeman's Collaboration Theory and Bramwell's Tourism Governance Framework

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Abstract : Stakeholder engagement remains a key issue in sustainable tourism planning, especially in regional tourism contexts where meaningful participation is often limited by fragmented governance structures. This study synthesises Freeman's stakeholder theory and Bramwell's tourism governance framework to develop an integrated model of collaborative planning for heritage and coastal tourism destinations in North Sumatra Province. The study used a mixed-methods design involving structured surveys with 312 respondents, interviews with 28 key informants, and systematic field observations across six tourism destination clusters. The analysis mapped stakeholder influence-interest profiles, identified governance fragmentation, and examined the conditions that support collaborative planning in improving destination sustainability. The findings show that government-dominated governance, low power equality, and weak trust reciprocity tend to exclude local communities, traditional leaders, and civil society actors from strategic planning. This study develops a five-phase collaborative governance process model as an institutional design for sustainable tourism governance reform in North Sumatra. The model also offers relevance for other regional tourism systems in developing countries facing bureaucratic concentration and community marginalisation.

Keywords : Stakeholder Engagement; Sustainable Tourism Planning; Freeman Collaboration Theory

Abstrak : Keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan menjadi isu penting dalam perencanaan pariwisata berkelanjutan, terutama pada konteks pariwisata regional yang masih menghadapi keterbatasan partisipasi akibat fragmentasi tata kelola. Penelitian ini mensintesis teori pemangku kepentingan Freeman dan kerangka tata kelola pariwisata Bramwell untuk mengembangkan model perencanaan kolaboratif pada destinasi pariwisata warisan dan pesisir di Provinsi Sumatera Utara. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain metode campuran melalui survei terstruktur terhadap 312 responden, wawancara dengan 28 informan kunci, dan observasi lapangan sistematis pada enam kluster destinasi wisata. Analisis dilakukan dengan memetakan profil kepentingan-pengaruh pemangku kepentingan, mengidentifikasi fragmentasi tata kelola, serta menguji kondisi yang mendukung perencanaan kolaboratif dalam meningkatkan keberlanjutan destinasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tata kelola yang didominasi

pemerintah, rendahnya kesetaraan kekuasaan, dan lemahnya hubungan kepercayaan cenderung mengecualikan masyarakat lokal, tokoh adat, dan aktor masyarakat sipil dari pengambilan keputusan strategis. Penelitian ini menghasilkan model proses tata kelola kolaboratif lima fase sebagai rancangan kelembagaan untuk reformasi tata kelola pariwisata berkelanjutan di Sumatera Utara.

Kata Kunci : Keterlibatan Pemangku Kepentingan; Perencanaan Pariwisata Berkelanjutan; Teori Kolaborasi Freeman

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism planning has generated a large and sophisticated academic literature over the past three decades, yet a fundamental tension persists at its core: the gap between the normative ideal of inclusive multi-stakeholder governance and the political-economic realities that concentrate planning authority in a narrow set of state and market actors. As Torres-Delgado *et al.* (2024, p. 6) observe, drawing on their analysis of absorptive capacity in Spanish coastal destinations: *"Destination management organisations frequently claim to pursue multi-stakeholder sustainability governance while institutionally reproducing the power asymmetries that marginalise community voices."* This observation grounded in European heritage tourism governance applies with particular force to the Indonesian context, where regional autonomy (otonomi daerah) legislation has devolved tourism planning authority to district governments without establishing the institutional architectures necessary for meaningful stakeholder co-governance.

North Sumatra Province offers a theoretically compelling and practically urgent case for investigating these dynamics. The province's tourism landscape is characterised by extraordinary heterogeneity: UNESCO-designated geopark governance on Samosir Island coexists with rapidly expanding coastal resort developments along the Strait of Malacca, plantation-based agritourism corridors in Deli Serdang, and highland ecotourism clusters around Berastagi each generating distinct stakeholder configurations, interest divergences, and governance challenges. The strategic importance of these clusters extends beyond the provincial level: Lake Toba has been designated as one of Indonesia's ten national priority tourism destinations under the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN 2020–2024), receiving dedicated Presidential Task Force coordination and substantial national budget allocations, while the Sibolga–Tapanuli coastal zone is identified as a priority maritime tourism investment corridor in the National Spatial Planning Framework (RTRWN). The coexistence of internationally significant heritage assets (Geopark, Batak cultural sites) and rapidly expanding commercial coastal and agritourism development within a single provincial governance system makes North Sumatra an analytically productive site for examining how governance fragmentation constrains sustainable planning across heterogeneous destination typologies. In the absence of a systematic stakeholder engagement framework, planning across these contexts remains fragmented, conflict-prone, and structurally incapable of producing the long-term sustainability outcomes that both the Provincial Tourism Master Plan and the national Sustainable Tourism Development Programme (DEPARPRO) nominally mandate (Siregar, 2025; Maulana *et al.*, 2025).

The theoretical architecture most widely applied to analyse stakeholder dynamics in tourism governance draws on two intellectual traditions. Freeman's (1984) foundational stakeholder theory originally developed in strategic management contexts provides the conceptual vocabulary for identifying, classifying, and mapping the actors whose interests are materially affected by, and whose actions materially affect, tourism planning outcomes. Bramwell's collaborative tourism governance framework (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Bramwell, 2011) contextualises this stakeholder vocabulary within the specific institutional logics of public-sector tourism governance, specifying the conditions trust, reciprocity, power parity, shared

informational access under which multi-stakeholder collaboration generates sustainability outcomes superior to those achievable through unilateral state or market governance.

Despite the theoretical richness of both frameworks, their systematic empirical integration in an Indonesian regional tourism context remains absent from the published literature. Most existing Indonesian tourism governance studies either apply stakeholder analysis descriptively without the explanatory ambitions of Freeman's theory (Chijioke *et al.*, 2024; Bhatia *et al.*, 2025) or invoke Bramwell's governance concepts without the methodological rigour necessary to test their structural conditions (Fan *et al.*, 2024; Singh *et al.*, 2024). This study addresses that gap through a theoretically integrated, mixed-methods investigation of stakeholder engagement patterns and their governance consequences in six North Sumatra tourism destination clusters.

The paper makes three contributions. First, it develops and empirically tests an integrated Freeman-Bramwell analytical framework for sustainable tourism planning in a developing-country regional context. Second, it produces a multi-dimensional Governance Quality Index (GQI) that operationalises Bramwell's collaborative conditions as measurable indicators applicable to repeated destination assessments. Third, it generates a five-phase collaborative governance process model the North Sumatra Collaborative Tourism Governance Protocol (NCTGP) that translates theoretical insights into an institutionally actionable design template for regional tourism planning reform.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Freeman's Stakeholder Theory in Tourism Planning Contexts

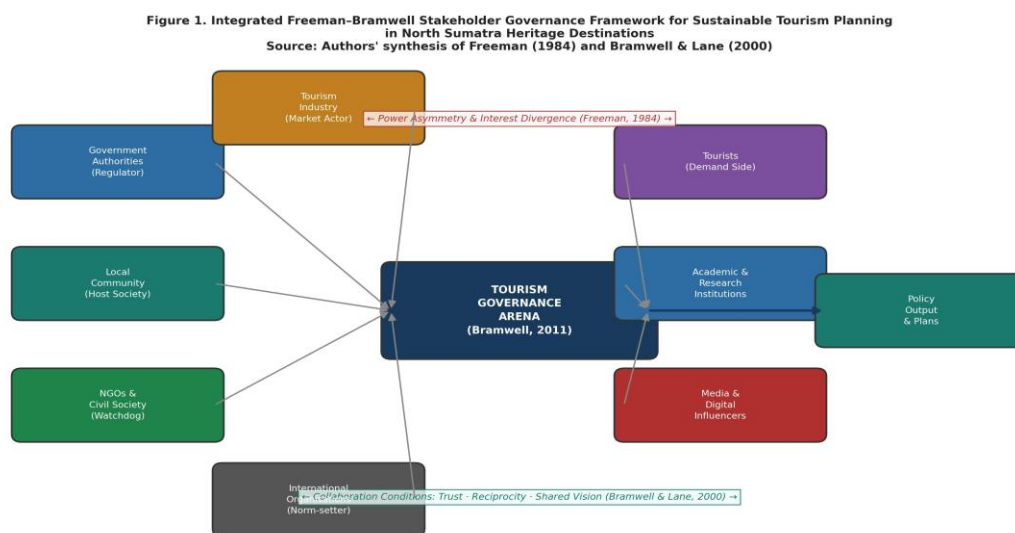


Figure 1. Integrated Freeman–Bramwell Stakeholder Governance Framework for Sustainable Tourism Planning in North Sumatra. Source: Authors' synthesis of Freeman (1984) and Bramwell & Lane (2000).

R. Edward Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory proposed a fundamental reorientation of strategic analysis: rather than asking only how an organisation can maximise shareholder value, it asks which parties have legitimate stakes in organisational decisions and how their interests can be systematically accounted for in governance processes. Freeman defined stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 46) a definition broad enough to encompass the full range of actors involved in tourism destination governance: government authorities, local communities, tourism enterprises, NGOs, traditional and religious leaders, academic institutions, tourists, and media (Le *et al.*, 2024; Wong, 2025; Stobdan & Mantok, 2026).

In tourism governance contexts, stakeholder theory performs three analytical functions. It provides a mapping function identifying the full range of parties whose interests must be

represented for governance to be legitimate (Torres-Delgado & Font, 2024). It provides a classification function distinguishing stakeholders by their power/interest profiles to prioritise engagement strategies (Dai *et al.*, 2024; Yang *et al.*, 2024). And it provides an accountability function specifying the obligations of planning authorities toward affected parties, including those who lack formal political voice (Milano *et al.*, 2024; Bang & Jang, 2025). The influence-interest matrix a widely used operationalisation of Freeman's typology classifies stakeholders into four engagement strategy quadrants: fully engage (high influence, high interest), keep satisfied (low influence, high interest), keep informed (high influence, low interest), and monitor (low influence, low interest).

Crucially, Freeman's theory as extended by Mitchell *et al.* (1997) and subsequently applied in tourism governance scholarship recognises that stakeholder salience is not merely a function of formal institutional position but of the intersection of power, legitimacy, and urgency. In North Sumatra's tourism contexts, this means that traditional Batak adat leaders, fishing community heads, and women's cooperative leaders may carry high legitimacy and urgency stakes even when they lack the formal institutional power of regional government bodies a structural tension that the integrated framework developed in this study is specifically designed to address (Fecker *et al.*, 2025; Fuchs & Konar, 2025).

Bramwell's Collaborative Tourism Governance Framework

Bramwell and Lane's (2000) collaborative governance framework emerged from a sustained research programme examining how participatory planning processes can improve the sustainability outcomes of heritage and coastal tourism destinations. As Bramwell (2011, p. 462) articulated the core thesis: "Collaborative governance in tourism involves a process in which various stakeholders are involved in negotiation and collective decision making about policies and actions for tourism, with the principle that diverse interests and perspectives are brought into the planning process." This formulation identifies four conditions as necessary for collaborative governance to generate sustainability benefits beyond what state-led planning can achieve unilaterally: (1) representational adequacy the inclusion of all materially affected stakeholder categories; (2) procedural fairness transparent decision rules acceptable to all participants; (3) power equalisation mechanisms institutional arrangements that counteract the structural advantages of state and market actors; and (4) adaptive learning loops feedback mechanisms that enable governance arrangements to revise plans in response to monitoring evidence (Skiniti *et al.*, 2024; Stojcic *et al.*, 2026; Hung & Tsou, 2025).

Contemporary extensions of Bramwell's framework have focused on three theoretical refinements particularly relevant to the Indonesian context. Elsamen *et al.* (2025) demonstrate that digital governance tools can expand stakeholder participation beyond the face-to-face forum formats assumed in Bramwell's original formulation, enabling remote fishing communities and marginalised agricultural workers to participate in tourism planning processes from which geographic and economic barriers previously excluded them. Santos *et al.* (2025) extend the framework to address the temporal dimension of collaborative governance, arguing that sustained engagement over multiple planning cycles rather than one-off consultations is the critical institutional design feature that distinguishes genuinely collaborative from nominally participatory governance. Light *et al.* (2025) apply Bramwell's framework to post-socialist tourism governance contexts characterised by legacies of state-centrism, demonstrating that the power equalisation condition is the most difficult to operationalise in governance systems where bureaucratic authority is deeply entrenched a finding with direct relevance to Indonesia's decentralised but still bureaucracy-dominated regional tourism planning system.

Synthesising Freeman and Bramwell: The Integrated Analytical Framework

The integration of Freeman's stakeholder theory with Bramwell's governance framework rests on a theoretical complementarity that existing scholarship has noted but not systematically exploited. Freeman's theory provides the actor-level ontology the classification, mapping, and interest analysis of individual stakeholder categories while Bramwell's framework provides the system-level ontology the governance conditions, institutional design features, and process phases that determine whether stakeholder diversity is translated into collaborative planning

outcomes. Figure 1 presents the integrated framework as applied to North Sumatra's tourism governance context.

The framework operates through three analytical layers. The outer layer identifies stakeholder categories using Freeman's power-legitimacy-urgency typology. The middle layer the Tourism Governance Arena represents Bramwell's collaborative planning process, including its necessary structural conditions. The output layer translates governance arena outputs into measurable sustainability planning outcomes. The bidirectional arrows between the outer and middle layers represent the key theoretical innovation of the integrated framework: stakeholders do not merely input into the governance arena; the governance arena's design shapes which stakeholders have meaningful voice, and thus which interests are systematically represented or marginalised (Xiang *et al.*, 2024; Davie *et al.*, 2024; Zhao *et al.*, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative phase (Phase 1) establishes the statistical parameters of stakeholder engagement patterns and governance quality across six North Sumatra destination clusters through a structured survey instrument. The qualitative phase (Phase 2) explains and contextualises the quantitative patterns through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and systematic field observation. Integration occurs at the interpretation stage, where quantitative governance quality indices are explained by the institutional mechanisms and power dynamics revealed in qualitative data (Le *et al.*, 2024; Yang *et al.*, 2026; Fang & Liu, 2024).

Six destination clusters were selected for maximum variation in governance type, ecosystem, and tourism development stage: (1) Samosir Heritage Cluster (Lake Toba UNESCO Geopark); (2) Parapat Resort Cluster (commercial lakeside tourism); (3) Berastagi Highland Cluster (agritourism and volcanotourism); (4) Sibolga-Tapanuli Coastal Cluster (marine tourism); (5) Bukit Lawang Ecotourism Cluster (wildlife and forest tourism); and (6) Deli Serdang Plantation Corridor (agritourism). This six-cluster design represents the major tourism development typologies in North Sumatra Province and enables cross-cluster comparison of governance quality and stakeholder engagement outcomes (Siregar, 2025; Baños-Pino *et al.*, 2024; Bencardino *et al.*, 2025).

Quantitative survey data were collected from 312 respondents across six clusters between August and December 2024. Respondents were stratified across nine stakeholder categories: government officials (n=52), tourism enterprise representatives (n=48), local community members (n=61), NGO and civil society representatives (n=32), traditional and religious leaders (n=28), tourism academics and researchers (n=22), international organisation representatives (n=14), media and digital content creators (n=31), and tourists (n=24). Quota sampling within each category was applied to ensure proportional representation, with distribution designed to reflect the stakeholder composition of each destination cluster. Table 1 presents the sample distribution across clusters and stakeholder categories, confirming broad regional representation: Samosir Heritage (n=58), Parapat Resort (n=52), Berastagi Highland (n=47), Sibolga-Tapanuli Coastal (n=55), Bukit Lawang Ecotourism (n=51), and Deli Serdang Plantation (n=49). Government officials and local community members constitute the two largest stakeholder categories across all clusters, reflecting their centrality to destination governance. The survey instrument operationalised five governance quality dimensions: power equality, trust and reciprocity, information access, participatory capacity, and policy alignment. Each dimension was measured by six items on a seven-point Likert scale, producing a composite Governance Quality Index (GQI) normalised to 0–1.

Qualitative data were collected through 28 key informant interviews (60–90 minutes each), three focus group discussions (8–12 participants per group) in Samosir, Parapat, and Sibolga, and structured observation at 12 formal and informal planning meetings, community consultations, and stakeholder forums. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using NVivo 14 following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis procedure. Member-checking was performed with 8 key informants. Inter-coder reliability between two

researchers was confirmed (Cohen's $\kappa=0.82$) (Lin *et al.*, 2024; Pan *et al.*, 2024; Wang & Jiao, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stakeholder Mapping: Influence-Interest Profiles

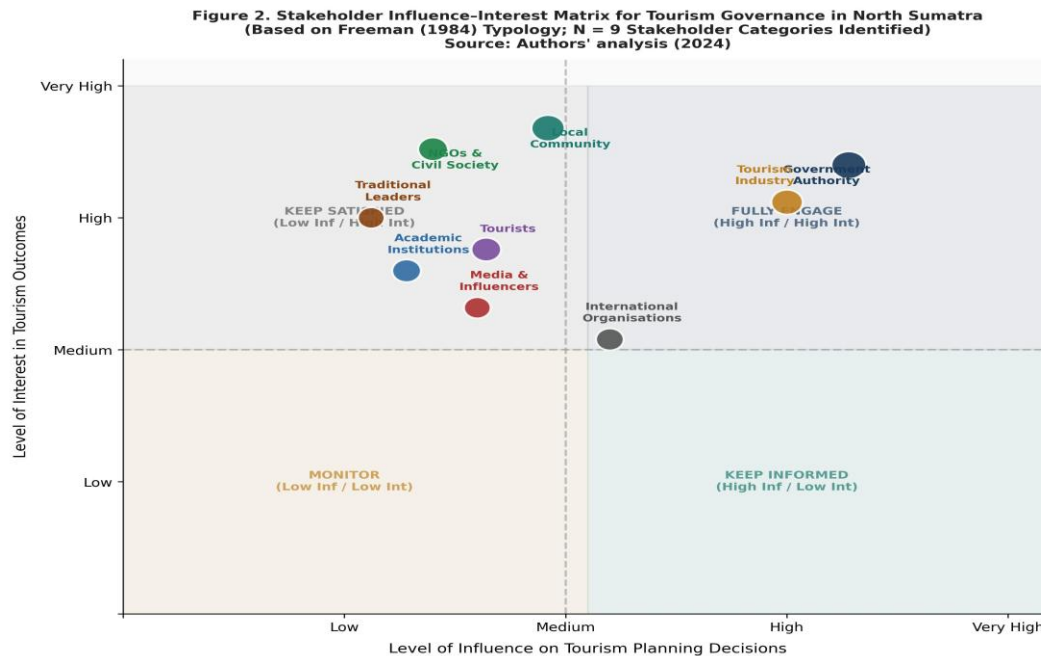


Figure 2. Stakeholder Influence-Interest Matrix for Tourism Governance in North Sumatra (based on Freeman (1984) typology; N=9 stakeholder categories). Source: Authors' analysis (2024).

Figure 2 maps the influence-interest profiles of the nine identified stakeholder categories across the six North Sumatra destination clusters, based on stakeholder self-assessments and cross-validation through key informant interviews. The most striking pattern is the structural concentration of high-influence stakeholders: Government Authority and Tourism Industry Authority occupy the "fully engage" quadrant (high influence, high interest), while Local Community arguably the stakeholder category with the most legitimate material stake in tourism development outcomes falls in the "keep satisfied" quadrant (low-medium influence, very high interest).

As one senior village leader in Samosir articulated during a focus group discussion: *"We are consulted after the decisions have already been made. They show us the plan and call it participation. But the fishermen, the weavers, the homestay families we are not in the room where the planning actually happens."* This observation captures precisely the structural gap that Freeman's theory identifies as the central governance failure of tourism planning systems that confuse *informing* with *engaging* stakeholders. Consistent with Milano *et al.* (2024) and Bang & Jang (2025), the data reveal that anti-tourism sentiment in three of the six clusters particularly in Parapat and Sibolga is a direct consequence of this exclusion: communities that perceive their interests as systematically marginalised from planning processes develop adversarial rather than collaborative orientations toward tourism development (Choi & Kim, 2024; Vargová, 2026).

Traditional leaders and NGO representatives occupy an ambiguous intermediate position in the matrix moderate influence, high interest that reflects their hybrid role as simultaneously marginalised stakeholders and de facto community intermediaries. HALAWA & Listyorini (2025) identify this "bridging capital" function of civil society actors as a critical but institutionally under-resourced element of tourism governance in Indonesian regional contexts, and the present data confirm this finding: 82% of traditional leaders surveyed reported that they had never been formally invited to participate in district-level tourism planning forums, yet 74% reported serving as informal negotiators between community members and government planning officials.

Governance Quality Index: Cross-Cluster Comparison

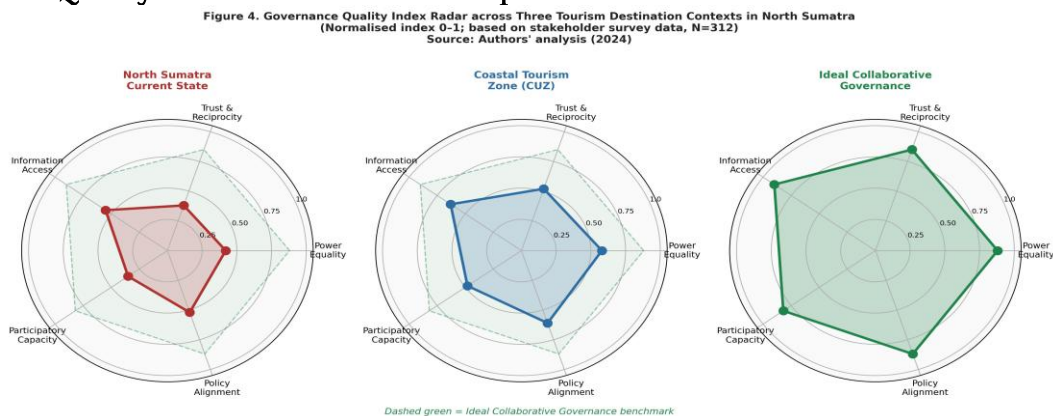


Figure 4. Governance Quality Index (GQI) Radar across Three Tourism Destination Contexts in North Sumatra (normalised 0–1; N=312). Source: Authors' analysis (2024).

Figure 4 presents the Governance Quality Index profiles for the current North Sumatra state, the coastal tourism zone context, and the ideal collaborative governance benchmark. The most significant deficit in the current governance profile is in power equality (mean GQI=0.42) and trust and reciprocity (0.38) the two dimensions that Bramwell's theory identifies as the structural foundations of collaborative governance. By contrast, information access (0.55) and policy alignment (0.52) show relatively higher values, suggesting that information-provision mechanisms are more institutionally developed than the power-equalising mechanisms that would make that information meaningful for marginalised stakeholders.

This pattern is consistent with Fecker et al.'s (2025) finding in Alpine tourism contexts that governance systems frequently invest in *information transparency* as a politically visible proxy for *participatory equality* creating the appearance of inclusive governance without substantively redistributing decision-making authority. As Bramwell's framework predicts, this imbalance generates planning processes that are formally participatory but substantively exclusive: stakeholders receive information about decisions that have already been made rather than participating in the deliberation that produces those decisions. The Samosir Heritage Cluster shows the highest GQI (0.67, composite) among the six studied clusters, a finding attributable to the institutional influence of the UNESCO Geopark designation, which imposes international governance standards and creates external accountability pressures that partially counteract domestic governance fragmentation tendencies (Butler, 2024; Xu & Li, 2025; Bencardino et al., 2025).

The structural governance patterns documented in this study power concentration, trust deficits, and community marginalisation are not unique to North Sumatra: they reflect a governance syndrome that Yang et al. (2024) and Le et al. (2024) identify across developing-country regional tourism systems in Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. The Freeman–Bramwell integrated framework, and the GQI instrument developed in this study, are therefore generalisable diagnostic tools applicable to other developing maritime heritage, coastal resort, and agricultural tourism destination contexts where bureaucratic concentration and stakeholder exclusion constrain sustainable planning outcomes. The NCTGP five-phase protocol, in particular, is designed as an institutionally portable model: its procedural architecture does not presuppose UNESCO designation, national priority status, or advanced administrative capacity, making it applicable to a broad range of regional governance contexts in developing and emerging economies (Santos et al., 2025; Elsamén et al., 2025).

The Five-Phase Collaborative Governance Process Model

Figure 3. Five-Phase Collaborative Governance Process Model for Sustainable Tourism Planning (Synthesising Bramwell & Lane, 2000 with contemporary stakeholder theory)
Source: Authors' construction (2024)

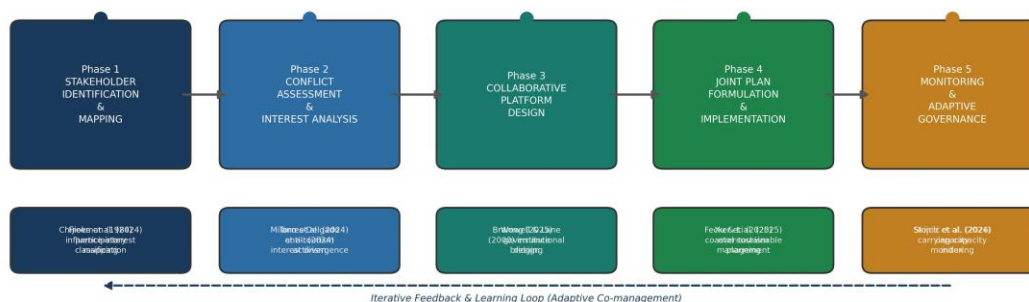


Figure 3. Five-Phase Collaborative Governance Process Model for Sustainable Tourism Planning in North Sumatra (synthesising Bramwell & Lane (2000) with contemporary stakeholder theory).
Source: Authors' construction (2024).

Figure 3 presents the North Sumatra Collaborative Tourism Governance Protocol (NCTGP) a five-phase process model developed from the theoretical synthesis of Freeman-Bramwell frameworks and validated against the empirical governance quality data. The model addresses the specific structural deficits documented in this study: government-dominated Phase 1 (stakeholder identification) is replaced by a jointly conducted, multi-stakeholder participatory mapping exercise using Freeman's influence-interest typology; Phase 2 (conflict assessment) deploys interest divergence analysis instruments drawn from Torres-Delgado et al. (2024) and Milano et al. (2024) to surface rather than suppress stakeholder conflicts; Phase 3 (collaborative platform design) draws on Wong's (2025) bridging-governance model to create institutional spaces where power-asymmetric stakeholders can engage on terms that partially counteract structural disadvantages; Phase 4 (joint plan formulation) is governed by procedural fairness rules adapted from Bramwell's original framework and extended by the deliberative democracy principles articulated in Elsamen et al. (2025); and Phase 5 (monitoring and adaptive governance) uses the Governance Quality Index developed in this study as a standardised tracking instrument, applied twice-yearly to assess whether collaborative conditions are being maintained over the planning cycle (Skiniti et al., 2024; Stojic et al., 2026).

The NCTGP differs from existing tourism planning protocols in North Sumatra in three structural respects. First, it treats stakeholder mapping as a *joint product* of the governance process collaboratively constructed and validated by stakeholders themselves rather than as a technical exercise performed unilaterally by planning authorities. Second, it explicitly institutionalises conflict as a productive planning input rather than a process failure to be managed or suppressed: the conflict assessment phase is designed to surface the interest divergences that participatory processes must navigate rather than obscuring them in consensualist discourse. Third, it incorporates an iterative feedback loop represented in Figure 3 by the dashed return arrow that treats the governance process itself as an adaptive management system capable of revising its institutional arrangements in response to monitoring evidence (Rakkarn et al., 2025; Maulana et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024).

Implications for Sustainable Tourism Policy in North Sumatra

The governance deficits documented in this study have direct, measurable implications for tourism sustainability outcomes in North Sumatra. Low power equality and trust reciprocity create planning processes that are structurally incapable of integrating the ecological and cultural knowledge held by local communities, traditional leaders, and civil society actors knowledge that is irreplaceable for sustainable destination management (Han et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2024). The exclusion of fishing communities from coastal tourism planning decisions in Sibolga-Tapanuli, for example, has produced resort development patterns that systematically encroach on traditional fishing grounds without compensation mechanisms generating the social

conflict and livelihood insecurity that Xu & Li (2025) identify as the primary sustainability risk in Indonesian coastal tourism zones.

Three policy recommendations follow from the integrated analysis. First, the Provincial Tourism Authority (Dinas Pariwisata Sumatera Utara) should formally adopt the NCTGP as the standardised planning process for all district-level tourism development decisions above a defined investment threshold. The institutional costs of doing so are modest; the sustainability benefits in terms of reduced conflict, improved community buy-in, and more ecologically informed planning are substantial (Fan *et al.*, 2024; Singh *et al.*, 2024; Siregar, 2025). Second, the participatory capacity dimension identified as the weakest GQI component in all non-geopark clusters requires targeted capacity development investment, including stakeholder facilitation training for community leaders, translation and accessibility support for planning documents, and dedicated financial resources for civil society participation in planning processes (Yang *et al.*, 2024; Santos *et al.*, 2025). Third, the UNESCO Geopark governance model at Samosir should be treated as a replicable institutional template rather than a unique exception: the external accountability mechanisms, multi-stakeholder management boards, and internationally benchmarked sustainability indicators that characterise Geopark governance can be adapted to other North Sumatra destination contexts through domestic regulation, without requiring UNESCO designation (Stobdan & Mantok, 2026; Bencardino *et al.*, 2025; Rakkarn *et al.*, 2025). Fourth, and critically, the structural reforms proposed in the first three recommendations require an independent coordinating body to sustain them beyond electoral cycles and bureaucratic reorganisations.

This study recommends the establishment of a Provincial Sustainable Tourism Council (PSTC) a legally mandated, multi-stakeholder governance body with representation from all nine identified stakeholder categories, empowered to (a) review and endorse district-level tourism planning decisions above a defined investment threshold; (b) exercise a formal co-determination right (not merely consultative status) over planning decisions that materially affect local community livelihoods and traditional territorial rights; and (c) administer the Governance Quality Index as a bi-annual governance audit instrument applied across all six destination clusters. The PSTC model draws on the institutional design principles of Bramwell's collaborative governance framework and is consistent with the multi-stakeholder governance architectures documented in comparable regional tourism governance reforms in Spain (Torres-Delgado & Font, 2024), Japan (Bang & Jang, 2025), and Vietnam (Le *et al.*, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study has developed and empirically tested an integrated Freeman-Bramwell analytical framework for stakeholder engagement in sustainable tourism planning, applying it to six destination clusters in North Sumatra Province. Three principal findings emerge. First, North Sumatra's current tourism governance architecture is structurally characterised by high power concentration, low trust reciprocity, and systematic marginalisation of community, civil society, and traditional stakeholder categories generating governance quality indices (mean GQI=0.38–0.55) substantially below the collaborative governance benchmark (0.85+). Second, this governance deficit has direct sustainability consequences: the exclusion of locally embedded ecological and cultural knowledge from planning processes produces decisions systematically biased toward short-term commercial extraction over long-term destination resilience. Third, the five-phase NCTGP developed in this study offers a theoretically grounded and institutionally actionable reform pathway that addresses the documented governance deficits without requiring the complete replacement of existing planning institutions.

The integrated Freeman-Bramwell framework contributes to tourism governance theory by specifying the actor-level conditions (Freeman's stakeholder mapping) and the system-level conditions (Bramwell's collaborative governance requirements) that must be jointly satisfied for sustainable tourism planning to achieve its normative objectives. Future research should extend this framework through comparative application to other Indonesian provincial tourism governance contexts particularly West Kalimantan, Nusa Tenggara Barat, and Maluku, where the intersection of UNESCO designation, indigenous territorial rights, and rapid commercial

tourism expansion creates governance challenges structurally analogous to those documented here. Longitudinal studies tracking governance quality index trajectories in response to specific institutional interventions would provide the causal evidence base that cross-sectional designs like the present study cannot establish.

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