

Collaborative Governance of Border Tourism in Sota District, Merauke

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Abstract. Border tourism can connect territorial symbolism, cross-border mobility, local identity, and local economic development, but these benefits depend on coordination across institutions with different mandates. This study explains how collaborative governance shapes border tourism development in Sota District, Merauke, on the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border. A qualitative single-case study draws on one documented FGD at PLBN Sota on 31 October 2024 (about 130 minutes), field observation and survey material from a 2024 government-university study, signed tourism datasets, and policy and planning documents. FGD evidence was anonymized with role-based codes and analyzed manually using a theory-driven thematic matrix. Findings show that border identity is both an incentive and an institutional complication: it creates destination and market value while connecting tourism to border management, village governance, infrastructure, conservation, and community livelihoods. Collaboration appears through participatory discussion, cross-sector coordination, market/community involvement, promotion, and training, but is only partly institutionalized. Facilitative leadership is distributed across tourism authorities, border management, and local actors. WebGIS, master planning, infrastructure, capacity building, and multi-source financing are treated as project outputs or planned directions rather than consolidated outcomes. The study shows that peripheral border tourism requires bridging leadership and integrated vertical-horizontal coordination.

Keywords: Border tourism, Collaborative governance, Cross-border tourism governance, Local economic empowerment, Sota.

Abstrak. Pariwisata perbatasan dapat menghubungkan simbolisme teritorial, mobilitas lintas batas, identitas lokal, dan pembangunan ekonomi, tetapi manfaatnya bergantung pada koordinasi antarlembaga dengan mandat yang berbeda. Penelitian ini menjelaskan bagaimana tata kelola kolaboratif membentuk pengembangan pariwisata perbatasan di Distrik Sota, Merauke, pada perbatasan Indonesia-Papua Nugini. Studi kasus tunggal kualitatif menggunakan satu FGD terdokumentasi di PLBN Sota pada 31 Oktober 2024 (sekitar 130 menit), bahan observasi dan survei lapangan dari kajian pemerintah-universitas tahun 2024, data administratif pariwisata, serta dokumen kebijakan dan perencanaan. Bukti FGD dianonimkan dengan kode berdasarkan peran dan dianalisis secara manual menggunakan matriks tematik berbasis teori. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa identitas perbatasan sekaligus menjadi insentif dan komplikasi kelembagaan: perbatasan menciptakan nilai destinasi dan pasar, tetapi juga menghubungkan pariwisata dengan pengelolaan perbatasan, pemerintahan kampung, infrastruktur, konservasi, dan mata pencaharian masyarakat. Kolaborasi tampak melalui diskusi partisipatif, koordinasi lintas sektor, keterlibatan pasar dan masyarakat, promosi, serta pelatihan, namun baru sebagian terlembaga. Kepemimpinan fasilitatif bersifat terdistribusi antara otoritas pariwisata, pengelola perbatasan, dan para aktor lokal. WebGIS, masterplan, infrastruktur, peningkatan kapasitas, dan pembiayaan multi-sumber diposisikan sebagai keluaran proyek atau arah rencana, bukan sebagai hasil tata kelola yang telah terkonsolidasi. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa pariwisata perbatasan perifer memerlukan kepemimpinan penghubung serta koordinasi vertikal dan horizontal yang terintegrasi.

Kata Kunci: Pariwisata perbatasan, Pemberdayaan ekonomi, Sota, Tata kelola kolaboratif, Tata kelola pariwisata.

1. INTRODUCTION

Border regions combine territorial sovereignty with everyday mobility, local livelihoods, infrastructure needs, and cross-border social relations. In Indonesia, these areas are increasingly discussed not only as security frontiers but also as development spaces in which public services, welfare, and local economic opportunities must be coordinated across institutions. This shift is particularly relevant in Sota District, Merauke Regency, which lies on the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border. Sota contains border monuments, villages with cultural-tourism potential, agro-tourism and recreational sites, natural attractions, and local trading activities associated with the border. Previous studies identify the Sota border post as an important site of mobility and socio-economic interaction (Metherall et al., 2022; Pugu & Pusung, 2025).

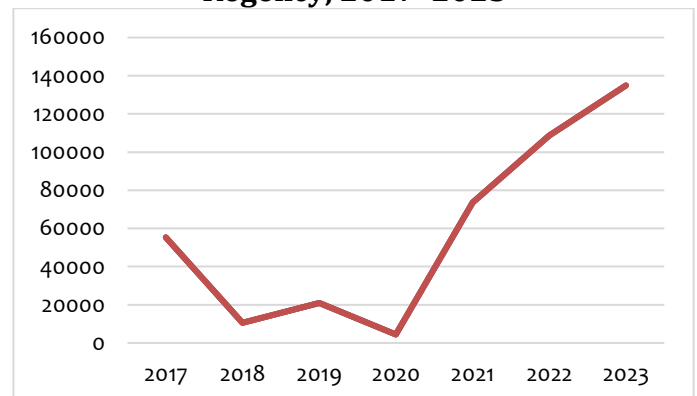
Tourism can turn the symbolic and material qualities of borderlands into destination resources, but cross-border and borderland tourism are institutionally complex (Baburao et al., 2025; Wang & Lin, 2025). Borders may function simultaneously as attractions, markers of identity, administrative boundaries, and spaces of mobility. Research on European and Asian border destinations shows that tourism development requires coordination across levels of government and among territorial actors, while institutional asymmetry and fragmented mandates can constrain collective action (Blasco et al., 2014; Liberato et al., 2018; Park et al., 2022; Więckowski & Timothy, 2021). In Sota, this complexity is intensified because tourism intersects with village development, road and service infrastructure, environmental protection, local economic empowerment, and border administration.

The empirical problem is therefore not simply the availability of attractions. The Merauke Tourism and Creative Economy Office's 2024 destination inventory records nine Sota entries spanning natural, agro, built, historical, and cultural tourism, including Pelangi Rawa Biru, Agro Wisata Sota, Camping Ground, the RI-PNG Cross-Border Post, Tugu Sabang Merauke, and the cultural villages of Sota, Yakiu, Yanggandur, and Rawa Biru (Merauke Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, 2024). The same administrative inventory identifies Homestay Pelangi Rawa Biru in Kampung Rawa Biru,

indicating an emerging local accommodation base. These assets coexist with infrastructure and visitor-comfort constraints, uneven community capacity, and responsibilities distributed across tourism, village, border, infrastructure, and conservation institutions.

At the regency level, a signed Tourism and Creative Economy Office administrative dataset records 55,351 visits in 2017, 10,574 in 2018, 20,946 in 2019, 4,434 in 2020, 73,643 in 2021, 108,664 in 2022, and 134,903 in 2023 (Merauke Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office., 2024). These are administrative visit counts compiled from hotels and tourism destinations across Merauke Regency; they are not Sota-specific demand estimates or necessarily unique persons. The sharp pre-pandemic fluctuations should therefore be treated cautiously because the dataset does not document a causal explanation for changes in coverage or reporting.

Figure 1. Tourist Visit Trends in Merauke Regency, 2017–2023



Source: Data from the 2024 Merauke Tourism and Creative Economy Office Document.

Collaborative governance provides an appropriate analytical lens for this problem because it explains how public agencies and non-state stakeholders can move from fragmented responsibilities toward joint decision-making and action (Luthfi et al., 2023). Ansell & Gash (2008), emphasize starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and a collaborative process involving dialogue, trust building, commitment, shared understanding, and intermediate outcomes. In tourism, these mechanisms are important because destination governance depends on actors with different authority, knowledge, resources, and interests (Barandiarán et al., 2019; Bramwell, 2011). Recent tourism-governance studies also stress that residents should be treated as collaborators rather than passive beneficiaries, and that participation requires institutional supports, shared spaces, and trust-based relationships (Valderrama & Polanco,

2024; Zhang et al., 2022)

Cross-border tourism governance adds a territorial dimension to this framework. It emphasizes multi-level coordination, institutional heterogeneity, border identity, mobility, and the need for bridging actors who can connect otherwise fragmented organizations (Blasco et al., 2014; Park et al., 2022). For Sota, the combination of collaborative governance and cross-border tourism governance makes it possible to examine not only who participates, but also how border-specific conditions shape incentives, power and resource asymmetries, coordination needs, and the prospects for integrated local development (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2018).

Three research gaps follow from this literature. First, cross-border tourism governance has been developed mainly through European and Chinese cases, while eastern Indonesian borderlands remain underrepresented. Second, Indonesian collaborative-tourism studies commonly focus on tourism villages, ecotourism, or destination management, with less attention to border tourism as a hybrid arena linking public administration, border management, local identity, and local economic development. Third, Indonesian border-governance research has focused more strongly on national institutions, security, decentralization, and inter-agency coordination than on tourism-oriented collaborative governance. The novelty of this study lies in integrating collaborative governance, cross-border tourism governance, and community-based local economic development in an eastern Indonesian border setting. Conceptually, it treats border identity not merely as contextual background but as a condition that can simultaneously create tourism value and increase the number of institutional relationships that must be coordinated.

Accordingly, this study asks: how does collaborative governance shape border tourism development in Sota, Merauke? It examines the starting conditions of collaboration, institutional design and stakeholder configuration, facilitative leadership, collaborative processes, and the distinction between observed intermediate outputs and planned governance directions. The objective is to explain how these dimensions enable or constrain the movement from fragmented tourism potential toward more integrated and sustainable border tourism governance.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative single-case design to explain collaborative governance in border tourism development in Sota District, Merauke Regency. The unit of analysis was the governance arrangement connecting tourism planning, border management, village/community participation, infrastructure, conservation, and local economic activity. A case-study design was appropriate because these governance processes are embedded in a specific institutional and territorial context (Yin, 2018). The fieldwork component of the 2024 commissioned study was scheduled during September-October 2024 within a four-month September-December project cycle; the archived FGD used in this article was held at the Sota Cross-Border Post (PLBN Sota) on 31 October 2024 from approximately 10:20 to 12:30 WIT.

The article's primary participant evidence comes from that single documented FGD, preserved as a two-part transcript. Participation was purposive and role-based, focusing on actors with direct institutional responsibility or lived experience relevant to the border, tourism, community life, and local economic activity. Speaker roles that can be verified in the transcript include a PLBN/border-management representative (BM-1), a local community actor (COM-1), and a market/local-business actor (BUS-1); the discussion also involved local government or village actors and the university research/facilitation team. Because the transcript does not provide a complete auditable attendance roster, the analysis reports verified role categories rather than an unverifiable participant total. Participant names are omitted, and transcript evidence is paraphrased under role-based codes rather than reproduced as long verbatim quotations.

The evidence base was triangulated across four source groups. First, the FGD provided participant accounts of cross-border relations, market activity, visitor flows, infrastructure needs, border-space regulation, and coordination. Second, field-observation and survey descriptions were drawn from the 2024 commissioned study; these covered physical conditions, supporting infrastructure, natural and cultural tourism potential, and the local socio-economic setting. Third, administrative evidence comprised the Tourism and Creative Economy Office datasets on tourist visits and the 2024 inventory of hotels, guesthouses, homestays, and tourism objects. Fourth, documentary analysis using the Central Statistics Agency of Merauke Regency Merauke

Regency in Figures 2024 and the Tourism Office of Merauke Regency and the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Merdeka University of Malang (2024), Final Report: Consultancy Services for the Study of the Development of Pioneer Zones Strategy for the Development of Integrated Institutions for Tourism-Local Economy on the Merauke-PNG Border, as well as policy and planning materials synthesized in the report.

Data were analyzed through manual, theory-driven thematic coding. The deductive matrix followed Ansell & Gash (2008) components of starting conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and collaborative process, with additional cross-border codes for border identity, mobility, core/support-zone regulation, vertical-horizontal coordination, local-market linkages, and the status of outputs. Inductive subcodes were retained where they recurred in the field record, especially kinship-based cross-border interaction and visitor-comfort/market-infrastructure constraints. Coding consistency was checked by returning to the transcript passages and comparing claims with the final report and administrative datasets. Analytical sufficiency was judged through source convergence rather than by claiming interview saturation. Because the commissioned report contains both empirical diagnosis and recommendations, observed or participant-reported evidence was explicitly separated from proposed programs; the latter are analyzed as planned governance directions unless implementation evidence is documented.

The FGD was generated within a government-university policy study. For this article, only non-sensitive institutional and community-role information is used, speakers are anonymized, and potentially identifying personal material is excluded. The consultancy archive used for this manuscript does not provide a separate ethics-committee approval number; accordingly, no formal ethics-clearance claim is made. This

archival constraint is reported as a study limitation rather than resolved by inference.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Sota as a Strategic Border Tourism Space

Sota's significance as a tourism area derives from the combination of border symbolism, community life, local economic interaction, and diverse attractions. The Tourism Office's 2024 inventory records nine destinations in Distrik Sota: *Pelangi Rawa Biru*, *Agro Wisata Sota*, *Camping Ground*, the *RI-PNG Cross-Border Post*, *Tugu Sabang Merauke*, *Kampung Sota*, *Kampung Yakiu*, *Kampung Yanggandur*, and *Kampung Rawa Biru* (Merauke Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, 2024). A separate accommodation sheet in the same inventory records *Homestay Pelangi Rawa Biru* in *Kampung Rawa Biru*. This combination links a formal international-border landscape with natural, agro, recreational, cultural, and small-scale visitor-economy assets.

These characteristics support treating Sota as a border tourism governance space rather than a single attraction. BM-1 described ordinary cross-border movement as roughly 20-30 persons per day, with larger flows associated with family, religious, and national events; this is a participant-reported operational estimate rather than an administrative tourist series. Such mobility makes the border an active social and economic interface, but also ties tourism to immigration, customs/quarantine, security, village administration, and market management. This institutional layering is consistent with research showing that borders can simultaneously be attractions, mobility filters, and governance boundaries (Park et al., 2022; Więckowski & Timothy, 2021).

Table 1. Main Characteristics of Sota Border Tourism

Main Characteristic	Empirical Evidence	Data Source	Analytical Relevance
Strategic international border location	Sota is located directly on the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border and functions as a formal and traditional cross-border mobility space. FGD participants described routine movements between Indonesia and PNG, with the volume increasing during cultural, religious, and national events.	FGD, PLBN Sota, 31 October 2024; 2024 Merauke-PNG Border Tourism Development Report	Positions Sota not only as a tourism destination but also as a border-governance space where tourism, mobility, state authority, and local livelihoods intersect.
Transit and	Sota has historically been	2024	Strengthens Sota's

gateway function	viewed as a transit point for movements toward areas such as Boven Digoel, Muting, and Elikobel. The border location therefore gives Sota a functional role beyond recreation.	Merauke–PNG Border Tourism Development Report	potential as a border tourism hub connected to wider regional mobility rather than as an isolated tourism site.
Diverse border tourism attractions	Identified attractions include Agro Wisata Sota, Camping Ground Sota, the Indonesia–PNG Border Post, Sabang–Merauke Monument, Kampung Sota, Kampung Yakiu, Kampung Yanggandur, and Kampung Rawa Biru. The attractions represent agro-tourism, border symbolism, recreation, history, and local culture.	Merauke Tourism and Creative Economy Office data in the 2024 Final Report	Shows that Sota's tourism potential is multi-dimensional, combining state symbolism, cultural resources, community life, recreation, and local economic activities.
Strong cross-border kinship and socio-cultural relations	FGD participants emphasized long-standing family relationships between communities on both sides of the border. These relationships are maintained through family visits, mixed marriages, customary relations, religious activities, and other social interactions.	FGD, PLBN Sota, 31 October 2024	Indicates that the border operates as a socially connected space rather than merely a territorial dividing line. These ties provide an important social foundation for border tourism.
Active cross-border market and local economic interaction	The supporting zone of PLBN Sota contains a market used by border communities. FGD participants described approximately 400 market stalls and trading activities involving food, household necessities, agricultural products, fish, handicrafts, and other commodities. The market also attracts residents crossing from PNG for shopping.	FGD with PLBN management, community members, and market actors, 31 October 2024	Demonstrates that tourism in Sota is closely connected with everyday cross-border economic interaction. The market can function simultaneously as an economic facility, visitor attraction, and space of social interaction.
Community-based cultural and local-product potential	Local products mentioned during the FGD include handicrafts, noken, honey, eucalyptus products, sarang semut, fruit, agricultural products, and other locally traded commodities. Cultural assets are also embedded in border villages, including local traditions and settlement characteristics.	FGD, PLBN Sota, 31 October 2024; 2024 Final Report	Provides a basis for linking border tourism with community-based tourism and local economic empowerment rather than concentrating tourism benefits only on physical attractions.
Border tourism operates within a regulated institutional space	PLBN management distinguishes between the core zone , primarily designated for cross-border services, and the supporting zone , where market and community economic activities can be accommodated. Tourism-related activities therefore cannot be developed without considering border-management rules and institutional authority.	FGD with border-management actors, PLBN Sota, 31 October 2024	Makes Sota institutionally different from conventional tourism destinations. Tourism development must reconcile tourism objectives with immigration, customs, quarantine, security, and border-management functions.

Emerging tourism development with infrastructure and service constraints	The 2024 study identifies limitations in accessibility, accommodation, tourism facilities, promotion, and human-resource capacity. Market actors also expressed the need for better supporting facilities so visitors could remain comfortably during heat or rain.	2024 Final Report; FGD with local business actors, 31 October 2024	Suggests that Sota has substantial tourism assets, but its transformation into a sustainable destination depends on institutional coordination, facility improvement, and stronger community capacity.
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Source: Author's synthesis based on the FGD conducted at PLBN Sota on 31 October 2024 and the Final Report on the Strategic Pioneer Zone for the Development of Integrated Tourism–Local Economy Institutions in the Merauke–PNG Border Area (2024).

3.2 Starting Condition: Opportunity, Asymmetry, and Weak Institutionalization

The starting conditions in Sota combine strong incentives for collaboration with substantial capacity asymmetries. Border symbolism, cultural villages, nature/*agro* attractions, kinship-based mobility, and market exchange create incentives for participation. COM-1 described Indonesia–PNG interaction in Sota as rooted in long-standing family and cultural relations that continued after the international boundary formalized separate jurisdictions. This history of interaction gives tourism a social base that is different from destinations created only through government planning.

At the same time, benefits are constrained by uneven resources and visitor-support capacity. BUS-1 reported that market activity already attracts visitors and supports local trading but that heat and rain can shorten visits, leading the participant to request covered or sheltered facilities. The final consultancy report similarly identifies weak infrastructure, incomplete destination connectivity, limited market-ready tourism products, and insufficient package variety. This pattern fits Ansell & Gash (2008), emphasis on resource asymmetries and incentives: public institutions hold mandates and program resources, while communities hold cultural legitimacy, local knowledge, land-based assets, and everyday market practices.

A second starting condition is incomplete institutionalization. The evidence shows many relevant actors and issue-specific interactions, but not a single durable border-tourism forum that consistently links tourism, village development, infrastructure, conservation, PLBN functions, communities, and business actors. Interdependence therefore exists before

institutional consolidation: the destination already depends on multiple organizations, while the rules and routines for sustained joint action remain fragmented.

Together, COM-1 and BUS-1 show why the starting conditions are simultaneously favorable and unequal: cross-border social relations and market activity provide incentives to collaborate, yet basic visitor comfort and community-facing infrastructure still require public support. The issue is therefore not whether collaboration has a rationale, but whether institutions can convert pre-existing social and economic interaction into stable destination governance.

3.3 Institutional Design and Stakeholder Configuration

The stakeholder configuration demonstrates structural interdependence. The final report assigns the Tourism Office roles in programming, promotion, creative-economy support, monitoring, and community empowerment through *Pokdarwis*; public works institutions are linked to access and infrastructure; environmental and national-park actors to conservation; village institutions to local development; and communities/business actors to services and benefit capture. The report explicitly argues that tourism development requires cooperation among government, communities, academics, private actors, civil society, and cross-sector agencies (Merauke Regency Tourism Office & Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, 2024)

Border management adds a design constraint that is absent from ordinary tourism villages. BM-1 distinguished the PLBN core zone, whose primary function is formal cross-border service and which is treated as a restricted operational area, from a supporting zone that includes the market and is intended to facilitate

border-community economic activity. Tourism events, facilities, or commercial uses in and around this space therefore cannot be governed solely by the Tourism Office or village actors; they require coordination with PLBN mandates and border rules. This finding makes vertical-horizontal coordination a substantive institutional-design requirement rather than a generic partnership principle.

Community actors are especially important because Sota's tourism resources are embedded in village life, local identity, and everyday economic practice. They should not be

treated merely as passive beneficiaries. The participatory approach documented in the final report used FGD techniques with tourism managers, village representatives, and community leaders to identify problems, resources, and tourism opportunities. The market-trader evidence in the archived FGD further shows that local actors possess practical knowledge about visitor behavior and facility needs. Their role should therefore extend from consultation to planning, service design, implementation, and monitoring (Zhang et al., 2022).

Table 2. Stakeholder Configuration in Sota border Tourism

Stakeholder / Actor	Empirical Role and Evidence	Main Resource or Authority	Governance Relevance
Merauke Tourism and Creative Economy Office	Initiates and designs tourism development programmes, promotes destinations, supports creative-economy activities, conducts monitoring and evaluation, and facilitates tourism-related community empowerment. The 2024 border-tourism study itself was commissioned through the Tourism Office to generate inputs for future tourism development in the border area.	Sectoral authority, tourism programmes, promotion, facilitation, and policy coordination	Functions as the lead sectoral actor , but cannot independently address infrastructure, border regulation, village development, environmental management, and local economic issues.
PLBN Sota / Border Management Authority and CIQS actors	Facilitates formal cross-border mobility and operates within a regulated border-management system. FGD evidence distinguishes the PLBN core zone , primarily designated for cross-border services, from the supporting zone , where market activities are accommodated. Border actors also facilitate movements associated with cultural, religious, and other events.	Border-management authority, cross-border facilities, regulatory control, security, and mobility management	Acts as a boundary-regulating and bridging actor . Tourism initiatives must be aligned with border-service rules and cannot be developed solely according to tourism-sector priorities.
District, Village Government, and Village Institutions	Connect tourism development with village-level development, local economic institutions, land and community interests, and emerging tourism-village initiatives. The 2024 study also identifies village empowerment institutions as important for developing tourism villages and local economic activities.	Local administrative legitimacy, village development instruments, community access, and locally embedded institutional knowledge	Provide the local institutional anchor needed to translate regency-level tourism programmes into community-based implementation.
Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis)	Identified in the 2024 study as a community-level mechanism through which tourism authorities can strengthen participation, tourism services, destination management, and local tourism capacity.	Community organization, local participation, destination knowledge, and tourism-service capacity	Potentially acts as an intermediary between government programmes and community-based tourism , although its organizational capacity requires continued strengthening.
Local	FGD participants described long-	Local legitimacy,	They are not merely beneficiaries

Communities, Cultural Actors, and Market Traders	standing cross-border kinship, customary interaction, mixed marriages, religious relations, local trading, and production of goods such as handicrafts, noken, honey, eucalyptus products, sarang semut, fruit, fish, and other commodities. Market traders also directly experience visitor flows and identified practical needs for better visitor-supporting facilities.	cultural knowledge, cross-border social networks, products, hospitality, and everyday economic practices	but co-producers of the border tourism experience . Their participation is necessary for tourism benefits to become locally embedded.
Public Works and Infrastructure Actors	The 2024 study identifies road access, infrastructure improvement, and supporting tourism facilities as responsibilities requiring coordination with public-works institutions. Infrastructure deficiencies were also repeatedly identified as constraints to tourism development.	Technical authority, roads, physical infrastructure, and supporting public facilities	Provide the physical connectivity needed to transform tourism potential into an accessible destination; this creates direct interdependence between tourism planning and infrastructure policy .
Environmental Agency and National Park Authority	The study assigns environmental actors roles in ecological education, environmental protection, conservation, and supervision of activities affecting natural ecosystems and protected areas.	Environmental regulation, conservation expertise, ecosystem protection, and monitoring authority	Ensure that tourism expansion is compatible with environmental sustainability and conservation , particularly where border tourism depends on natural and landscape resources.
Academics and Universities	Academic actors conduct research, mapping, institutional analysis, and policy recommendations. The 2024 integrated tourism-local economy study was jointly undertaken by the Merauke Tourism Office and the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Merdeka Malang.	Research capacity, analytical knowledge, facilitation, evaluation, and policy recommendations	Function as knowledge and facilitation actors , connecting empirical evidence with institutional design and policy formulation.
Civil Society Organisations / NGOs	The 2024 study identifies civil society organisations as potential contributors to community facilitation, empowerment, training, and local development activities.	Community facilitation, social networks, training, and empowerment capacity	Can strengthen the participation of actors with weaker organizational resources; however, the available evidence presents this role primarily as a supporting/potential role rather than a strongly institutionalized one .
Private Sector and Tourism Businesses	The study identifies private actors as potential providers of investment, tourism services, product development, training, and market access, conditional on adequate infrastructure, security, and legal certainty. Local traders already constitute an active economic component of the Sota border area.	Capital, services, market networks, entrepreneurship, and commercial innovation	Can support economic sustainability and product development, but broader private-sector participation remains less institutionalized than public and community involvement .

Source: Author's synthesis based on the 2024 Merauke–PNG border tourism development report and the FGD conducted at PLBN Sota on 31 October 2024.

The stakeholder configuration demonstrates that Sota border tourism is characterized by institutional interdependence rather than by the dominance of a single tourism

authority. The Tourism and Creative Economy Office holds the sectoral mandate for tourism development, but border mobility and spatial use are conditioned by PLBN and border-management

authorities; accessibility depends on infrastructure agencies; village institutions and communities provide local legitimacy and tourism resources; and environmental, academic, civil-society, and private actors contribute specialized capacities. The central governance problem is therefore not the absence of stakeholders, but the absence of a sufficiently institutionalized mechanism capable of converting stakeholder plurality into sustained collective action.

3.4 Facilitative Leadership as a Bridging Function

Facilitative leadership in Sota is best understood as a distributed bridging function. The Tourism Office commissioned and supported the 2024 integrated tourism-local economy study, while the documented Sota FGD created a face-to-face forum in which border-management, local-government/village, community, market, and university actors could articulate constraints and development ideas. The final report also records Regional Apparatus Forum coordination, Table Top Meetings, promotion, product development, and training as mechanisms used to connect tourism actors. These activities show convening capacity, but not a single permanent collaborative leader.

BM-1's account illustrates why bridging leadership must cross mandates: the PLBN's primary responsibility is border service and compliance, whereas tourism and local-economic actors seek longer visits, events, facilities, and market activity. Facilitation therefore requires translation between tourism objectives and border-operational rules, while district/village and community actors connect those decisions to local implementation. In Ansell & Gash (2008) terms, the key leadership task is not merely convening but maintaining participation, clarifying roles, supporting weaker actors, and sustaining follow-up across organizations with different legal purposes.

The evidence supports an emerging rather than fully institutionalized leadership structure. Convening is visible, and specific actors perform bridging roles, but the archive does not show a standing forum with a clear mandate, secretariat, decision rules, and monitoring cycle. The analytical implication is that Sota's facilitative leadership is distributed and episodic; its next

governance challenge is to convert these bridging practices into durable coordination routines.

3.5 Collaborative Coordination, Participation, and Joint Action Process: Community

The collaborative process is visible in issue-specific, face-to-face practices rather than in one consolidated forum. The 31 October FGD itself brought together border-management and local economic/community perspectives around concrete questions: cross-border movement, market functions, tourism potential, visitor facilities, and the responsibilities of different institutions. Participants explicitly connected future tourism events and market development with the need to collaborate with local government and other stakeholders. The final report adds Regional Apparatus Forum discussions, Table Top Meetings, destination-product development, promotion, and training as further coordination mechanisms.

These practices should nevertheless be interpreted as intermediate collaboration. They demonstrate dialogue and problem definition, but do not by themselves establish sustained trust, shared decision authority, or an enduring implementation regime. The core/support-zone distinction reported by BM-1 also shows that agreements must remain compatible with border-service rules. A durable collaborative process therefore requires clear participation rules, issue escalation, task assignment, follow-up, and review mechanisms across tourism, PLBN, district/village, infrastructure, conservation, and community actors.

Community participation determines whether collaboration produces locally embedded benefits. COM-1 linked the border economy to kinship and everyday exchange, while BUS-1 framed visitor comfort as a practical condition for sustaining market income. These accounts move community participation beyond symbolic inclusion: local actors contribute knowledge about social relations, visitor behavior, products, and facility constraints. This supports recent tourism-governance research emphasizing residents as collaborators with relevant knowledge, rights, and responsibilities (Valderrama & Polanco, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022).

Table 3. Collaborative Governance Findings in Sota

Governance Area	Evidence	Status	Governance Meaning
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Institutional and spatial planning	The 2024 study produced an institutional assessment, tourism-development recommendations, and geospatial/WebGIS-based planning inputs.	Intermediate output	Provides a common evidence base for coordinated border-tourism planning.
Community and local economic development	Strengthening Pokdarwis, BUMDes, village branding, tourism-product marketing, local products, and border-market activities were identified as development priorities.	Existing practices + planned strengthening	Links tourism development with community participation and local economic benefits.
Infrastructure and environmental support	Road access, tourism facilities, clean water, sanitation, waste management, and environmental protection were identified as necessary supporting interventions.	Primarily planned	Shows that border tourism requires cross-sector coordination beyond the tourism agency.
Promotion and destination development	Tourism packages, local events, product innovation, digital promotion, and stronger border-destination identity were proposed.	Planned / partially initiated	Supports the transition from isolated attractions toward a recognizable border-tourism destination.
Financing and collaborative mechanism	Multi-source financing and stronger coordination among government, communities, border institutions, and other actors were proposed.	Planned governance direction	Requires clearer role allocation, joint implementation, and accountability.
Integrated border-tourism governance	A permanent and integrated governance arrangement has not yet been fully institutionalized.	Long-term direction	Sota is still transitioning from programme-based coordination toward sustained collaborative governance.

Source: Author's synthesis based on the FGD conducted at PLBN Sota on 31 October 2024 and the Merauke Regency Tourism Office & Faculty of Social and Political Sciences 2024).

The findings indicate that collaborative governance in Sota is emerging rather than fully institutionalized. Strong cross-border social relations, stakeholder interdependence, existing interaction forums, and sector-specific coordination provide an enabling foundation for collaboration. However, these practices have not yet consolidated into a permanent governance arrangement with clearly shared rules, sustained collective decision-making, implementation mechanisms, and joint accountability.

3.6 Intermediate Outputs and Planned Directions toward Integrated Border Tourism Governance

The original manuscript described a number of items as collaborative outcomes. The evidence supports a more cautious distinction between documented intermediate practices, consultancy project outputs, and planned development directions. Documented

practices include participatory/sectoral forums, promotion, training, and tourism-product or package activities. The final report also specifies WebGIS development as part of the study's tourism-information workstream. Feasibility studies, master planning, detailed engineering design, large infrastructure investments, recurring capacity-building programs, and multi-source financing are primarily program directions in the report's development matrix and should not be presented as realized governance outcomes.

This classification strengthens the analysis because collaborative governance develops incrementally. A forum or shared spatial-information tool can be an intermediate output when it improves common problem definition, information access, or coordination; its existence does not prove that institutions have adopted shared decision rules or implementation accountability. Likewise, training may reduce capacity asymmetries, but

its governance effect depends on continuity, role clarity, and follow-up. The article therefore treats outputs according to the strongest implementation status supported by the source material.

The case points toward an integrated governance direction rather than a completed collaborative-governance regime. The final report's program matrix links Merauke-Sota tourism development with feasibility and

design work, local festivals, roads and bridges, electricity and telecommunications, water and waste systems, BUMDes/Pokdarwis strengthening, rural branding, marketing, and institutional assistance, drawing on APBD, APBN, APBDes, CSR, and private sources. The value of this matrix is not that all items are accomplished, but that it makes the cross-sector dependency of border tourism explicit.

Table 4. Intermediate Outputs and Planned Governance Directions

Governance Area	Evidence	Status	Governance Meaning
Institutional and spatial planning	The 2024 study produced an institutional assessment, tourism-development recommendations, and geospatial/WebGIS-based planning inputs.	Intermediate output	Provides a common evidence base for coordinated border-tourism planning.
Community and local economic development	Strengthening Pokdarwis, BUMDes, village branding, tourism-product marketing, local products, and border-market activities were identified as development priorities.	Existing practices + planned strengthening	Links tourism development with community participation and local economic benefits.
Infrastructure and environmental support	Road access, tourism facilities, clean water, sanitation, waste management, and environmental protection were identified as necessary supporting interventions.	Primarily planned	Shows that border tourism requires cross-sector coordination beyond the tourism agency.
Promotion and destination development	Tourism packages, local events, product innovation, digital promotion, and stronger border-destination identity were proposed.	Planned / partially initiated	Supports the transition from isolated attractions toward a recognizable border-tourism destination.
Financing and collaborative mechanism	Multi-source financing and stronger coordination among government, communities, border institutions, and other actors were proposed.	Planned governance direction	Requires clearer role allocation, joint implementation, and accountability.
Integrated border-tourism governance	A permanent and integrated governance arrangement has not yet been fully institutionalized.	Long-term direction	Sota is still transitioning from programme-based coordination toward sustained collaborative governance.

Source: Author's synthesis based on the Final Report on the Strategic Pioneer Zone for the Development of Integrated Tourism-Local Economy Institutions in the Merauke-PNG Border Area (2024) and the FGD conducted at PLBN Sota on 31 October 2024.

The evidence indicates that Sota has generated several intermediate outputs, particularly in the form of institutional assessment, stakeholder consultation, spatial-information development, destination identification, and policy recommendations. However, many of the more ambitious components—including integrated infrastructure, community-capacity programs, multi-source financing, destination development, and a permanent collaborative forum—remain planned governance directions rather than realized outcomes. This distinction is analytically important because it suggests that Sota has moved beyond simple recognition of tourism potential, but has not yet reached fully institutionalized collaborative governance. The current stage is better characterized as a transition from evidence-building and program-based coordination toward integrated implementation and joint accountability.

4. CONCLUSION

Sota has substantial potential as a border tourism destination because its international-border location combines state symbolism, cultural villages, natural distinctiveness, recreational attractions, and local economic interaction. The central constraint is governance capacity rather than tourism potential alone. The study identifies enabling but unequal starting conditions, incomplete institutional design, an emerging facilitative-leadership function, collaborative practices that remain partly episodic, and intermediate outputs that have not yet matured into fully institutionalized collaborative outcomes.

The practical implication is that Sota needs a durable governance arrangement that links vertical coordination among government levels and border-related institutions with horizontal collaboration among communities, *Pokdarwis*, businesses, academics, civil society, and other local actors. Clear roles, continued facilitation, community-capacity strengthening, integrated planning, spatial information, infrastructure alignment, and accountable multi-source financing are more important than isolated tourism projects. Community

actors should participate as co-producers of destination governance rather than only as beneficiaries.

The study's theoretical contribution is to show that border identity can function simultaneously as a collaborative incentive and a source of institutional complexity. In a peripheral border destination, the same territorial condition that creates tourism value also broadens the number of policy domains and actors that must be coordinated. This makes bridging leadership and multi-level coordination especially important for translating tourism potential into locally embedded development.

This study has several limitations. It is a single case and therefore supports analytical transfer rather than statistical generalization. The participant evidence rests on one documented FGD whose archived transcript does not provide a complete attendance roster and contains AI-transcription noise; only speaker roles that could be identified with sufficient confidence were coded, and claims were paraphrased. Much of the additional evidence comes from a government-university consultancy report and administrative datasets, creating a risk of conflating empirical diagnosis with program recommendations; the analysis addressed this by triangulating sources and separating documented practices from planned directions. The archive also does not provide a separate ethics-committee approval number for the consultancy material. Future research should use a purpose-built interview/observation protocol, preserve an auditable participant log and consent record, follow implementation longitudinally, and compare Sota with other Indonesian border destinations

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