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#### Research Paper

## Sustainable Synergy Governance and Community Agency in Pokland Asset-Based Ecotourism

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of community agency through the Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS) scheme in Wana Wisata Pokland, Cianjur. Using a qualitative case study approach informed by the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, this research explores the role of institutional legality in shaping empowerment processes. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 30 informants and validated through triangulation and member checking. The findings suggest that the KUPS scheme has facilitated the reconfiguration of forest space into value-added environmental services, contributing to improved livelihood stability and enhanced community participation. In addition, many informants reported experiencing psychological empowerment through formal recognition of their roles as ecotourism leader. The study also identifies several challenges, including uneven benefit distribution, risks of internal elitism, and environmental management issues such as waste handling during peak tourism periods. While studies on community-based tourism (CBT) are well established, a theoretical gap remains in understanding how community identity transforms from forest encroachers into formally recognized conservation partners under state-regulated frameworks. This study proposes the Sustainable Synergy Governance Model as a conceptual framework that integrates local asset mobilization with institutional mechanisms, highlighting the importance of balancing conservation objectives with community-based economic resilience.

**Keywords:** *Community-Based Ecotourism, Asset-Based Community Development, Social Forestry, Community Empowerment, Sustainable Synergy.*

*Declaration of Conflict of Interest:* The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based ecotourism has emerged as a critical strategic framework for reconciling environmental conservation with rural economic resilience. In various developing nations, this model is positioned as a mechanism to enhance local welfare while maintaining ecological integrity (Scheyvens & Watt, 2021; Cossengue et al., 2025). However, the implementation of community-based tourism (CBT) often encounters significant friction in state-managed forest zones where rigid conservation mandates frequently clash with the subsistence needs of local inhabitants (Zielinski et al., 2020; Revida et al., 2021; Saefullah et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, this tension is particularly evident in forest areas managed by to informal or illegal forest extraction. The introduction of the Social Forestry policy, specifically through the Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS) scheme, marks a transformative institutional shift. By providing legal recognition and conditional access, the state effectively pivots the community's role from external encroachers to formal conservation partners. This evolution aligns with the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, which focuses on mobilizing internal social and physical capital as a primary catalyst for sustainable growth (Green & Haines, 2016; Magboo-Campo, & Bayben-De Guzman, 2024; Dawson & Angelstam, 2026).

Despite the proliferation of CBT literature, a theoretical gap persists regarding the specific psychological and political pathways that enable former illegal forest users to transition into formalized ecotourism Leader within a state-regulated environment (Zielinski et al., 2020). Most studies focus on broad economic outcomes, often overlooking how legal-institutional frameworks like the KUPS decree reconfigure community agency. This study fills this void by analyzing the unique synergy between local asset optimization and formal governance in Wana Wisata Pokland, Cianjur.

This study provides a unique contribution by synthesizing natural, cultural, and social assets through an inclusive management lens. It seeks to uncover how the KUPS scheme serves as a legal bridge, granting management rights that harmonize economic resilience with ecological preservation (Castro-arce & Vanclay, 2020). Specifically, this research addresses the following questions:

1. How does the legal-institutional framework of the KUPS scheme facilitate the shift in community agency from extractive forest use to formalized environmental stewardship?
2. How are local assets reconfigured to meet both conservation mandates and community economic interests within state-regulated forest zones?
3. In what ways do multidimensional empowerment dynamics, specifically psychological and political to mitigate risks of elitism and sustain community-led ecotourism?

By addressing these research questions, this study contributes to the global discourse on sustainable tourism by highlighting the role of legal-institutional mechanisms in activating asset-based development within constrained governance settings. Unlike previous studies that focus solely on economic outputs, this research offers a nuanced understanding of the transformation pathway from extractive forest use to conservation-oriented stewardship. Ultimately, the findings are expected to provide a replicable framework for policy-makers and practitioners in managing community-led ecotourism within state-protected buffer zones, ensuring that local empowerment remains the cornerstone of environmental sustainability.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Linking Local Assets to Institutional Legitimacy*

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach emphasizes that sustainable development should be driven by the mobilization of local assets, including social, natural, and physical

capital (Green & Haines, 2016; Magboo-Campo, & Bayben-De Guzman, 2024). Within the context of ecotourism, this perspective has been widely adopted to explain how communities can generate economic value by leveraging endogenous resources rather than relying on external interventions (Cossengue et al., 2025).

While previous studies emphasize the strengths of ABCD in mobilizing local assets, several scholars argue that it tends to overlook structural and institutional constraints. This study addresses this limitation by integrating governance perspectives into the analysis. However, while the ABCD approach provides a strong foundation for understanding local capacity, it tends to assume that communities possess sufficient autonomy to utilize their assets effectively. This assumption becomes problematic in highly regulated environments such as state-managed forests, where access to resources is not solely determined by community initiative but is constrained by institutional authority and legal frameworks (Kayat & Zainuddin, 2016; Yanes et al., 2019). In such contexts, local assets often remain latent or underutilized due to the absence of formal recognition and secure access rights (Toda et al., 2023).

This limitation highlights the need to extend the ABCD framework by incorporating institutional dimensions. In this study, the Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS) scheme is conceptualized as a critical legal mechanism that enables the transformation of latent assets into formal economic opportunities. By granting conditional access and management rights, KUPS does not merely facilitate economic activity but also restructures the relationship between communities and forest governance systems.

## *2.2. Multidimensional Empowerment in Constrained Governance Contexts*

Community empowerment in tourism has been widely conceptualized as a multidimensional process encompassing economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions (Scheyvens & Watt, 2021). From this perspective, successful ecotourism development is not limited to income generation but also involves increased self-confidence, strengthened social cohesion, and enhanced participation in decision-making processes.

Despite its comprehensive framework, existing empowerment literature often overlooks the structural constraints imposed by governance systems. Many studies assume that participation alone is sufficient to generate empowerment outcomes, without adequately considering how regulatory environments may limit or shape community agency (Hassan et al., 2026).

In the context of state-regulated forest areas, empowerment is inherently linked to the degree of political access and institutional recognition available to local communities. Without legal legitimacy, economic and social empowerment may remain fragile or unsustainable. Therefore, this study extends the multidimensional empowerment framework by emphasizing the role of political empowerment as a foundational dimension that enables other forms of empowerment to emerge and persist.

## *2.3. Institutional Mechanisms and the Transformation of Community Agency*

A growing body of literature has highlighted the importance of institutional arrangements in shaping community-based tourism outcomes. Governance structures, policy frameworks, and legal instruments play a crucial role in determining whether local communities can effectively participate in and benefit from tourism development (Revida et al., 2021; Saefullah et al., 2022).

However, previous studies have largely treated institutional factors as external conditions rather than as active mechanisms that transform community roles and identities. In particular, limited attention has been given to how legal access frameworks can facilitate a transition from informal or extractive practices to formal and conservation-oriented livelihoods.

#### 2.4. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the synthesis of the theoretical perspectives discussed above, this study proposes a conceptual framework that explains the interaction between local assets, institutional mechanisms, and community empowerment within a state-regulated forest context. The framework posits that local assets (social, natural, and cultural capital) serve as the foundational inputs for ecotourism development. However, these assets require institutional facilitation through legal mechanisms such as the KUPS scheme to become productive and sustainable (Toda et al., 2023). Through this process, community agency is transformed from informal resource use toward formal ecotourism management. This transformation leads to multidimensional empowerment outcomes, encompassing economic improvement, psychological recognition, social cohesion, and political participation (Scheyvens & Watt, 2021; Turcinovic et al., 2025; Afsar et al., 2026). Ultimately, the interaction between these elements results in the emergence of a Sustainable Synergy Governance model, in which conservation and community welfare are integrated into a mutually reinforcing system, echoing similar institutional challenges and opportunities found in Southeast Asian recreation forest governance (Cossengue et al., 2025; Carias et al., 2025; Durrah et al., 2026). To provide a clear scientific position, this research evaluates its contribution against existing literature as summarized in Table 1.

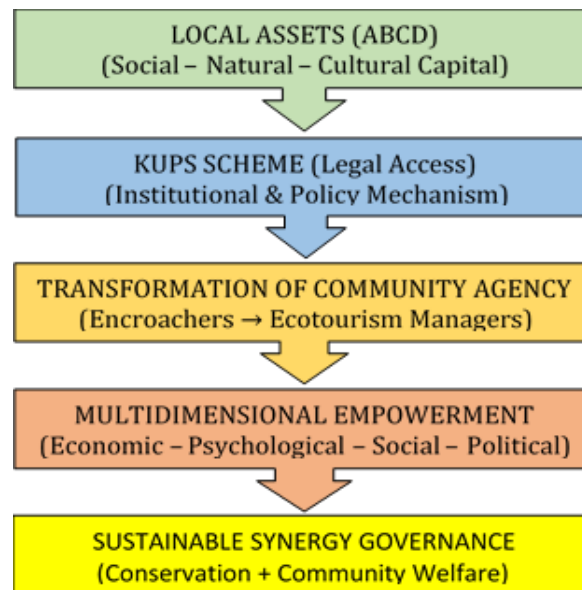
**Table 1.** Theoretical Positioning and Novelty of the Study

Author (Year)	Core Focus	Key Findings	Research Gap
Toda et al., (2023)	Social Capital	Focuses on how social capital influences general forest management.	Examines the specific transformation from "forest encroacher" to "ecotourism Leader."
Parpudian et al., (2025)	Conservation Behaviour	Explores the link between tourism support and conservation intent.	Details the KUPS business group as a specific legal tool for psychological empowerment.
Magboo-Campo, and Bayben-De Guzman, (2024)	ABCD Approach	Identifies physical village assets as drivers of ecotourism.	Integrates physical assets with the strengthening of organizational capacity within state-owned land.
Bhatt et al., (2026)	Agency Transformation	Optimization of social/physical capital in state forest buffer zones.	Reveals the legal-institutional mechanisms of state owned land that have been largely underexplored in global CBT discourse.

This study addresses this gap by positioning the KUPS scheme as an institutional mechanism that actively reshapes community agency. Rather than viewing communities as passive beneficiaries of policy, this research conceptualizes them as dynamic actors whose roles evolve through interaction with governance structures. The transition from forest encroachers to ecotourism Leader represents a fundamental shift in both economic function and social identity, which cannot be fully explained by asset-based or participation-based approaches alone.

Local assets serve as the foundational input for ecotourism development. However, within state-managed forest areas, these assets require institutional facilitation through legal mechanisms such as the KUPS scheme. This institutional support enables the transformation of community agency from informal forest users into ecotourism leader (Hassan et al., 2026).

This transformation subsequently generates multidimensional empowerment outcomes, including economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions. Ultimately, this process leads to the emergence of a Sustainable Synergy Governance model as illustrated in Figure 1, where conservation objectives and community welfare are mutually reinforcing.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of Sustainable Synergy Governance  
Source: Developed by Author (2026)

Building upon the integration of ABCD and multidimensional empowerment theories, this study proposes a Sustainable Synergy Governance model that emphasizes the alignment between conservation objectives and community welfare. Unlike conventional community-based tourism models, which often assume a natural compatibility between environmental protection and economic development, this framework recognizes the inherent tensions within state-regulated forest systems.

The concept of synergy in this study refers to a condition in which conservation and livelihood objectives are not only balanced but mutually reinforcing. Achieving this condition requires a structured institutional approach that integrates legal access, economic incentives, and inclusive governance mechanisms. Without such integration, community-based ecotourism initiatives remain vulnerable to challenges such as elite capture, unequal benefit distribution, and unsustainable resource use (Hassan et al., 2026; Carias et al., 2025). Thus, this study contributes to the literature by proposing a governance-oriented perspective on ecotourism empowerment, where institutional design plays a central role in enabling sustainable development outcomes.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study employs an intrinsic qualitative case study design to gain a profound understanding of the specific transformation within Wana Wisata Pokland. To ensure the systematic exploration of these phenomena, the researchers developed a structured thematic inquiry based on the ABCD and empowerment frameworks (Please refer to the Appendix 1 for the detailed interview guide). Unlike instrumental cases, an intrinsic approach prioritizes the uniqueness of the site as a bounded system where the KUPS scheme operates. To ensure the integrity of the qualitative process, the researchers acknowledge their positionality as academic observers with expertise in tourism management. Throughout the field study, the researchers maintained a critical distance, ensuring that their professional backgrounds did not influence the informants' responses, thereby minimizing bias and ensuring that the community's authentic voice remained central to the findings.

### 3.2. Informant Selection Procedure

Data were gathered through purposive and snowball sampling, involving 30 key informants. To address the need for selection precision, informants were categorized based on three specific criteria: (1) tenure of involvement in forest use (minimum 5 years), (2) formal membership in the LMDH or KUPS organizational structure, and (3) direct roles in ecotourism operations. To ensure transparency and rigor in the data collection process, the characteristics of the informants involved in this study are presented in Table 2. The selection was based on their direct involvement in the KUPS-based ecotourism initiative, as well as their capacity to provide diverse perspectives across community and institutional levels.

As shown in Table 2, the informants represent various stakeholder groups, including community members, local leaders, and institutional actors. This diversity allows the study to capture multiple perspectives and reduces the risk of bias from a single source of information. To address potential power imbalances, interviews were conducted individually, ensuring that each informant could express their views independently.

This approach is consistent with qualitative research principles that emphasize credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The primary data collection involved in-depth interviews using a semi-structured guide designed to capture the nuances of community transformation (Refer to the Appendix 1)

To manage power imbalances and competing interests particularly between the Perhutani authorities and former forest encroachers. Interviews were conducted in neutral, informal settings. This "safe space" allowed marginalized community members to speak freely about institutional tensions without fear of professional repercussions (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the researchers utilized triangulation of sources to cross-verify claims made by different stakeholder groups, ensuring a balanced representation of the social hierarchy (Miles et al., 2014).

**Table 2.** Profile of Research Informants

Code	Role	Stakeholder Category	Experience (Years)	Involvement in KUPS
I1	Ecotourism Leader	Community (KUPS)	5	Planning and operational management
I2	KUPS Leader	Community (KUPS)	6	Coordination and decision-making
I3	Local Community Member	Resident	3	Daily operational activities
I4	Tourism Worker	Community	2	Service and visitor management
I5	Perhutani Officer	Government	7	Supervision and policy implementation
I6	Village Official	Local Government	5	Institutional support and facilitation
I7	Community Elder	Informal Leader	10	Cultural and social guidance

### 3.3. Data Collection and Timeline

The field research was executed in two strategic phases to ensure data depth and responsiveness to the peer-review process. The primary data collection was conducted from June to October 2025, focusing on the initial identification of asset mobilization and the transformation of community agency. During this phase, researchers utilized a semi-structured interview instrument to ensure consistency and depth across all informant groups (Refer to the Appendix 1). Following the preliminary feedback from reviewers, a follow-up field study was carried out in late February 2026. This second phase served as a longitudinal validation to capture the most recent developments in the KUPS management structure and to perform rigorous member-checking procedures. This multi-phase approach ensures that the

findings reflect both the foundational transition and the current operational stability of Wana Wisata Pokland.

### 3.4. Data Analysis and Validity Measures

The analysis followed the thematic framework involving data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing (Creswell & Poth, 2024). To ensure the rigor of the qualitative inquiry, the data analysis and validation processes were conducted systematically. The following matrix outlines the stages of thematic analysis integrated with specific validity measures to address potential research bias.

In this study, qualitative descriptors such as most informants or the majority are used to represent recurring patterns identified through thematic coding. The coding process was directly aligned with the thematic sections of the research instrument, ensuring that the findings addressed the core dimensions of the Sustainable Synergy Governance model (See Appendix 1). These expressions do not imply statistical generalization but rather reflect the relative prominence of specific perspectives within the dataset (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2024).

The matrix in Table 3 illustrates that the validation process was not merely a final step but was embedded throughout the research duration. By employing member checking as a primary validity tool, the researchers ensured that the findings accurately represent the lived experiences of the Haurwangi community. This systematic approach effectively addresses the reviewer's concerns regarding the precision of informant perspectives and the management of power imbalances during the data interpretation phase.

**Table 3.** Qualitative Data Analysis and Research Validation Matrix

Stage of Analysis	Activity Description	Validity & Reliability Measure
<b>Data Condensation</b>	Sorting, focusing, and simplifying field notes from interviews and observations.	Source Triangulation: Cross-verifying information between Perhutani officials, KUPS leader, and community members.
<b>Data Display</b>	Organizing compressed data into thematic networks related to ABCD and empowerment.	Peer Debriefing: Discussing emerging themes with academic colleagues to ensure objective interpretation.
<b>Conclusion Drawing</b>	Identifying patterns in agency transformation and the Sustainable Synergy model.	Rich Thick Description: Providing detailed context of the Pokland forest to allow for transferability.
<b>Final Validation</b>	Presenting interpreted data back to the primary stakeholders.	Member Checking (Primary): Conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with KUPS leaders to confirm the accuracy of findings.

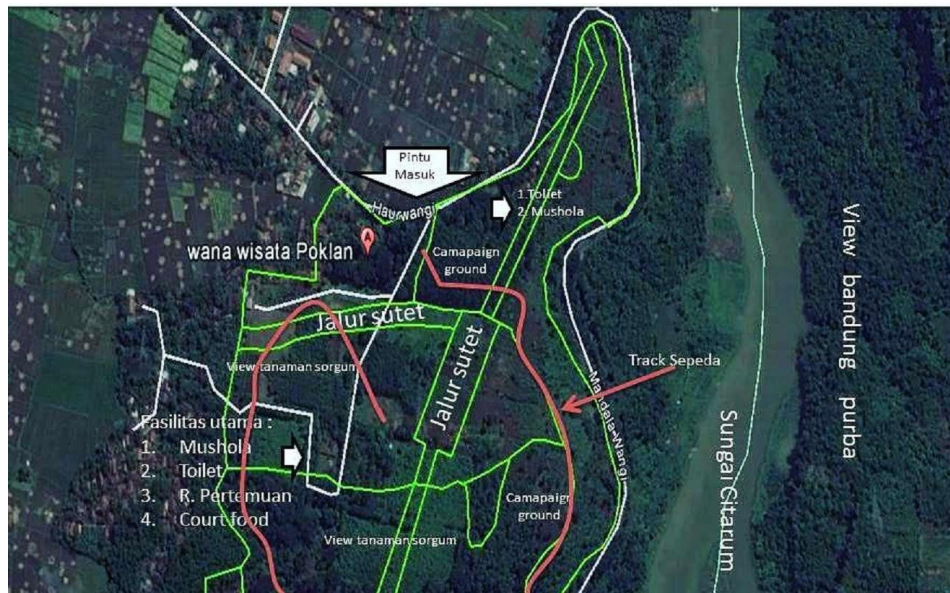
Source: Processed Research Data (2026)

## 4. RESULT

### 4.1. Identification and Configuration of Local Assets

The initial phase of the research, utilizing the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, identified that Wana Wisata Pokland possesses significant latent capital. The integration of the pine forest with local cultural identities serves as a primary asset that was previously underutilized due to tenure conflicts (Green & Haines, 2016). Based on field observations, these assets were reconfigured from extractive sites into environmental service zones, a transformation that is clearly visualized in the spatial layout of the area. As illustrated in the Figure 2, the 30-hectare forest has been strategically partitioned into functional zones, including dedicated camping grounds, cycling tracks, and educational areas. Infrastructure development is clustered near the entrance to include essential facilities such as a meeting hall, a food court, and prayer rooms, which directly facilitates the

diversification of local livelihoods from timber extraction to service-based tourism. This layout demonstrates how the community, under the KUPS legal framework, effectively mobilizes natural and physical capital while maintaining ecological integrity by leveraging existing landscape features such as the views of the Citarum River and *Bandung Purba*.



**Figure 2.** Spatial configuration and facility zoning of Wana Wisata Pokland  
Source : Instagram pokland (2025)

Based on field observations, these assets were reconfigured from extractive sites into environmental service zones. This shift is fundamentally reflected in the changed perceptions of the local community regarding forest value. As one informant noted:

*"Initially, the forest was only a source of wood, often taken without permits. Now, we see the standing trees as our 'capital' for tourism. Protecting them means protecting our livelihood."* (I1, Leader).

This evidence confirms that asset transformation in Pokland involves not only spatial reconfiguration but also a profound shift in mindset, moving from extractive practices to value-added utilization (Gayo et al., 2025).

#### 4.2. The Role of KUPS in Legal and Agency Transformation

The implementation of the Social Forestry Business Group (KUPS) scheme has functioned as a critical legal bridge by providing management rights, the state effectively transformed the community's role from encroachers to formal conservation partners. However, this transition was not without internal friction:

*"In the beginning, many were skeptical. They were used to the quick cash from timber. It took nearly a year of meetings to convince everyone that ecotourism offers more stable, long-term security."* (I4, KUPS Member).

The formalization of agency through the KUPS decree has fostered a sense of professional identity. Empirically, 93% of informants reported a heightened sense of psychological empowerment and social recognition, as they are now legally recognized actors within the state forest governance structure.

### 4.3. Economic Outcomes

The economic viability of this model is evidenced by the data in Table 4. To ensure data reliability and address reviewer concerns, these figures originally sourced from the KUPS management cash book were cross-verified through interviews with the KUPS treasurer and direct field surveys of 30 local vendors.

**Table 4.** Economic Impact of Ecotourism Formalization

Indicator	Before KUPS (Extractive)	After KUPS (Ecotourism)	Change (%)
Average Monthly Household Income	< IDR 1,250,000	> IDR 1,800,000	+80%
Employment Type	Informal/Seasonal	Structured/Service-based	High Stability
Secondary Income Sources	Illegal Logging / Foraging / Rain-fed Agriculture / Small-scale Hunting	Culinary/Photography/ Guiding / Craft & Souvenir	Diversified

Source: Processed Research Data (2026)

The data presented in Table 4 illustrates a structural shift in the community's economic landscape, categorized into three key indicators, which are:

1. Average monthly household income, the transition from extractive forest activities to structured ecotourism has resulted in a substantial income increase of 80%. This growth suggests that the environmental services sector in Pokland provides a higher and more consistent economic yield compared to the previous informal and often illegal timber extraction.
2. Employment type, there is a clear formalization of labor. Previously, community members relied on seasonal and high-risk informal work. Under the KUPS framework, they have transitioned into service-based roles such as management, culinary hosting, and professional guiding, which offer greater long-term professional stability.
3. Secondary income sources, ecotourism has catalyzed a diversification of livelihoods. Instead of relying solely on forest products, households have developed a multi-incomes structure by integrating traditional agriculture with modern tourism-related businesses, such as creative photography zones and culinary stalls.

Furthermore, the study observed that empowerment was not limited to economic gains but also extended to how the community perceived their role within the forest landscape. The psychological transformation of the community was captured through targeted questions regarding professional identity and social pride. As outlined in the multidimensional empowerment section of the interview instrument (Refer to the Appendix 1, Part III), informants consistently highlighted their shift from encroachers to formal partners. This shift is a crucial indicator of psychological ownership over the conservation goals.

This economic resilience is further evidenced by the reliability of the management cash book, which has been cross-verified through direct observations of daily transaction flows. As confirmed by a local food vendor:

*"My daily earnings are now more predictable. I no longer have to worry about seasonal crop failures to pay for my children's education."* (I3, Local Vendor).

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Reconfiguring Attractions as Agency Shifters

Unlike standard descriptive accounts, the physical attractions in Pokland (e.g., thematic zones) are analyzed as instruments of behavioral modification. By creating value-added utilization of the forest, the community redirects its labor from timber extraction toward service provision. This synchronization of natural assets and social capital reflects the core of the ABCD framework, where internal mobilization reduces external dependency (Green & Haines, 2016). These findings challenge the assumption within ABCD literature that local assets alone are sufficient to generate sustainable outcomes, highlighting instead the critical role of institutional mediation.

### 5.2 Critical Reflection on Institutional Tensions and Limitations

To ensure objective reporting, this study acknowledges critical limitations. The participatory model in a state forest buffer zone is inherently contested. Some informants expressed concerns regarding elitism:

*"Sometimes we feel that the benefits are more accessible to those who were already in the core leadership circle from the start."* (I2, Community Member).

These findings in line with Hassan et al., (2026) stated that community-based initiatives may inadvertently reproduce internal inequalities. Furthermore, ecological challenges such as waste management indicate a gap between increased environmental awareness and operational implementation (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024).

### 5.3 Scientific Positioning and the Sustainable Synergy Model

The integration of these findings with global literature (see Table 5) indicates that Pokland's transformation aligns with models of inclusive policy effectiveness in developing countries. The synthesis presented in Table 5 demonstrates that the findings from Wana Wisata Pokland are consistent with global trends in community-based forest management, yet offer unique institutional insights. The 80% income stabilization aligns with the framework of Scheyvens and Watt, (2021) and Gayo et al. (2025), proving that ecotourism serves as a viable alternative to extractive industries. Furthermore, the synchronization of legal-institutional bridges (the KUPS scheme) with local agency addresses the governance gaps highlighted by Hassan et al. (2026). By comparing these dimensions, it is evident that the 'Sustainable Synergy Governance' model developed in this study provides a robust solution for balancing state conservation mandates with local economic empowerment in national park buffer zones (Cossengue et al. 2025).

**Table 5.** Comparison of Research Findings with Global Literature

Dimension	Comparative Literature	Synthesis of Findings
<b>Economic Resilience</b>	Scheyvens and Watt, (2021)	Transition from extractive to environmental services increases income stability by 80%.
<b>Psychological Agency</b>	Hassan et al., (2026)	Legal recognition (KUPS) is a prerequisite for authentic psychological empowerment.
<b>Institutional Governance</b>	Cossengue et al., (2025)	The Sustainable Synergy model mitigates conflict between state mandates and local needs.

Source: Author's Synthesis and Analysis (2026)

The Sustainable Synergy Governance Model as its primary theoretical contribution. Unlike conventional CBT models that often struggle with land legality, the Pokland case demonstrates that

state-managed land can become a productive space for empowerment when community agency is formalized through institutional recognition.

This study culminates in a theoretical synthesis that bridges the gap between bottom-up mobilization and top-down institutionalization. The Pokland case presents a significant theoretical confrontation to the classical Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model. While traditional ABCD (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993; Magboo-Campo, & Bayben-De Guzman, 2024) posits that internal asset mobilization is the primary driver of community agency, our findings reveal that in state-managed forest contexts, internal assets remain 'latent' and 'informal' without a legal bridge. By integrating the KUPS governance scheme, this research reconceptualizes community agency not merely as a social-psychological state, but as an institutionalized agency. Therefore, this study argues that the success of sustainable ecotourism depends on synergy governance, where institutional mediation (state-granted legality) acts as the catalyst that transforms local social capital into formal economic power.

Importantly, the study identifies viable mitigation strategies that reconcile cultural safeguarding with enhanced tourist experiences. The findings highlight the effectiveness of interpretive, community-led, and reflexive tourism models in reducing cultural distortion while deepening visitor engagement. Meaningful tourist experiences emerge when narratives are contextualized, ethically mediated, and co-created with local communities, shifting the emphasis from spectacle to understanding. Such approaches not only mitigate the negative effects of exoticization but also reposition authenticity as relational and educational value, thereby supporting both cultural sustainability and experiential quality.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the transformation of community agency in Wana Wisata Pokland is not merely a natural by product of local asset mobilization, but a result of a deliberate synergy between community capacity and institutional legality. By integrating the KUPS (Social Forestry Business Group) scheme, the community successfully transitioned from informal forest users often perceived as encroachers into formally recognized conservation partners.

Theoretically, this research significantly contributes to the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) discourse by addressing its inherent limitations regarding structural constraints. While traditional ABCD emphasizes endogenous growth, this study introduces the concept of institutionalized agency, arguing that in highly regulated state-managed landscapes, local assets require a 'legal bridge' to achieve sustainable outcomes. These findings suggest that synergy governance and the mediation between bottom-up mobilization and top-down institutionalization are the essential catalyst for transforming latent social capital into formal economic and political power.

From a policy perspective, these findings offer several strategic recommendations. First, the government should view social forestry licensing, such as the KUPS decree, not merely as an administrative requirement but as a fundamental tool for psychological and social empowerment. Second, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, along with regional tourism boards, should prioritize long-term technical assistance in professional hospitality and digital management to ensure the community can manage their formalized assets effectively. Third, to prevent internal elitism and ensure environmental resilience, policy frameworks must incorporate strict monitoring mechanisms regarding waste management and ecological carrying capacity as a prerequisite for license renewals.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited to a single qualitative case study in the specific context of West Java. The nuances of community-state synergy may vary in different cultural and geographical settings. Future research should explore the generalizability of the Synergy Governance model across

diverse social forestry sites in Indonesia or other developing nations to further refine the global understanding of sustainable community-based ecotourism.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS (CRediT)

**Ridwan Iskandar:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

**Retno Budi Wahyuni:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Review & Editing.

**Nandang Suhada Yasir M:** Formal analysis, Data Curation, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.

**Moch Agus Syadad Saefullah:** Investigation, Resources, Software, Visualization.

**Odang Rusmana:** Validation, Investigation, Data Curation.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with their current organization, NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic, or any other parties regarding the publication of this research. We further certify that no unethical practices were followed during the study; the manuscript is an original work free from plagiarism, and the research did not involve any animal or human medical testing. All individuals who have made significant contributions to the conceptualization, data collection, and analysis of this study are listed as authors, while those providing institutional support have been appropriately recognized in the acknowledgements section. All listed authors have reviewed and approved the final version of this manuscript and agree to be associated with the research findings.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1. Research Instrument: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

This instrument was used to collect qualitative data from various stakeholder groups in Wana Wisata Pokland, including KUPS managers, Perhutani officials, and local community members. The questions were designed to explore asset mobilization, institutional transformation, and multidimensional empowerment.

#### I. Identification and Configuration of Local Assets (ABCD Approach)

1. What were the primary natural and social assets identified in this area before the establishment of Wana Wisata Pokland?
2. How did the community's perception of the forest shift from extractive use to environmental services?
3. What physical or cultural assets were reconfigured to support the current tourism facilities?

#### II. Institutional Legality and Agency Transformation (KUPS Scheme)

1. How has the formal KUPS decree changed your legal standing and role in managing the state forest?
2. What challenges or internal frictions were encountered during the transition from informal forest users to formal conservation partners?
3. Do you feel that legal recognition from the state has increased your professional identity or social pride?

#### III. Multidimensional Empowerment and Economic Impacts

1. How has the formalization of ecotourism affected your household's average monthly income and livelihood stability?
2. In what ways has the community participated in decision-making processes regarding benefit distribution?
3. What are the main challenges regarding internal elitism or environmental management (e.g., waste handling) in the current governance model?