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Article

# Promoting Local Sustainable Development Through Tourism Governance: Advancing Decent Work and Economic Growth Implementing the Eighth Sustainable Development Goal in Wakatobi, Indonesia

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## Abstract

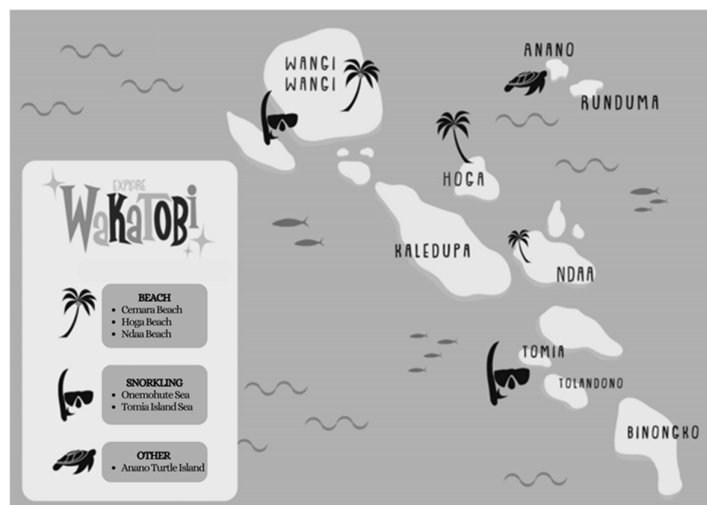
Tourism plays an important role in promoting local sustainable development, particularly in regions with strong cultural identity and significant natural heritage. In Wakatobi, Indonesia, efforts to advance tourism as a driver of decent work and inclusive economic growth in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 have encountered challenges, including top-down policy structures, informal and insecure labor conditions, and limited institutional coordination. This study aims to examine how regional tourism governance can better contribute to decent job creation and sustainable economic outcomes through strengthened institutional evaluation and local community participation. A qualitative case study approach was used, drawing on semi-structured interviews with 25 stakeholders, analysis of policy documents and local news, and field observations. Thematic analysis using NVivo 12 Plus identified key issues such as the dominance of concerns related to labor rights and safety (11.53%), minimal attention to youth employment (3.23%), weak policy implementation (5.6%), and a persistent imbalance between economic productivity narratives and social protection efforts. These findings suggest that tourism governance mechanisms require more contextual, participatory, and community-centered approaches. Strengthening institutional capacity and deepening local engagement are crucial to ensuring that tourism transformation meaningfully supports the achievement of SDG 8 and contributes to equitable and sustainable local development.

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism governance; SDG 8; decent work; local economic development; community participation; tourism policy

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## 1. Introduction

Wakatobi Regency, Indonesia, is a nationally strategic region rich in marine biodiversity and cultural heritage. (1,2), but its tourism management still faces various challenges in achieving decent work and inclusive economic growth in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Eight (3,4). Policy formulation remains top-down with low community participation (5), labor conditions tend to be informal and seasonal (6), and institutional coordination is weak (7). Additionally, environmental impacts caused by unsustainable tourism practices, particularly in coastal areas, further hinder the long-term sustainability of this sector (8).



**Figure 1.** Wakatobi Tourism Graphical Map. Source: Adapted from (9).

Figure 1 illustrates the geographic layout of Wakatobi Regency, comprising four main islands Wangi-Wangi, Kaledupa, Tomia, and Binongko—which form a strategic coastal and marine corridor in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. The map highlights the region's status as both a national park and a designated super-priority tourism area. Its ecological richness, including coral reefs and endemic marine species, underscores the importance of integrated spatial planning in tourism governance. Understanding this geographic context is essential for analyzing spatial disparities in infrastructure, employment distribution, and community access to tourism benefits.

To strengthen governance and support the achievement of SDG Eight, several solutions have been proposed: encouraging multi-stakeholder participation in tourism governance (10), developing green infrastructure and environmentally friendly accommodation (11), and enhancing community capacity through training and human resource development (12). The integration of innovative policies based on digital technology and participatory approaches is expected to bridge the gap between planning and implementation. By prioritizing workforce development and environmental resilience, Wakatobi has the potential to become a local model for implementing global development goals.

The implementation of SDG Eight in Wakatobi, which emphasizes sustainable economic growth and decent work, still faces structural challenges in its tourism sector. Although this region has been designated a super-priority destination and boasts high ecological wealth, its tourism management strategy remains incomplete and lacks community participation and environmental sustainability (5,6). Economic benefits are not evenly distributed due to limited access to financial institutions, technological support, and regulations that do not favor local communities (13). Additionally, pressure on the environment and cultural heritage reinforces the urgency for more inclusive and sustainable governance (14).

In this context, several research and institutional gaps are highlighted. There are no comprehensive indicators to measure the effectiveness of green economic policies in Wakatobi (5), while the roles of institutions such as the BOP, TNW, and local government tend to be fragmented, leading to conflicts over access and authority (15,16). Key questions that need to be addressed include: How is SDG Eight applied in the context of Wakatobi tourism?; What is the configuration of tourism policies and institutions in this region?; How is the model of sustainable tourism governance implemented regionally?; and How can tourism job creation strategies be optimized at the local level?

Previous studies have highlighted various dynamics: from evaluations of tourism policies and the green economy (5,6), the socio-ecological impacts of ecotourism practices (16), the dominance of institutional actors and regulatory conflicts [8], to the challenges of community involvement in tourism marketing (13). This study is important as a basis for developing an adaptive governance

model based on local empowerment. A collaborative approach and strengthening community social capital are considered potential strategies in promoting governance transformation towards sustainability and economic justice (10,16).

This research focuses on the development of sustainable tourism in Indonesia through participatory approaches, collaborative governance, and environmental conservation to promote economic growth and decent employment. Its objectives include: analyzing sustainable tourism practices (14,17), exploring the role of community empowerment in tourism management and marketing (5,18,19), evaluating policy and institutional frameworks that support sustainable development (20–22), and examining innovative approaches such as green tourism and eco-innovation (23). The literature highlights the importance of direct community involvement in tourism marketing and management, as well as the need for policies that integrate conservation, social inclusion, and economic empowerment.

This research presents novelty through the application of a community-based strategic approach and technology in strengthening tourism governance in Indonesia. This approach emphasizes cross-sectoral policy integration, ecotourism innovation (11), and the utilization of social capital (10,18) to address economic inequality and ecological pressure. Additionally, this research highlights the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model as an inclusive strategy that can improve local well-being (21), while aligning tourism practices with the SDGs. With this contribution, the research is relevant for policymakers and institutional actors in designing transformative strategies toward fair and sustainable tourism.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for understanding the contribution of regional sustainable tourism governance to employment creation can be grounded in the concept of “relational work” from economic sociology (24–26). This approach emphasizes the importance of the diverse and complex relationships within small-scale tourism enterprises, which are central actors in rural labor markets (26). These enterprises facilitate job opportunities, sustained business relationships, and resilient work relationships, contributing significantly to SDG Eight (26). The framework involves analyzing the boundary work between various types of relationships in the tourism labor market, such as formal and informal, professional and personal, and marketized and non-marketized work relationships.

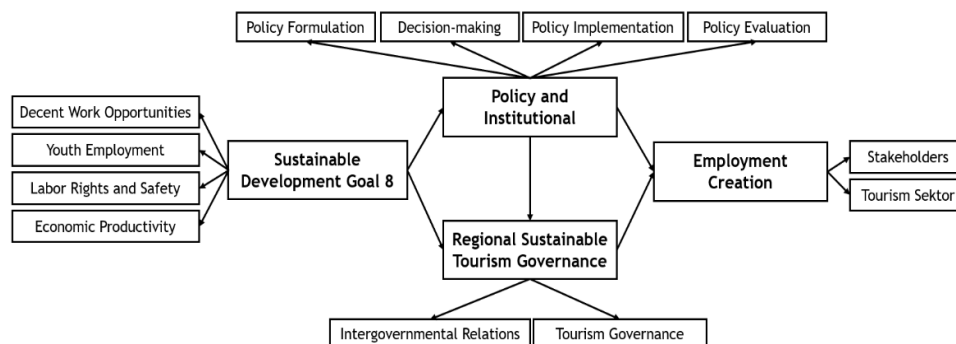
Another critical aspect of the theoretical framework is sustainable human resource management (HRM) (27). This approach focuses on ensuring that tourism employment is sustainable and decent, aligning with the goals of SDG Eight (28,29). Sustainable HRM involves engaging multiple stakeholders at various scales to comprehensively address the sustainability of tourism employment (30). This includes implementing policies and practices that promote decent work conditions, fair wages, and job security, essential for achieving sustainable economic growth and full employment in the tourism sector.

The governance and policy-making framework for sustainable tourism is also crucial. This framework involves understanding the complex interplay of various policy initiatives and governance structures that influence regional tourism (31,32). For instance, New South Wales, Australia's case study, highlights the importance of destination management planning as a framework to drive sustainable tourism outcomes (33). This approach ensures that tourism governance is aligned with sustainable development principles, promoting economic growth and employment while preserving environmental and cultural resources.

The CBT is an innovative approach that places local communities at the center of tourism development (34). This model aligns with SDG Eight by fostering inclusive economic growth, empowering marginalized communities, and promoting cultural and environmental sustainability (35). CBT generates sustainable livelihoods, preserves cultural heritage, and addresses governance challenges, making it a vital component of the theoretical framework for sustainable tourism governance (36,37). By involving local communities in tourism planning and decision-making, CBT

ensures that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed, contributing to employment creation and poverty alleviation.

Inclusive tourism governance is another important element of the theoretical framework (38). This approach integrates sustainable practices in the tourism sector by engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, suppliers, and local communities (39,40). Inclusive tourism governance promotes sustainable consumption and production, responsible resource use, and inclusive economic growth, which aligns with the broader goal of sustainable development (41). This approach ensures sustainable tourism development and contributes to job creation and economic growth by fostering stakeholder collaboration.



**Figure 2.** Theoretical framework for managing regional sustainable tourism to create jobs. Source: Adapted from (26,30,33,35,41).

Figure 2 presents a theoretical framework that highlights the role of regional sustainable tourism governance in job creation. The framework illustrates the interrelated elements of policy-making and institutional strategies that support SDG Eight, which emphasizes decent work opportunities, youth employment, workers' rights, workplace safety, and economic productivity. The framework covers stages such as policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation and shows their implications for tourism governance. It also highlights how stakeholder engagement and active participation of the tourism sector contribute to sustainable job creation. This visual serves as a comprehensive guide to understanding how an effective governance framework can promote sustainable job creation in tourism.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design and Approach

This research employs a qualitative, exploratory case study approach to understand complex governance processes (42,43) and their impact on sustainable employment in tourism. The choice of qualitative methods stems from the study's aim to explore perceptions, experiences, and institutional relationships that cannot be adequately captured through purely quantitative approaches (44,45). The case study design is particularly appropriate given the need for an in-depth investigation of regional governance in a specific socio-cultural and economic context: Wakatobi, Indonesia. A qualitative case study facilitates the exploration of how policy frameworks, stakeholder interactions, and local governance mechanisms influence the capacity of tourism to generate employment that aligns with SDG Eight objectives. This approach enables the examination of contextual specificities and supports theory-building grounded in real-world dynamics.

#### 3.2. Study Site: Wakatobi as a Strategic Case

Wakatobi is a regency located in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, comprising four main islands and designated as both a national park and a marine biodiversity hotspot. It is internationally

recognized for its rich marine ecosystems and cultural heritage, making it a prime tourism destination. However, despite its potential, Wakatobi faces various socio-economic challenges, including limited employment diversification, inadequate infrastructure, and weak policy enforcement. The region's dependence on tourism for economic development, coupled with environmental sensitivity, renders it an ideal case for examining the intersection of governance, sustainability, and employment. Wakatobi's tourism sector involves a range of stakeholders, from local communities and tour operators to government agencies and international NGOs, creating a complex governance environment that necessitates empirical investigation.

### 3.3. Population and Sampling Strategy

The study population includes stakeholders who play key roles in Wakatobi's tourism governance and employment generation. These include government officials, tourism entrepreneurs, community leaders, non-governmental organizations, and youth groups involved in tourism-related activities. Given the qualitative nature of the study, purposive sampling was employed to select participants based on their relevance to the research objectives and their ability to provide rich, experience-based insights. In total, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants were selected to ensure representation across various sectors and governance levels. Criteria for inclusion involved (1) direct involvement in tourism planning, management, or operations; (2) a minimum of two years of experience in tourism-related roles in Wakatobi; and (3) willingness to engage in a recorded interview under informed consent protocols. Snowball sampling was also used to identify additional respondents through recommendations by initial interviewees (46,47). This method proved effective in accessing hard-to-reach stakeholders, such as informal workers and community-based tourism actors who may not be registered in official databases but hold valuable contextual knowledge.

### 3.4. Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing for flexibility in the questioning process while maintaining thematic consistency (48). Interview guides were developed based on the study's theoretical framework and included questions on tourism policy implementation, governance structures, institutional barriers, stakeholder participation, and perceptions of decent work. The interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language and Wakatobi local dialects where appropriate, then transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was conducted in settings that ensured participant comfort and privacy. In addition to interviews, policy documents, local government reports, and tourism development plans were analyzed to triangulate data and verify claims made by respondents. Field notes were also maintained to capture non-verbal cues, environmental conditions, and researcher reflections during the fieldwork (49,50). Ethical clearance was obtained prior to fieldwork, and informed consent was secured from all participants (51). Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis was employed to systematically code and interpret qualitative data. This involved several stages:

- a) Familiarization: Researchers thoroughly reviewed transcripts to become immersed in the data.
- b) Initial Coding: Codes were generated using NVivo 12 Plus software, guided by both the theoretical framework and emergent themes from the interviews.
- c) Categorization: Codes were grouped into thematic categories that aligned with the study's research questions—namely, governance practices, employment conditions, stakeholder engagement, and policy implementation.

- d) Pattern Recognition: Relationships and patterns across themes were identified to construct a holistic understanding of the mechanisms through which governance impacts employment.
- e) Interpretation: Themes were analyzed in light of relevant literature to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations.

The use of NVivo 12 Plus software enhanced analytical rigor by enabling the visualization of thematic networks, frequency analysis, and co-occurrence of concepts. This software also facilitated the transparent documentation of coding decisions, increasing the reliability and replicability of the analysis (52,53).

### 3.6. Validity, Reliability, and Triangulation

To ensure the validity of the findings, data triangulation was applied by cross-referencing interview responses with official documents and policy reports (54). Member checking was also conducted by presenting preliminary findings to selected participants for feedback and validation. Reliability was enhanced through a clear audit trail of data collection and analysis procedures, consistent use of coding protocols, and inter-coder verification during the analysis phase. Researcher reflexivity was maintained to minimize bias, with ongoing self-assessment throughout fieldwork and analysis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. SDG Eight in the Context of Wakatobi Tourism

SDG Eight, in the context of tourism in local government, is an important pillar for promoting inclusive economic growth and decent work. Analyzing indicators such as decent job opportunities (28,55), youth employment (56), workers' rights and safety (57), and economic productivity (58) is crucial to ensuring that tourism contributes to the well-being of the community. Local governments must integrate principles of sustainability and social protection into their policies while establishing monitoring systems to ensure efficiency and fairness in the development of the tourism sector.

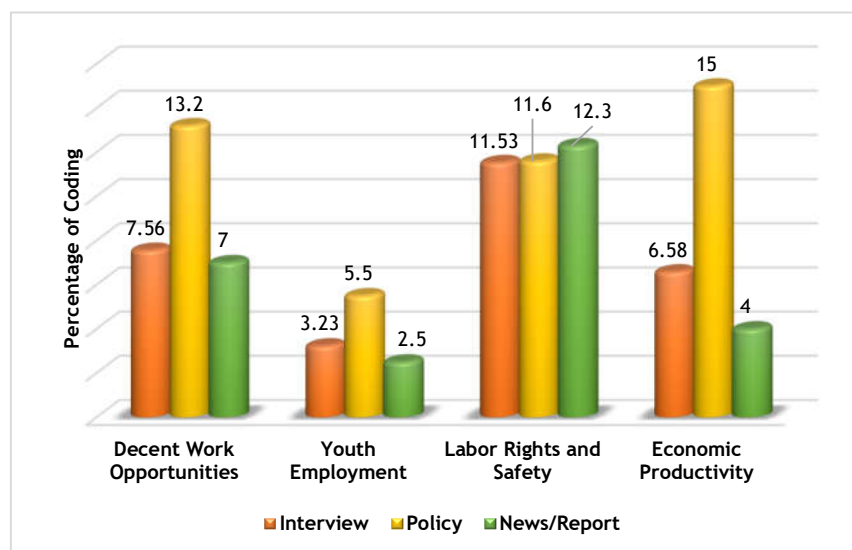


Figure 3. Crosstab analysis of SDG Eight on Wakatobi tourism.

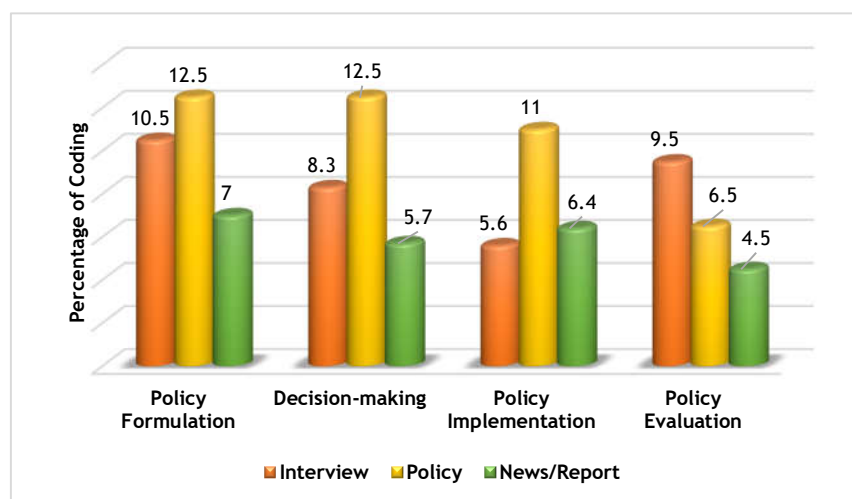
Figure 3 shows the dominance of the issue of “Workers' Rights and Safety” in the discourse on tourism in Wakatobi, reflected in the highest intensity of codes in interviews (11.53 percent) and news sources (12.3 percent). This indicates that the perceptions of field actors highlight the weak protection of informal workers and the lack of social security. The Wakatobi tourism sector is still dominated by

seasonal forms of employment, without clear legal status and adequate labor protection. Although policy documents emphasize a focus on “economic productivity” (15 percent), the imbalance between economic expansion and social protection remains a critical point in the effectiveness of sustainability policies. The gap between policy narratives and practical realities highlights the limited institutional commitment to fair labor dimensions.

On the other hand, the low proportion of “Youth Employment” in interviews (3.23 percent) and news (2.5 percent) indicates that the youth segment has not yet become a strategic part of the tourism work ecosystem. However, according to (56), infrastructure development and local capacity mapping can significantly reduce youth unemployment rates. “Youth involvement should not be merely symbolic but designed as part of the framework for regional economic transformation,” as emphasized in the interview with the head of the tourism division. This disparity highlights the need for new, more progressive, and contextual policy designs, with labor interests as the core of sustainable tourism development.

#### 4.2. Policy and Institutionalization of Tourism in Wakatobi

Tourism policy and institutionalization in local government require analysis of key indicators such as policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and policy evaluation. Contextual and participatory formulation (59,60), inclusive decision-making with stakeholder involvement (61), and inter-agency coordination in implementation (62) are essential for policy effectiveness. Evaluation through governance indicators and sustainable monitoring systems (63) ensures that policies remain adaptive and relevant. This analysis strengthens responsive and sustainable tourism governance at the local level.



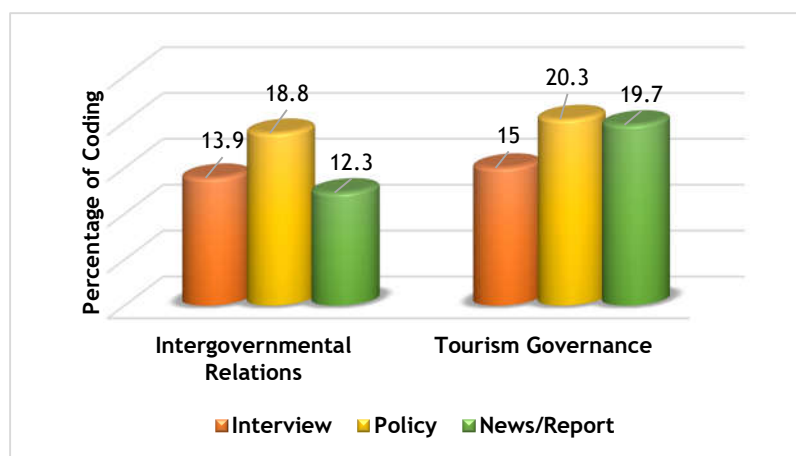
**Figure 4.** Crosstab analysis policy and institutionalization of tourism in Wakatobi.

Figure 4 illustrates a cross-analysis of the four main components of tourism policy and institutionalization in Wakatobi: “Policy Formulation,” “Decision Making,” “Policy Implementation,” and “Policy Evaluation.” In the interview category, “Policy Formulation” (10.5 percent) and “Policy Evaluation” (9.5 percent) received high attention, indicating that field actors are more concerned about the gap between policy design and implementation. Many respondents stated that the planning process remains technocratic, “fails to adequately consider the voices of local communities,” and is not fully adaptive to the needs of marine tourism areas. Conversely, policy documents show a balanced proportion between “Formulation” and “Decision-making” (each at 12.5 percent), but “Evaluation” is only 6.5 percent, reflecting the weakness of monitoring systems and success indicators.

The discrepancy between the intensity of statements in the news (only 4.5 percent for evaluation) and the focus of formal policies indicates that the evaluation process is not a priority for the public or the media. However, according to (60), “without a system of sustainability indicators, policies easily lose their relevance.” The low proportion of “Policy Implementation” in the interviews (5.6 percent) indicates a lack of clarity in the roles of institutions in the field and coordination challenges. These findings underscore the need for a participatory governance framework, with comprehensive improvements in the evaluation and implementation stages of policies to ensure the effectiveness of sustainable tourism in Wakatobi.

#### 4.3. Regional Sustainable Tourism Governance in Wakatobi

Sustainable tourism governance at the local government level requires policies that are fair, inclusive, and responsive to environmental sustainability and social welfare (64). Analysis of indicators such as intergovernmental relations is important for understanding cross-level coordination in policy formulation and implementation (65), while tourism governance indicators help identify the roles of stakeholders and the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms (31,66). By integrating these two sets of indicators, local governments can optimize strategies, enhance policy legitimacy, and strengthen accountability in the governance of sustainable tourism destinations.



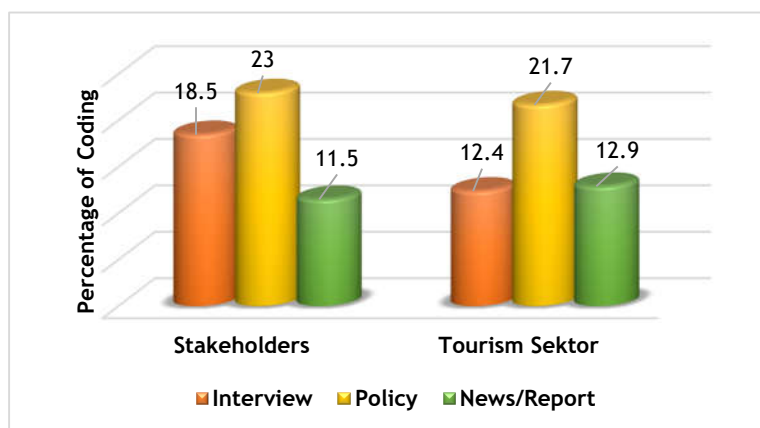
**Figure 5.** Crosstab analysis of regional sustainable tourism governance in Wakatobi.

Figure 5 reveals the dynamics of sustainable tourism governance in Wakatobi through a cross-analysis of two key indicators: “Intergovernmental Relations” and “Tourism Governance.” The interview categories show that “Tourism Governance” received the highest attention (15 percent), illustrating the significant attention given to the distribution of roles among actors and participatory mechanisms that are not yet functioning optimally. Many narratives from local stakeholders emphasize that inter-agency coordination often gets “stuck in sectoral egos” and lacks collaborative forums. On the other hand, policy documents show a dominance of the topics “Intergovernmental Relations” (18.8 percent) and “Tourism Governance” (20.3 percent), reflecting regulatory intentions to strengthen connectivity between levels of government, though this has not yet been fully realized in practice.

In news reports, the proportion of “Tourism Governance” reached 19.7 percent, while “Intergovernmental Relations” only accounted for 12.3 percent, indicating that governance issues receive higher public attention compared to formal institutional coordination. According to (31), effective destination governance requires “clear consensus mechanisms and distribution of responsibilities.” This imbalance shows that although the policy framework has adopted the principle of sustainability, implementation in the field still faces obstacles in intergovernmental harmonization and stakeholder engagement. Restructuring governance and strengthening inter-institutional networks are strategic steps to ensure the success of sustainable tourism in Wakatobi.

#### 4.4. Tourism Employment Creation in Wakatobi

Job creation in the tourism sector within local government contributes significantly to regional economic growth and poverty alleviation (56). To ensure sustainability and inclusivity, it is important to analyze indicators such as stakeholder engagement (67,68), which reflects collaboration between the community, government, and private sector. In addition, monitoring the performance of the tourism sector through economic, social, and environmental indicators (69–71) helps identify new job opportunities and supports evidence-based policy-making, increasing the effectiveness of tourism-based local development programs.



**Figure 6.** Crosstab analysis of tourism employment creation in Wakatobi.

Figure 6 shows the relationship between the indicators “Stakeholders” and “Tourism Sektor” in job creation in Wakatobi, with data distribution from interviews, policy documents, and news sources. In the interviews, “stakeholders” accounted for the highest percentage (18.5 percent), indicating that local actors strongly emphasize the importance of collaboration between local government, communities, and businesses. One respondent stated that “cross-actor coordination is often ad hoc, without permanent mechanisms,” highlighting weaknesses in the participatory institutional structure. Conversely, the “Tourism Sektor” only accounted for 12.4 percent in the interviews, indicating that discussions related to industry dynamics—such as workforce competencies and business innovation—remain underrepresented.

Policy documents show a dominant focus on two indicators: “Stakeholders” (23 percent) and “Tourism Sektor” (21.7 percent), reflecting the government’s formal commitment to cross-sectoral collaboration and the development of the tourism industry as an economic driver. However, the proportion in news reports for the “Tourism Sektor” (12.9 percent) is higher than that for “Stakeholders” (11.5 percent), indicating that public narratives focus more on industry performance than on inter-party relations. In line with the findings of (68), the use of stakeholder indicators is crucial to promote collaborative policy design that can expand job creation and economic inclusion in a sustainable manner.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that the tourism governance structure in Wakatobi tends to emphasize economic expansion without adequate protection for workers. The disparity between the focus on economic productivity in policy and the lack of attention to the rights and safety of informal workers (72,73) indicates a failure to apply the principle of social justice, which is at the core of SDG Eight (55). This pattern aligns with the argument by (74) regarding the weak integration of sustainable HRM in the tourism sector in developing countries. The lack of institutional accountability further weakens the effectiveness of policies (63), resulting in an anomaly between regulations and workplace realities that hinders the achievement of inclusive development.

Additionally, the marginalization of youth groups is evident in the low intensity of narratives in documents and public discourse related to youth employment (56). This contradicts the urgency of development based on productive demographics, as emphasized by (75,76), who place youth empowerment as a core element in community-based tourism. The minimal involvement of the younger generation reinforces (77,78), view that inclusive tourism requires not only representation but also redistribution of roles and access within the work ecosystem. The mismatch between policy approaches and local potential demands structural reforms within the framework of regional tourism governance.

Theoretically, the findings of this study support the “relational work” approach in sociological economics as a critical framework for understanding the dynamics of informal and institutional work in tourism (26,79). In the context of Wakatobi, relationships between actors are often in tension between market work and community work, highlighting the need for adaptive and participatory institutional structures (10,16). Practically, these findings call for strengthening social indicators in monitoring systems and integrating cross-sectoral policies to ensure that tourism transformation not only drives economic growth but also guarantees social sustainability and meaningful community involvement. (80,81).

## 6. Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical actions are recommended to enhance sustainable tourism governance and advance decent work and economic growth in Wakatobi:

### a) Strengthen Institutional Coordination and Policy Integration

Local governments should establish a cross-institutional task force that brings together representatives from tourism, labor, environmental, and community sectors. This would bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation while ensuring the alignment of SDG 8 principles with other development goals.

### b) Enhance Labor Standards and Social Protection Mechanisms

Tourism stakeholders should formalize employment agreements and provide social protection for workers, especially in informal and seasonal positions. Programs such as local insurance schemes, skills certification, and safety training can enhance labor rights and job security.

### c) Promote Youth Engagement and Capacity Building

Policies must target the empowerment of youth through vocational training, apprenticeship programs, and entrepreneurship support in the tourism value chain. Leveraging digital tools and creative industries could open new opportunities for young people in tourism-related services.

### d) Foster Community-Based and Inclusive Tourism Models

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiatives should be scaled up by integrating local knowledge and prioritizing community participation in decision-making. Support for microfinance and cooperative models can help local communities capture value from tourism while preserving cultural and ecological assets.

### e) Develop Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

Local authorities should adopt context-specific sustainability indicators to monitor tourism impacts, employment outcomes, and governance performance. Periodic assessments and stakeholder feedback mechanisms will help refine policies and ensure accountability.

### f) Invest in Green and Resilient Tourism Infrastructure

Encouraging the development of eco-friendly accommodations, renewable energy systems, and waste management solutions in tourist areas will minimize environmental degradation while attracting responsible visitors. Such initiatives should be supported by financial incentives and technical assistance.

g) Encourage Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Collaboration among government, private sector, academia, and civil society is vital for fostering innovation and resource pooling. These partnerships should aim at inclusive marketing strategies, global networking, and sustainable destination branding.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, the scope of this research is limited to a single case study of Wakatobi Regency, which, although rich in insights due to its unique socio-ecological context, restricts the generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies involving other tourism-dependent regions in Indonesia or Southeast Asia would help to validate and refine the findings, particularly in terms of policy implementation and community participation in tourism governance.

Second, the qualitative nature of the study, based on semi-structured interviews and document analysis, offers in-depth understanding but limits the ability to quantify the economic and social outcomes of tourism labor policies. Future research could adopt mixed-methods approaches, integrating survey methods or secondary economic data, to measure the direct impact of governance reforms on employment quality and economic resilience.

Third, while this study reflects stakeholder perspectives from government, private sector, and community actors, it acknowledges the underrepresentation of vulnerable groups, such as women, informal workers, and youth who are not actively engaged in formal tourism management structures. Expanding the participant base to include these groups could offer a more balanced view of tourism's social implications and better inform inclusive policy recommendations.

Finally, the fast-evolving nature of global tourism dynamics, especially with the rise of digital platforms and the effects of post-pandemic travel behavior, indicates that longitudinal research would be valuable. Tracking governance reforms, employment patterns, and technological integration over time could illuminate how adaptive governance contributes to sustainable and future-proof tourism sectors.

## 8. Conclusions

This study shows that sustainable tourism governance in Wakatobi has not been fully integrated with the dimensions of decent work and social inclusion as mandated by the eighth Sustainable Development Goal. The imbalance between economic expansion and labor protection, as well as the low involvement of youth, are indicators that the policy approach is still technocratic and not responsive to local conditions. Furthermore, weak intergovernmental coordination and a lack of policy evaluation systems show that existing institutional structures are unable to bridge the gap between participatory and adaptive implementation.

The implications of these findings are significant, both theoretically and practically. In general, this study supports the claim that participatory and community-based governance is a key prerequisite for achieving socially just and sustainable tourism. For the future, this work provides a perspective that strengthening local institutional capacity, substantially involving youth, and using context-based social indicators should be priorities in tourism policy design. Further research could be directed toward developing a more applicable and responsive SDG-based policy evaluation model that is responsive to local dynamics.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions and the confidentiality agreements made with participants during the fieldwork.

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## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
CBT	Community-Based Tourism
HRM	Human Resource Management
NVivo	Qualitative Data Analysis Software (NVivo 12 Plus)
BOP	Tourism Authority Board
TNW	Wakatobi National Park
MDPI	Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
DOI	Digital Object Identifier

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