

From community to corporate governance: ecotourism destination management transition at Bronjong river, Cipadang village, Pesawaran

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Bronjong river, community-based ecotourism, corporate-community management, destination management, governance transition,

Katakunci:

ekowisata berbasis masyarakat, manajemen destinasi, manajemen korporat-komunitas, sungai Bronjong, transisi tata kelola

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.26905/jpp.v11i1.16720>

Received **January 30, 2026**

Review **February 18, 2026**

Accepted **June 3, 2026**

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HOW TO CITE ITEM

Nurmoyo, A. G., Novianti, E., Winoto, Y., Sari, D., & Oktavia, D. (2026). From community to corporate governance: Ecotourism destination management transition at Bronjong River, Cipadang Village, Pesawaran. *Jurnal Pariwisata Pesona*, 11(1).
<https://doi.org/10.26905/jpp.v11i1.16720>

ABSTRACT

Governance transitions in nature-based tourism destinations remain underexplored, particularly in contexts where community-based ecotourism (CBET) arrangements collapse due to institutional failure and land tenure complexity. This study examines the governance transition at Bronjong River ecotourism destination, Cipadang Village, Pesawaran Regency, Lampung Province, from community-based management under Pokdarwis Pelangi Cipadang to corporate-led management under PT Perkebunan Nusantara (PTPN) I Regional 7. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 informants representing five stakeholder groups, participatory observation, and documentation study. Findings reveal that institutional failure, manifested through weak financial accountability, illegal levies, and unmet contractual obligations, triggered the collapse of community-based governance and subsequent corporate takeover. The transition produced paradoxical outcomes: local operational workers from five buffer villages, UMKM operators, and tourists reported improved conditions under PTPN management, while the village government and BUMDes experienced institutional and economic marginalization. These findings challenge dominant assumptions that community-based governance is inherently superior to corporate alternatives, demonstrating that institutional capacity and accountability mechanisms are more decisive determinants of governance quality. This study contributes to destination management literature by providing empirical evidence of hybrid corporate-community governance dynamics in rural Indonesian river tourism.

ABSTRAK

Transisi tata kelola destinasi wisata berbasis alam masih kurang dieksplorasi, khususnya dalam konteks di mana pengelolaan ekowisata berbasis masyarakat runtuh akibat kegagalan institusional dan kompleksitas penguasaan lahan. Penelitian ini mengkaji transisi tata kelola destinasi ekowisata Sungai Bronjong, Desa Cipadang, Kabupaten Pesawaran, Provinsi Lampung, dari pengelolaan berbasis masyarakat di bawah Pokdarwis Pelangi Cipadang menuju pengelolaan berbasis korporat di bawah PT Perkebunan Nusantara (PTPN) I Regional 7. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dan desain studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 11 informan yang mewakili lima kelompok pemangku kepentingan, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kegagalan institusional, yang termanifestasi melalui lemahnya akuntabilitas keuangan, pungutan liar, dan tidak terpenuhinya kewajiban

kontrak, memicu runtuhnya tata kelola berbasis masyarakat dan pengambilalihan oleh PTPN. Transisi ini menghasilkan dampak yang paradoks: pengelola operasional dari lima desa penyangga, pelaku UMKM, dan wisatawan melaporkan kondisi yang lebih baik di bawah manajemen PTPN, sementara pemerintah desa dan BUMDes mengalami marginalisasi institusional dan ekonomi. Temuan ini menantang asumsi dominan bahwa tata kelola berbasis masyarakat selalu lebih unggul dibandingkan alternatif korporat, dengan menunjukkan bahwa kapasitas institusional dan mekanisme akuntabilitas merupakan penentu kualitas tata kelola yang lebih menentukan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur manajemen destinasi dengan menyediakan bukti empiris dinamika tata kelola hybrid korporat-komunitas dalam pariwisata sungai pedesaan di Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Global discourse on sustainable tourism has increasingly emphasized the role of local communities in managing natural resources, particularly through the Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) framework. This model positions local communities as primary actors in tourism governance, with the expectation that participatory management generates both ecological sustainability and socio-economic benefits (Guerrero-Moreno & Oliveira-Junior, 2024; Sani & Anam, 2022; Wiratno *et al.*, 2022). However, empirical evidence from various developing country contexts reveals that CBET does not always deliver its intended outcomes. Institutional weaknesses, governance failures, and unresolved land tenure arrangements frequently undermine the viability of community-led tourism ventures (Koot *et al.*, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2025).

In Indonesia, the development of nature-based tourism destinations has often involved complex multi-actor arrangements between village governments, state-owned enterprises, and local communities. These arrangements are particularly vulnerable to institutional dysfunction when formal contractual obligations are not met, benefit-sharing mechanisms are unclear, or local organizations lack the capacity for transparent financial management (Ristiawan *et al.*, 2023; Suyatna *et al.*, 2025). The social capital dimension, which underpins community solidarity and collective action in CBET, is also fragile when internal accountability mechanisms are absent (Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020). Despite growing scholarly attention to CBET failures in Southeast Asia, studies that examine the full governance transition process from community-based to corporate-led management and its differential impacts on various stakeholder groups remain limited. This gap is particularly evident in rural river-based ecotourism contexts where land ownership by state enterprises creates an additional layer of governance complexity.

The integration of institutional and ecological dimensions in tourism governance has been identified as a critical but underexplored research area. Andrades *et al.* (2024) and Baloch *et al.* (2023) argue that nature-based tourism systems require governance frameworks that simultaneously address social resilience, institutional flexibility, and ecological carrying capacity. However, empirical studies that demonstrate how institutional failure disrupts this integration, particularly in the context of abrupt governance transitions driven by contractual breakdown, remain scarce in the literature (Tuyen *et al.*, 2025). This study addresses that gap by examining a case where the collapse of community-based institutional arrangements directly affected the sustainability trajectory of a river-based ecotourism destination.

The Bronjong River in Cipadang Village, Gedong Tataan District, Pesawaran Regency, Lampung Province, presents a compelling case in this regard. As a natural river with significant aquatic and scenic potential, the site was formally established as a community-managed ecotourism destination in 2021 under a contractual arrangement between the village government and PT Perkebunan Nusantara (PTPN) I Regional 7, the state-owned plantation enterprise that owns the surrounding land. The five buffer villages involved in managing the destination are Banjar Negeri, Padang Manis, Padang Ratu, Pampangan, and Cipadang. Within a year, the arrangement collapsed due to unmet contractual payment obligations and alleged financial mismanagement by the local tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis Pelangi Cipadang), including the non-return of revenue to the village enterprise (BUMDes) and the presence of illegal levies. By 2023, PTPN assumed direct control of the destination, retaining local residents as operational partners while effectively excluding the village government from governance processes.

This governance transition produced paradoxical outcomes. Local operational workers reported improved welfare and greater security under PTPN management, while the village government lost both its revenue stream and institutional role entirely. This paradox directly challenges dominant assumptions in CBET literature that community-based governance is inherently superior to corporate-led alternatives. This study therefore aims to analyze the governance transition process at Bronjong River ecotourism destination, examine

its underlying causes and differential outcomes across stakeholder groups, and derive implications for destination management policy in rural Indonesia.

METHODS

This study applies a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the governance transition of ecotourism management at the Bronjong River, Cipadang Village, Gedong Tataan District, Pesawaran Regency, Lampung Province. The case study design was selected because it enables an in-depth contextual examination of a specific governance phenomenon within its real-life setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Location and Period

The research was conducted at the Bronjong River ecotourism site from September to October 2025. The location was selected purposively based on three considerations: (1) the site underwent a significant governance transition from community-based to corporate-led management, (2) the transition involved multiple stakeholder groups with contrasting experiences, and (3) the site reflects broader patterns of nature-based tourism governance challenges in rural Lampung.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation study. Interviews were conducted with 11 key informants representing five stakeholder groups: PTPN I Regional 7 management, local operational workers, village government and BUMDes representatives, UMKM operators at the tourism site, and tourists (both local and non-local visitors). Informant selection followed a purposive and snowball sampling approach until data saturation was reached. A profile of research informants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of research informants at Bronjong River ecotourism site, Cipadang Village

Code	Role	Gender	Origin
I1	PTPN I Regional 7 Representative	Male	PTPN employee (non-village)
I2	Head of PTPN Cooperative	Male	Cipadang Village
I3	Village Government Representative (Head of Public Relations)	Male	Cipadang Village
I4	Tourism Site Committee Chair (representing Banjar Negeri, Padang Manis, Padang Ratu, Pampangan, and Cipadang villages)	Male	Buffer village
I5	UMKM Operator	Male	Cipadang Village
I6	UMKM Operator	Female	Cipadang Village
I7	Tourist	Male	Outside the region
I8	Tourist	Female	Outside the region
I9	Tourist	Male	Outside the region
I10	Tourist	Female	Outside the region
I11	Tourist	Male	Outside the region

Participatory observation was conducted during tourism activities at the site to directly examine operational conditions and visitor behavior. Documentation study covered village profiles, regional tourism policies, and records related to the governance transition process.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021), involving iterative coding, theme development, and narrative interpretation. Credibility was ensured through source and method triangulation, as well as member checking with key informants (Nowell et al., 2017).

Research Ethics

Formal permission was obtained from the village government and PTPN prior to fieldwork. All informants provided informed consent and were anonymized in data reporting, consistent with qualitative research ethics principles (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Bronjong River is a natural river located within the administrative boundaries of Cipadang Village, Gedong Tataan District, Pesawaran Regency, Lampung Province. The river flows through a rural landscape characterized by plantation areas owned and managed by PT Perkebunan Nusantara (PTPN) I Regional 7, making land tenure a structurally significant factor in the governance of any tourism activity at the site. Prior to 2021, the Bronjong River existed as a natural resource without formal tourism development. Its scenic aquatic environment, however, held considerable potential for nature-based tourism development, particularly for river-based recreational activities (Huang et al., 2022).

Overview of Bronjong River as a Nature-Based Tourism Destination

In 2021, the village government of Cipadang formally established the site as a community-managed ecotourism destination through a contractual arrangement with PTPN, which granted the village temporary management rights over the land surrounding the river. Tourism facilities including gazebos, toilets, a musholla, water tubing, and food stalls were subsequently developed to support visitor activities. The site currently attracts visitors primarily during weekends and national holidays, with weekday visits remaining relatively low, a pattern consistent with rural nature-based tourism destinations in Lampung (Haider *et al.*, 2023). This seasonal and weekend-concentrated visitation pattern underscores the importance of institutional stability in ensuring that peak-period revenue is managed transparently and equitably distributed among stakeholders.

The Rise and Fall of Community-Based Management

The establishment of Pokdarwis Pelangi Cipadang as the primary institutional vehicle for community-based ecotourism management at Bronjong River represented an attempt to operationalize CBET principles at the village level. In theory, Pokdarwis was expected to coordinate tourism activities, manage visitor flows, and channel revenue back to the village enterprise (BUMDes) in accordance with the contractual arrangement with PTPN. In practice, however, the institutional performance of Pokdarwis Pelangi Cipadang fell significantly short of these expectations.

Field findings reveal two interrelated dimensions of institutional failure. First, the organization demonstrated critical weaknesses in financial governance, with tourism revenues allegedly not returned to the BUMDes as required under the management arrangement. Second, the presence of illegal levies (*pungli*) imposed on visitors and UMKM operators created an environment of institutional distrust and economic insecurity within the tourism site. These findings are consistent with Koot *et al.* (2020), who documented how institutional degradation within CBT organizations, manifested through weak accountability mechanisms and the capture of benefits by specific actors, can rapidly undermine the legitimacy and viability of community-based governance arrangements. The erosion of social capital that accompanies such institutional failure further weakens the collective action capacity that CBET depends upon (Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020).

The consequences of these institutional failures were severe. The village government's contractual obligations to PTPN, particularly regarding payment of the contract value, could not be fulfilled, a direct result of the financial mismanagement at the Pokdarwis level. As one village government representative described:

"We deeply regret what happened. The Pokdarwis did not act responsibly, and that triggered a chain of problems that ultimately had fatal consequences for the village's role in managing the destination." (I3)

This cascading institutional failure culminated in the dissolution of Pokdarwis Pelangi Cipadang in 2022, marking the effective end of the community-based governance phase at Bronjong River. The speed and totality of this collapse reflect what Ostrom (2009) identifies as a failure of institutional design principles, specifically the absence of effective monitoring mechanisms and graduated sanctions that could have detected and corrected financial misconduct before it reached a critical threshold.

Governance Transition: From Village to PTPN

Following the collapse of the community-based management arrangement, PTPN I Regional 7 assumed direct operational control of the Bronjong River ecotourism site in 2023. This transition was grounded in PTPN's legal position as the landowner of the surrounding plantation area, a structural condition that had always existed but became operationally decisive once the village government failed to fulfill its contractual obligations. As a PTPN representative indicated:

"The takeover was a contractual necessity. The management had been fully delegated to the village, and when the obligations were not met, we had no choice but to resume direct control, regardless of the reasons behind the village's failure." (I1)

Under the new governance arrangement, local residents from the five buffer villages, namely Banjar Negeri, Padang Manis, Padang Ratu, Pampangan, and Cipadang, were retained as operational partners, managing day-to-day tourism activities including facility maintenance, visitor services, and UMKM operations, but within a direct accountability structure to PTPN rather than to village institutions. This hybrid arrangement, in which corporate ownership coexists with community operational involvement, reflects what Ristiawan *et al.* (2023) describe as a form of patrimonial governance in Indonesian tourism contexts, where land ownership by powerful

state or corporate actors shapes the distribution of governance authority and economic benefits. The involvement of workers from five buffer villages also suggests that the economic footprint of the destination extends beyond Cipadang alone, though the formal governance structure now bypasses village-level institutions entirely.

Differential Outcomes Across Stakeholder Groups

The governance transition produced markedly different outcomes depending on stakeholder position. For local operational workers and UMKM operators at the site, the transition to PTPN management yielded tangible improvements. Respondents consistently reported that the elimination of illegal levies created a more secure and equitable operating environment, as expressed by an UMKM operator:

"It is much better now. There are no more unclear charges. We know exactly what we are responsible for and there is no intimidation." (I5)

The current condition of tourism activities at Bronjong River under PTPN management is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows visitors engaging in water tubing, one of the main recreational activities offered at the site.



Figure 2. Aquatic tourism activities at Bronjong River under PTPN management
(Photo taken during field observation, September-October 2025)

Tourists similarly reported greater comfort visiting the site under the current management, attributing this to improved order and the absence of unofficial charges. These findings suggest that in contexts where community-based institutions are captured by rent-seeking behavior, the transition to more formal corporate governance can paradoxically enhance the day-to-day experience of both workers and visitors (Jayasekara, et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025; Teeroovengadum, 2019). The Head of the Tourism Site Committee further confirmed that operational coordination across the five buffer villages has become more structured and predictable under the PTPN framework:

"The management is clearer now. Each village knows its responsibilities and there is a proper reporting system. Before, everything was chaotic." (I4)

In contrast, the village government and BUMDes experienced the transition as a significant institutional and economic loss. The exclusion of village institutions from the governance structure meant not only the loss of tourism revenue but also the loss of a development asset that had been intended to support broader village economic goals. This divergence in outcomes across stakeholder groups highlights the distributional complexity of governance transitions in tourism destinations, a dimension frequently overlooked in studies that evaluate CBET performance solely at the community aggregate level (Tuyen *et al.*, 2025). The findings are consistent with Andrades *et al.* (2024), who note that governance transitions in nature-based tourism systems often create winners and losers depending on actors' positions within the institutional hierarchy.

Institutional Dimension and Ecological Implications

The institutional transition at Bronjong River also carries implications for the ecological dimension of destination sustainability. Under the PTPN management framework, operational rules regarding visitor behavior, waste management, and facility use have been standardized across the five buffer villages. This institutional clarity, while reducing social equity for the village government, has contributed to more consistent enforcement of environmental norms at the site. The Tourism Site Committee Chair noted that visitor compliance with cleanliness standards has improved since the transition, attributing this to clearer operational guidelines and the absence of informal actors who previously benefited from unregulated access. These findings align with Andrades *et al.* (2024), who argue that governance flexibility and institutional learning are foundational to ecological resilience in nature-based tourism systems. The Bronjong River case demonstrates that institutional restructuring, even when driven by corporate interests, can generate positive ecological externalities when it eliminates rent-seeking behaviors that previously deterred responsible visitor management.

The Paradox of Corporate-Led Tourism Governance

The case of Bronjong River presents a governance paradox that challenges prevailing assumptions in CBET literature. The dominant theoretical position holds that community-based governance generates superior outcomes compared to corporate or state-led alternatives, particularly in terms of benefit distribution, local empowerment, and resource sustainability (Guerrero-Moreno & Oliveira-Junior, 2024; Sobhani *et al.*, 2023). The Bronjong River case complicates this position by demonstrating that under conditions of weak institutional capacity and poor accountability at the community level, corporate governance can produce better immediate outcomes for certain stakeholder groups, particularly those most directly exposed to the extractive behavior of dysfunctional local institutions.

This finding resonates with Ostrom's (2009) institutional analysis framework, which emphasizes that the sustainability of common resource governance depends not on the type of actor involved, but on the presence of robust institutional design principles, including clearly defined boundaries, proportional rules, collective choice arrangements, monitoring, and graduated sanctions. The failure of Pokdarwis Pelangi Cipadang can be understood as a failure to internalize these principles, rather than an inherent weakness of community-based governance *per se*. Accordingly, the current PTPN-led arrangement should not be interpreted as evidence that corporate governance is categorically superior, but rather as a transitional outcome shaped by specific institutional conditions and land tenure arrangements unique to this site. Future policy interventions should focus on rebuilding village-level institutional capacity, establishing transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms, and creating pathways for the gradual re-incorporation of village institutions into the governance structure of Bronjong River ecotourism.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the governance transition at Bronjong River ecotourism destination, from community-based management under Pokdarwis Pelangi Cipadang to corporate-led management under PTPN I Regional 7, was primarily driven by institutional failure at the local organization level. The collapse of the community-based arrangement resulted from a combination of weak financial accountability, the presence of illegal levies, and the inability of the village government to fulfill its contractual obligations to PTPN as the landowner. These factors collectively undermined the institutional foundations necessary for sustainable community-based ecotourism governance.

The transition produced paradoxical outcomes across stakeholder groups. Local operational workers from the five buffer villages, namely Banjar Negeri, Padang Manis, Padang Ratu, Pampangan, and Cipadang, alongside UMKM operators and tourists, reported improved conditions under PTPN management, including greater operational security, elimination of illegal levies, and more orderly destination management. Conversely, the village government and BUMDes experienced significant institutional and economic marginalization as a direct consequence of the transition, losing both revenue streams and governance participation.

These findings challenge the dominant assumption in community-based ecotourism literature that community-led governance is inherently superior to corporate alternatives. The Bronjong River case demonstrates that institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, and transparent benefit-sharing are more decisive determinants of governance quality than the type of actor involved. When local institutions fail to internalize these

principles, transitions toward more formal governance arrangements may paradoxically generate better immediate outcomes for certain community members, even as they marginalize others.

From a destination management perspective, this study highlights the critical importance of strengthening local institutional capacity before delegating governance responsibilities to community organizations, particularly in contexts where land tenure is held by external corporate or state actors. Future research should examine long-term ecological and socio-economic impacts of hybrid corporate-community governance models in Indonesian river-based tourism destinations, as well as policy frameworks that could facilitate more equitable benefit-sharing arrangements between PTPN, village governments, and local communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the Government of Cipadang Village, PTPN I Regional 7, and all research informants for their permission, support, and active participation throughout the research process. The openness and cooperation of all stakeholders played an important role in ensuring the depth and quality of this study.

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