



Organisational Trust in the Governance of Tourism Development

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Abstract

In a multi-stakeholder partnership, the success of governance is determined not only by the structure and the actors involved, but also by the level of trust between the organisations involved. However, in the practice of tourism development in West Papua Province, trust between actors has not yet been fully established. This study aims to analyse organisational trust within a multi-stakeholder partnership in the governance of tourism development in West Papua Province. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study strategy. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and were subsequently analysed using an interactive model through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The research findings indicate that organisational trust is influenced by three key aspects. Firstly, competence trust, which is not yet optimal, characterised by disparities in capacity and capability among the actors. Secondly, goodwill trust, which remains limited, evident in the lack of strong commitment, transparency and good faith in the collaboration. Third, behavioural trust is inconsistent, reflected in the weak implementation of agreements and a lack of accountability in programme delivery. These three dimensions are interrelated and influence the quality of relationships and the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Organisational trust within multi-stakeholder partnerships remains suboptimal and requires strengthening in terms of competence, commitment, and behavioural consistency among actors to enhance the effectiveness of tourism development governance.

Introduction

Given the region's rich natural potential, the development of tourism in West Papua Province requires cooperation between various stakeholders (Taroreh et al., 2026; Islahuddin et al., 2026; Lamatenggo et al., 2025). Trust amongst these stakeholders is not only a prerequisite for establishing cooperation, but also a key prerequisite for the sustainability of tourism governance. One of the main issues in the context of organisational trust is the weak coordination among the actors involved in tourism development (Moretti et al., 2026; Agbaba & Jurdana, 2025; Pane et al., 2025).

On the other hand, efforts to build partnerships between the public and private sectors also face obstacles such as inadequate infrastructure readiness, which highlights a gap between initial commitments and actual conditions on the ground (Owojori & Erasmus, 2025; Bhatnagar et al., 2025; Rimlinger et al., 2026). This lack of readiness has the potential to erode the trust of the parties involved, particularly business operators and the community. The absence of formal

relationships between parties, such as clear cooperation agreements or permanent coordination forums, also weakens institutional trust in the long term (Bahl et al., 2026; Mbanefo et al., 2026; Egberi et al., 2026). Cooperative relationships that rely too heavily on informal communication are prone to instability, particularly in the event of a change in leadership or conflicting interests between parties.

Furthermore, although there have been various forums for meetings between the government and environmental NGOs such as EcoNusa, WRI and WWF, there is as yet no specific formal mechanism within the tourism sector to ensure the continuity of structured cooperation. In addition, public trust in government institutions presents a challenge in its own right. In West Papua, local communities often feel they are not fully involved in planning or decision-making (Nikijuluw et al., 2026; Sembiring et al., 2026; Mambrasar et al., 2026).

Consequently, the low level of organisational trust among tourism development stakeholders in West Papua is one of the fundamental obstacles to building effective governance. Trust cannot be built overnight; it requires consistent, open and fair relationships, supported by formal and accountable cooperation mechanisms. Without systematic efforts to strengthen this trust, the ideal multi-stakeholder partnership will remain merely a normative concept that is difficult to realise in practice (Sim et al., 2026; Küçükuncular, 2026; MacDonald et al., 2022).

In the field of public administration, particularly in the context of collaboration or partnerships, trust has long been recognised as one of the key factors driving the success of such partnerships. One theory considered suitable for explaining the phenomena occurring within the context of organisational trust is the Organisational Trust theory proposed by Blomqvist and Ståhle (2000).

The selection of the organisational trust theory in this study is based on the need to understand the relational dimensions underpinning the success or failure of multi-stakeholder partnerships in the governance of tourism in West Papua Province. In the context of cross-actor collaboration involving the government, NGOs, the private sector, and the community, relationships between actors are determined not only by institutional structures and the division of roles, but also by the level of trust that develops between them. Therefore, an approach that focuses solely on structural and procedural aspects is insufficient to comprehensively explain the dynamics of partnerships (Syarifuddin, 2025; Andonova & Faul, 2022; Hamann et al., 2023).

The theory of organisational trust proposed by Blomqvist and Ståhle (2000) was chosen because it offers a framework capable of explaining trust as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing competence trust, goodwill trust, and behavioural trust. In the context of partnerships, this approach plays a crucial role because partnerships involve actors with diverse backgrounds, interests, and capacities, making trust a key element in bridging these differences.

Furthermore, this theory offers the advantage of distinguishing between perceptions of competence, goodwill, and consistency of action (Moehl & Friedman, 2022; Richter et al., 2025; Cai et al., 2024; Augustine & Eyssel, 2026). This distinction is particularly important in the context of tourism governance, where actors may possess high technical competence but may not necessarily have a strong commitment, or vice versa.

On the other hand, in the literature on collaboration, trust is often cited as a primary prerequisite for building effective interactions between actors. Ansell and Gash (2008) emphasise that trust is a key factor influencing the sustainability of collaborative processes, particularly in contexts involving actors with diverse interests. Therefore, the use of organisational trust theory in this study does not stand alone, but is integrated with the broader concept of collaboration.

The theory of organisational trust can also analyse power relations that are not always explicitly visible. In multi-stakeholder partnerships, actors with greater resources or legitimacy tend to hold a more dominant position. However, such dominance is not always accepted without trust from other actors. In this context, trust acts as a mechanism that can either strengthen or weaken an actor's legitimacy within the partnership. Consequently, this theory contributes to our understanding of how power relations are mediated by trust.

On the other hand, the literature indicates that trust is not static but rather dynamic and evolves through interaction. This perspective aligns with the view of Rousseau et al. (1998), who see trust as positive expectations built through the experience of interaction. In relation to this study, the dynamics of trust are important because the partnerships that occur do not take place at a single point in time, but are an ongoing, evolving process.

The theory of organisational trust proposed by Blomqvist and Ståhle (2000) is analysed through three main dimensions: competence, goodwill and behaviour. Competence refers to the belief that colleagues possess sufficient expertise and technical skills to carry out their duties and responsibilities. In relation to studies on tourism development in Southwest Papua, this encompasses trust in the capacity of local communities as tourism stakeholders and guardians of the ecosystem. Goodwill trust refers to the good intentions, integrity, and ethics of partners; this is important for building partnerships that are not based on exploitation or conflicts of interest. Meanwhile, behavioural trust relates to consistency in actions, transparency, and the fulfilment of commitments; this forms the basis for long-term cooperation.

Studies on tourism governance over the past few decades have revealed a paradigm shift from a hierarchical approach towards a collaborative or partnership-based approach involving various stakeholders. In this context, the success of governance is no longer determined solely by the capacity of formal institutions, but also by the quality of interactions between the actors involved. One element that has received particular attention in the literature of the past decade is the role of trust as the foundation for building and maintaining cross-sectoral collaboration.

However, the majority of research on partnership governance still tends to emphasise normative aspects, such as institutional design, role allocation, and coordination mechanisms. This approach tends to assume that the existence of sound structures will automatically result in effective collaboration. In practice, this assumption does not always hold true, as relationships between actors are often influenced by relational factors that cannot be explained solely through a structural framework. This highlights the need to broaden the analysis of governance by incorporating the dimension of trust as a key variable.

In previous studies, trust has often been cited as a prerequisite for collaboration; however, discussions of it have remained general and have not been explored in depth as a standalone analytical variable. Many studies merely treat trust as a supporting factor without explaining how it is formed, develops, and influences partnership dynamics. Furthermore, the approaches used are often normative in nature, and thus fail to capture the complexity of trust within the context of relationships between organisations with differing interests and power dynamics.

This theoretical gap becomes particularly relevant when considered in the context of tourism governance, specifically in the Province of West Papua, where tourism development involves intense interaction between the government, NGOs, the private sector and local communities. This diversity of actors not only holds the potential for collaboration, but also for conflict and mistrust, particularly when there are conflicting interests between conservation and economic exploitation. In such circumstances, trust cannot be taken for granted, but must be actively built and managed.

Based on the above, the urgency of this research lies in the effort to address the gap in the literature regarding the role of trust in partnership governance, whilst also providing an empirical contribution to understanding the dynamics of trust within the context of tourism development.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of organisational trust in the governance of tourism development, particularly within multi-stakeholder partnerships involving government institutions, non-governmental organisations, private actors, and local communities. A case study design was used to examine the dynamics of trust in a real and specific governance context, namely tourism development in West Papua Province.

The focus of this study was organisational trust among actors involved in tourism governance. Organisational trust was examined through three main dimensions: competence trust, goodwill trust, and behavioural trust. Competence trust refers to the extent to which actors perceive other stakeholders as having the capacity, expertise, and resources required to perform their roles in tourism development. Goodwill trust refers to perceptions of good intentions, commitment, integrity, and openness among actors in collaborative processes. Behavioural trust refers to the consistency of actions, fulfilment of commitments, transparency, and accountability demonstrated by actors in the implementation of tourism governance programmes.

The research was conducted in West Papua Province, which was selected because tourism development in this area involves various stakeholders and requires collaborative governance. The case was considered relevant because tourism governance in the region is shaped by interactions between policy authorities, conservation-oriented organisations, business actors, and local communities with different interests, capacities, and forms of legitimacy.

The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and field observations, while secondary data were collected through documentation. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement, knowledge, and experience in tourism development and partnership governance in West Papua Province. The informants included representatives of government institutions, non-governmental organisations, private tourism-related actors, and local community representatives. These groups were selected to ensure that the data reflected the perspectives of the key actors discussed in the study.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore informants' perceptions and experiences regarding competence, goodwill, and behavioural consistency among actors in tourism governance. Observation was carried out to understand the interaction patterns, coordination practices, and collaborative dynamics among stakeholders. Documentation was used to support and verify the interview and observation data by examining relevant documents, such as policy documents, programme reports, partnership records, meeting notes, and other documents related to tourism governance and stakeholder collaboration.

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data condensation stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were selected, coded, and grouped according to the three dimensions of organisational trust: competence trust, goodwill trust, and behavioural trust. In the data display stage, the findings were organised into narrative descriptions and thematic matrices to identify patterns of trust, differences in actor

perceptions, and the relationship between trust and partnership effectiveness. In the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher interpreted the findings by linking empirical patterns with the organisational trust framework and relevant theories of collaborative governance.

Results and Discussion

In a study of tourism governance in the Province of West Papua, the ‘competence-trust’ dimension revealed that trust between actors within partnerships is not only built on the basis of social relationships or institutional proximity, but is significantly influenced by perceptions of each actor’s capacity and technical capabilities. The research findings indicate that there is a fairly clear recognition of the roles and competencies of each actor, with NGOs perceived as having strengths in technical and scientific aspects, the government as the policy authority, the private sector as the operational actor, and the community as the implementer at the grassroots level. However, this distribution of competencies is not always balanced, thereby affecting the level of trust formed amongst them.

Empirically, NGOs’ competencies in data-driven conservation and management are one of the key factors strengthening trust from the government and other actors. In many cases, local governments actually rely on NGOs for data provision, zoning planning, and sustainability-based approaches. This indicates that trust in competencies does not always follow formal power structures, but is instead determined by the actual capacity possessed by the actors. On the other hand, the private sector demonstrates competence in service provision and tourism management, yet remains not fully integrated into the broader planning system. Meanwhile, local communities possess competence rooted in traditional knowledge and direct experience, but are often not recognised as equals within the formal framework of partnerships.

This phenomenon indicates that competence trust within partnerships is differential and contextual. Actors do not trust one another comprehensively, but rather within specific domains according to their perceptions of each other’s capabilities. In other words, the trust that forms is partial, not comprehensive. This creates a situation where collaboration can proceed, but is not yet fully optimal as there remain unbridged boundaries of trust.

From the perspective of Blomqvist and Ståhle (2000), competence trust is a fundamental dimension in building trust between organisations, as it relates to the belief that partners possess the ability to perform their roles effectively. The findings of this study essentially support this view, as trust between actors is indeed heavily influenced by perceptions of competence. However, this study also demonstrates that competence trust is not merely technical in nature but is also influenced by structural and relational factors, such as an actor’s position within the network, access to resources, and social legitimacy.

This perspective aligns with the interorganisational trust theory proposed by Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone (1998), which states that trust between organisations is not built solely on reputation, but also through repeated interactions that allow actors to assess each other’s capabilities directly. In the context of this study, the intense interaction between the government and NGOs in conservation programmes has strengthened competence trust, whilst limited interaction with the community has resulted in relatively low levels of trust in local competence within the formal framework.

Furthermore, the knowledge-based trust theory of Lewicki and Bunker (1996) is also relevant to explaining these findings. They argue that trust develops through knowledge gained from the experience of interaction, so that the more frequently actors collaborate, the higher the level of trust formed. In the context of this study, actors with more intensive collaborative experience, such as the government and NGOs, demonstrate higher levels of competence trust

compared to less intensive relationships, such as those between the government and the community.

When compared with previous research, these findings reveal a fairly consistent pattern, wherein trust within partnerships is often stronger among actors possessing high technical capacity. However, this study makes an additional contribution by demonstrating that disparities in the recognition of competence can act as a barrier to building more inclusive trust. Much previous research has tended to assume that competence is an objective factor, whilst in this context it is evident that competence is also a social construct influenced by perceptions and power relations.

In the context of tourism governance in the Province of West Papua, this is important because the success of a partnership depends not only on the competencies possessed, but also on how those competencies are recognised and integrated into the collaborative system. When the competencies of local communities are not recognised on an equal footing, their potential contributions cannot be utilised to the full. Conversely, when NGOs' competencies are too dominant, there is a risk of dependency that can weaken the government's internal capacity.

Therefore, competence trust in this partnership can be understood as a condition that has been established, but is not yet fully equitable and integrated. Competence-based trust has enabled collaboration to proceed, but is not yet strong enough to create a system that is truly equitable and inclusive. This indicates that strengthening trust requires not only an improvement in technical capacity, but also a shift in perspectives regarding competence, so that all actors can be recognised and empowered proportionally within tourism governance.

In the context of research on tourism governance in West Papua Province, the dimension of goodwill trust reveals that trust between actors is not built solely on technical ability, but is also heavily influenced by perceptions of good intentions, commitment, and integrity in establishing cooperation. Whilst competence trust relates to "ability or lack thereof", goodwill trust relates more to "willingness or lack thereof" – that is, the extent to which actors are believed to have the intention to work honestly, openly, and without opportunism.

The research findings indicate that, generally, there is a positive perception of goodwill amongst actors, particularly regarding commitment to sustainable tourism development. The government is seen as committed to making tourism a flagship sector; NGOs are regarded as consistent in promoting conservation and community empowerment; whilst local communities demonstrate support for tourism development that delivers economic benefits. These relationships reflect a sufficiently strong foundation of goodwill trust, enabling collaboration to proceed despite structural constraints.

However, upon closer examination, the goodwill trust that has formed remains uneven and tends to be situational. Trust between actors often depends on previous interaction experiences, as well as on specific actors perceived to have a positive track record. This indicates that trust has not yet been fully institutionalised, but remains based on personal perceptions and informal relationships. Under such conditions, the sustainability of trust becomes vulnerable, as it is heavily dependent on the presence of specific individuals or institutions.

Furthermore, there are indications that goodwill trust is also influenced by differences in interests among actors. In some cases, particularly between conservation interests and economic exploitation, potential tensions arise that can reduce the level of trust. The private sector, for example, is in some situations perceived as being more profit-oriented, whilst NGOs place greater emphasis on sustainability. These differing orientations do not always result in open conflict, but they create a space of uncertainty that affects the level of trust between actors.

Trust in goodwill still needs to be strengthened through more systematic mechanisms, so that it does not rely solely on individual perceptions. In the context of this study, such expectations do exist, but they are not yet entirely consistent, as they are still influenced by varying experiences of interaction. When interactions go well, trust increases; conversely, when there is a clash of interests, trust may decline.

Furthermore, the relational governance theory of Ring and Van de Ven (1994) also offers an important perspective. They emphasise that cooperative relationships are governed not only by formal contracts, but also by social norms such as trust and commitment. In the context of this study, the relational aspect is in fact a key factor enabling the partnership to continue despite the absence of a strong formal structure. This is evident in how informal communication and personal relationships often serve as the primary binding force in collaboration.

However, reliance on informal relationships also has its limitations. Without supporting formal mechanisms, the trust that is formed tends to be fragile and difficult to replicate on a larger scale. This suggests that goodwill trust needs to be supported by institutional structures capable of maintaining its consistency and sustainability.

Referring to previous research, these findings suggest that goodwill-based trust is indeed a crucial element in multi-stakeholder partnerships, but often becomes a weak point when not supported by a robust system. Numerous studies indicate that collaboration failures are frequently caused by a decline in trust resulting from conflicts of interest or a lack of transparency. In the context of this study, such conditions have not yet materialised significantly, but the potential remains if not managed properly.

This study emphasises that goodwill trust cannot be separated from the social and cultural context. In the governance of tourism in West Papua Province, social and customary values, as well as community relationships, play a vital role in shaping trust. This indicates that an overly formal and technocratic approach is insufficient for building strong trust; rather, it must be combined with an understanding of local values.

This study also demonstrates that trust is not static but continues to evolve alongside interactions between actors. Trust can be strengthened through repeated positive experiences, but it can also weaken if not managed properly. Therefore, goodwill trust must be understood as a dynamic process, not as a finalised condition.

Thus, it can be said that within the context of tourism governance in West Papua Province, goodwill trust has been established as the initial foundation of partnership, but still requires strengthening to become a stable basis for long-term collaboration. Trust in goodwill has enabled actors to work together, but it is not yet strong enough to overcome differences in interests and create deeper integration among actors. This indicates that strengthening trust requires not only moral commitment but also an institutional mechanism capable of maintaining consistency and sustainability in tourism governance practices.

In the study of tourism governance in West Papua Province, the behavioural trust dimension indicates that trust between actors does not merely rest on perceptions of competence and goodwill, but is tested in practice through the consistency of actions, transparency, and commitment in day-to-day collaborative practices. Whilst the two previous dimensions are more cognitive and affective in nature, behavioural trust is the most concrete dimension, as it is directly reflected in how actors act, fulfil their promises, and account for their roles within the partnership.

Research findings indicate that behavioural trust within this partnership remains in a fluctuating state. On the one hand, there are indications that some actors have demonstrated consistency

in fulfilling their roles and commitments, particularly NGOs that are continuously involved in conservation and community empowerment programmes. The sustainability of the programmes carried out by NGOs sends a strong signal that they not only possess competence and good intentions, but are also capable of translating these into consistent, tangible actions. This strengthens the level of trust from other actors, particularly the government and the community.

However, on the other hand, the behaviour of stakeholders within the context of collaboration has not yet fully demonstrated the same level of consistency. The government, for example, has in some situations shown a commitment to tourism development, but implementation is often hampered by policy changes, limited coordination and bureaucratic dynamics. This creates the perception that existing commitments have not yet been fully matched by consistent action. Meanwhile, the private sector exhibits behaviour that tends to be adaptive, but is heavily influenced by economic interests, meaning its involvement in partnerships is not always stable.

From the community's perspective, behavioural trust is often built through social practices rooted in traditional values and community bonds. Consistency in safeguarding the area, participation in tourism activities, and adherence to local norms serve as key indicators in building trust. However, limitations in capacity and access often restrict the community's ability to demonstrate consistency on a broader scale, meaning their contributions are not yet fully evident within the formal framework of the partnership.

This phenomenon indicates that behavioural trust within partnerships is influenced not only by intention and capability, but also by structural conditions that either enable or hinder actors from acting consistently. In other words, behaviour-based trust is not merely a matter of 'willingness and ability', but also of 'whether or not it is possible within the existing system'.

From the perspective of Blomqvist and Ståhle (2000), behavioural trust is the most decisive dimension in the sustainability of partnerships, as it relates to the extent to which actors actually fulfil the expectations that have been established. Findings in this study indicate that this dimension remains a weak point in partnerships, due to a gap between stated commitments and actual actions. This indicates that the trust formed at the cognitive and affective levels has not yet been fully converted into action-based trust.

This view aligns with the 'trust as enacted behaviour' theory by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), which states that trust can only be demonstrated through consistent and predictable real actions. In the context of this study, inconsistency in actions, particularly from actors holding strategic roles, can reduce the overall level of trust, even though perceived trust remains.

Furthermore, Zucker's (1986) theory of institutional trust offers the perspective that sustained trust requires support from institutional structures capable of ensuring behavioural consistency. In the context of this study, the absence of formal mechanisms binding actors' behaviour means that trust relies more heavily on individual commitment rather than on the system. This makes trust vulnerable to change, particularly when there is a change in actors or policy.

Based on previous research, these findings suggest that behavioural trust is often the most difficult dimension to build in multi-stakeholder partnerships. Many studies show that although actors possess good intentions and competence, failure to maintain consistency in actions can undermine the trust that has been built. In the context of this study, the situation has not yet reached the stage of failure, but already shows signs that consistency of behaviour remains a major challenge.

This study also demonstrates that behavioural trust possesses a crucial temporal dimension. Trust is not built instantly, but through a lengthy process involving repeated interactive

experiences. In this context, every consistent action strengthens trust, whilst every inconsistency erodes the trust that has been built. Consequently, the sustainability of the partnership is highly dependent on the actors' ability to maintain consistency over the long term.

Based on this explanation, within the tourism governance of West Papua Province, behavioural trust can be understood as a dimension that is still in the process of formation. Trust has begun to form, but is not yet fully stable due to the persistent gap between commitment and action. This indicates that the main challenge ahead is not merely to build trust, but to maintain and strengthen that trust through consistent, transparent, and accountable actions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion regarding organisational trust within the tourism governance of West Papua Province, it can be concluded that trust between actors has been established as an initial foundation for supporting multi-stakeholder partnerships; however, it has not yet fully developed into a strong, stable and institutionalised system of trust.

In the dimension of competence trust, the research indicates that trust in the capabilities of the various actors has developed differentially, with each actor recognised as possessing a competitive advantage in specific fields. NGOs are perceived to have strong technical capacity, the government possesses formal legitimacy in policy-making, the private sector has operational capability, and the community possesses contextual local knowledge. However, recognition of these competencies is not yet fully equitable, particularly regarding the capacity of local communities, which still tend to be marginalised within formal frameworks. This indicates that competence-based trust has enabled collaboration to proceed, but it is not yet fully inclusive and integrated.

In the dimension of goodwill trust, findings indicate a positive perception of good intentions and commitment among actors in supporting sustainable tourism development. The actors involved are generally viewed as having the intention to cooperate and are not opportunistic. However, this trust remains situational and depends on the experience of interactions and the personal relationships formed. Differences in interests among actors, particularly between economic and conservation orientations, also indicate that trust based on good intentions is not yet fully stable and still requires strengthening through more systematic mechanisms.

Meanwhile, regarding behavioural trust, the research indicates that trust based on actions remains a key challenge within the partnership. Although there are indications of commitment from various stakeholders, consistency in implementation has not yet been fully maintained. The gap between stated commitments and actual actions suggests that the trust formed at the perceptual level has not yet been fully translated into consistent practice. This situation is exacerbated by the limitations of the institutional system, which has not yet been able to ensure consistent behaviour among actors on a sustainable basis.

The conclusions of this research indicate that the success of multi-stakeholder partnerships depends not only on the structure and the actors involved, but also on the quality of the relationships built between them. Strong and sustainable trust requires the integration of three elements: competence, good intentions, and behaviour, supported by institutional mechanisms capable of maintaining consistency and stability in the long term. Therefore, strengthening organisational trust is a key factor in promoting more effective, inclusive, and sustainable tourism governance.

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