



Premature Stagnation in Policy-Driven Tourism Development: Early-Stage Failures in Tourism Village Development

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ABSTRACT

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Policy-driven tourism village development has expanded rapidly in many rural regions, yet a considerable number of formally designated destinations fail to evolve into operational tourism systems despite the potential and administrative legitimacy. Existing studies predominantly interpret stagnation as a later-stage phenomenon within the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), leaving limited explanation for why some destinations fail to progress beyond the earliest stages of development. This study examines how stagnation emerges and persists during the initial phase of destination formation within policy-driven tourism contexts. Employing a qualitative multiple case study approach, this research investigates three tourism villages in Bandung Regency, Indonesia, using semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that administrative legitimacy alone is insufficient to activate destination development when not accompanied by institutional capacity, structured participation, and economic integration. Instead, fragmented institutional arrangements, uncoordinated participation, and disconnected economic practices can hinder the transition from exploration stage to involvement. Building on these findings, this study proposes the concept of premature stagnation to explain conditions in which destination development becomes structurally stalled at the exploration stage due to the absence of adequate institutional and social foundations. The study extends the TALC framework by demonstrating that stagnation may emerge before the involvement stage, which deviates from the natural progress that happens in the later stages of destination evolution. These findings highlight the importance of institutional preparation and systemic coordination as foundational prerequisites for policy-driven tourism development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades and increasingly occupies a strategic position within regional development agendas across diverse contexts [1, 2]. Its development now extends beyond its economic function as an alternative source of income for rural communities, increasingly positioning rural tourism as a development mechanism that connects economic growth with the revitalization of locally embedded social and cultural systems [3-5]. A growing body of scholarship demonstrates how rural spaces are progressively integrated into tourism systems through the commodification of landscapes, traditions, and social practices associated with authenticity and experiential value [6-8]. This transformation has positioned rural tourism as a strategic instrument of territorial

development, particularly in countries seeking to activate peripheral regions within broader economic and policy frameworks [9-11].

In Indonesia, rural areas are frequently incorporated into tourism development through village-based policies driven by administrative designation at the local government level [12-14]. This policy approach relies on the implicit assumption that formal recognition will improve economic activity, stimulate community participation, and strengthen local institutions. Within this framework, tourism villages are commonly situated within the broader paradigm of community-based tourism (CBT), which emphasizes participatory engagement, local resource mobilization, and sustainability-oriented development [15, 16]. However, empirical evidence shows that many designated tourism villages fail to exhibit operational tourism dynamics even after

extended periods [17, 18]. This pattern indicates that administrative legitimacy through tourism designation does not automatically translate into functional destination development.

This discrepancy points to a more fundamental issue: the presence of tourism potential and formal designation alone is insufficient to generate structured development. The institutional capacity literature consistently demonstrates that development outcomes depend on the ability of local organizations to coordinate actors, manage resources, and establish effective decision-making structures [19, 20]. Without these capacities, tourism potential remains unstructured and fails to evolve into an integrated economic system. Instead, it persists in fragmented and unsustainable forms [21, 22]. The core problem, therefore, lies in the absence of systemic organization.

Within tourism studies, destination development is commonly conceptualized through the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), which explains destination evolution from exploration to stagnation [23, 24]. Subsequent studies have continued to apply this framework to understand destination trajectories across different tourism contexts. TALC assumes a sequential progression driven by the interaction between market demand and local initiative [25-27]. However, such assumptions become problematic when applied to destinations shaped by policy interventions. In policy-driven tourism development, administrative legitimacy often precedes the formation of institutional capacity [28-30]. As a result, development trajectories frequently diverge from the organic pathways assumed in TALC.

The perspective of path dependence provides a useful lens for understanding this condition. It emphasizes how early decisions shape development trajectories that become increasingly difficult to alter over time [31-33]. Existing studies show that policy-driven destinations frequently encounter coordination problems and governance weaknesses during the early stages of their formation [11, 17, 34]. However, current literature remains limited in explaining how and why stagnation can emerge before destinations enter the involvement stage. Most studies continue to treat stagnation as a late-stage phenomenon, which leads early-stage failures to be interpreted as developmental delay. This limitation reveals a clear conceptual gap in explaining why destinations fail to transition from exploration to involvement, particularly in policy-driven rural tourism contexts.

Building on this conceptual gap, this study is guided by the central question of how stagnation can emerge and persist at the early stage of destination development within policy-driven tourism contexts. The analysis focuses on the relationship between administrative legitimacy, institutional capacity, and the formation of destination systems during the initiation phase. Drawing on three tourism villages in Bandung Regency, this study examines how initial configurations shape the likelihood of stagnation at the exploration stage. This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it revisits the concept of stagnation within the TALC by showing that stagnation may emerge prior to the involvement stage. Second, it introduces the notion of premature stagnation to explain conditions in which policy-driven tourism development does not translate into functional destination systems. Third, it provides an integrated explanation of how the absence of institutional integration, structured participation, and economic coordination constrains development at an early stage.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Institutional capacity and the paradox of administrative legitimacy

Studies on destination development frequently remain constrained by a form of physical reductionism that equates development readiness with the availability of infrastructure, tourism attractions, and spatial accessibility [35-37]. This perspective assumes that destinations will evolve organically once physical resources and tourism potential become available for economic utilization [11, 38, 39]. Such an orientation privileges material indicators of development while underestimating the institutional processes through which destinations are socially organized, economically coordinated, and politically sustained [9, 40-42]. Consequently, destination development is often approached primarily as a problem of resource availability instead of systemic organization [17, 18]. This perspective obscures a more fundamental dimension: institutional capacity as the underlying condition that enables fragmented resources, actors, and interests to be transformed into a functional destination system [20-22].

Within the institutional literature, destination development is increasingly understood as the capacity to construct stable mechanisms capable of coordinating collective action across multiple actors and sectors [19, 43, 44]. In this context, institutional capacity extends beyond administrative competence and formal organizational existence, encompassing the ability of local institutions to regulate interdependencies, establish credible decision-making structures, mediate competing interests, and organize resources into integrated economic configurations [20, 45-47]. Tourism destinations therefore evolve through institutional arrangements that coordinate dispersed activities into interconnected systems of governance, participation, and economic integration [19, 21, 48, 49]. Institutional capacity consequently becomes the foundational mechanism through which destination systems acquire operational coherence and long-term sustainability.

These dynamics become substantially more complex within policy-driven tourism development, where administrative intervention frequently precedes institutional consolidation at the local level [11, 50-52]. In such contexts, destination status is often formally assigned before the organizational, social, and governance foundations necessary for operational development have been established, generating a disjuncture between administrative legitimacy and operational capacity [17, 18, 34]. This condition reflects the paradox of administrative legitimacy, in which destinations may appear institutionally legitimate from a policy perspective while remaining operationally fragile in practice [41, 53-55]. Governance scholarship associates this condition with institutional voids, where formal rules exist legally but fail to acquire functional relevance because they are not embedded within local routines, collective practices, and systems of coordination [21, 56, 57]. Consequently, administrative legitimacy may generate formally stable yet operationally hollow arrangements. Under these conditions, destinations lack the organizational capacity required to coordinate actors, sustain participation, and integrate economic activities into coherent systems [11, 18, 34].

2.2 Systemic integration and early path dependence

CBT development is fundamentally shaped by the extent to which economic actors, local institutions, and tourism activities are integrated into coherent destination structures [58-61]. Within tourism systems, value is generated through interconnected relationships that enable coordination among production, participation, and governance processes [15]. Systemic integration therefore becomes a critical condition enabling dispersed tourism activities to acquire operational coherence and collective direction [62-65]. In this context, participation should be understood as an institutionalized process of coordinated engagement [66-69]. The absence of integration during the early stages of development often produces fragmented activity patterns in which tourism initiatives evolve independently without forming a functional destination system [17, 34]. Under such conditions, tourism potential may continue to exist spatially and economically, yet remain structurally disconnected due to the absence of mechanisms capable of linking actors, interests, and economic activities into an integrated configuration.

This condition can be further explained through the perspective of path dependence, which emphasizes how early institutional configurations shape long-term development trajectories [31, 32, 70]. Initial decisions that emerge without adequate institutional foundations frequently generate weak starting conditions that constrain subsequent transformation processes [33, 70]. Such a perspective challenges the linear assumptions embedded within the TALC, where stagnation is generally positioned as a consequence of the later stages of destination evolution [24, 27]. In policy-driven tourism development contexts, stagnation may emerge during the earliest phases when systemic foundations fail to materialize. Without effective mechanisms for coordination and participation, destinations remain unable to progress toward the involvement stage and become trapped within prolonged exploration [15, 16, 71].

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multiple case study strategy to examine stagnation at the early stage of tourism village development within a policy-driven tourism development context. The approach enables the investigation of social and institutional mechanisms that cannot be adequately understood through isolated variables, while situating the phenomenon within interrelated configurations of actors, rules, and practices [72, 73]. The analysis is oriented toward analytical generalization, focusing on how initial configurations in destination formation produce a failure of transition from exploration to involvement. The use of multiple cases allows comparison across contexts governed by an identical policy framework, ensuring that the patterns identified represent recurring mechanisms. Analytically, the study adopts an interpretative, theory-building orientation [74, 75], where empirical evidence is mobilized to evaluate and extend the TALC by identifying conditions under which development stalls at the initiation phase.

3.2 Research site

The empirical setting consists of three tourism villages in Bandung Regency—Sukamulya (Kutawaringin District), Jatisari, and Nagrak (Cangkuang District)—designated under Regent Decree No. 556/KEP.923-DISBUDPAR/2023. Case selection was purposive and based on two considerations. First, all three villages were established under the same policy framework, thereby providing a comparable institutional context [76]. Second, despite their formal designation as tourism villages in 2023, all remained at the pioneering stage and had not demonstrated substantive progression toward the involvement stage at the time of the study, which make this study as negative-case sampling that highlights the early-stage failure mechanism. This shared empirical condition provides a coherent basis for examining recurring mechanisms associated with early-stage stagnation under a common policy framework. Across the three cases, field observations, interviews, and document analysis consistently indicated the absence of an operational destination management system. This convergence was treated as replication of a recurring structural pattern, enabling analytical generalization of the mechanisms underlying premature stagnation.

The unit of analysis is the destination management system, encompassing institutional arrangements, community participation, and the integration of economic activities, based on the premise that destination development is shaped by the functional interdependence of these dimensions [15, 16, 71]. Within this framework, stagnation is interpreted as the failure to construct a system capable of coordinating actors, structuring relations, and integrating potential into a coherent destination configuration [17, 18, 34].

3.3 Data collection

Informants were selected purposively based on their direct and indirect involvement in the dynamics of tourism village development, including village government actors, managers, local communities, visitors, and tourism practitioners (Table 1). This selection enables the capture of multi-actor perspectives reflecting institutional, social, and user-experience dimensions of the destination [11, 14, 16, 77].

Data were collected over a ten-month period from March 2025 to December 2025 through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis as a method of triangulation. This extended period of fieldwork enabled the observation of institutional dynamics over time, particularly the persistent gap between administrative designation and operational practice [11, 78-80]. Interviews were used to explore the experiences, interpretations, and practices of actors in destination management. Observations enabled the identification of empirical conditions and the gap between administrative legitimacy and operational practices in the field. Documents were used to understand the policy context underlying the designation of tourism villages and to provide an interpretative framework for the field data. The combination of these data sources enabled the study to move beyond descriptive accounts toward analytical explanations of the relationships among policy, institutional structures, and local social dynamics.

3.4 Data analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic-interpretive analysis

through an iterative process of initial coding, category development, and thematic interpretation to identify relational patterns among dimensions shaping destination development [81, 82]. Figure 1 illustrates the analytical process through which interview data were coded, compared across cases, grouped into analytical categories, and refined into final themes through research team discussion and consensus, ultimately supporting the development of the concept of premature stagnation. The coding process was done through several iterative to ensure comprehensive themes and analytical sufficiency, guided by the principle of information

power [83, 84], where data collection continued until recurring patterns and conceptual explanations became consistently observable across cases. Analytical sufficiency was considered achieved when data analysis no longer contributing new codes because the collected data provided sufficient information to address the study aim through iterative cross-case comparison, analytical categories and final themes, consistent with recommendations for transparent reporting of saturation based on the recurrence of codes and themes [82, 84].

Table 1. Classification of research informants

Code Range	Informant Category	General Role Description	Number of Informants
P001–P003	Tourism Management Actors	Individuals directly involved in coordinating and managing tourism activities at the village level	3
P004–P005	Local Government Actors	Village-level government representatives involved in policy direction and local governance	2
P006–P008	Community Members	Local residents with no formal role in tourism management but affected by tourism development	3
P009–P012	Visitors	Individuals who have visited or experienced tourism activities in the studied villages	4
P013	Tourism Practitioner	External practitioner with experience in tourism village development	1
Total			13

Source: Research Data, 2025

Table 2. Representative examples of initial codes, analytical categories, and final themes

Example Initial Codes	Analytical Category	Final Theme
Absence of tourism management body; delayed institutional establishment; temporary governance arrangement	Institutional readiness gap	Administrative legitimacy
Low member engagement; weak collective ownership; top-down organisational formation	Weak institutional capacity	Institutional fragility
Limited community awareness; weak dissemination; passive community involvement	Participation readiness gap	Decoupling of participation
Individual benefit orientation; fragmented tourism activities; lack of coordination	Weak destination coordination	Economic fragmentation

Source: Research Data, 2025

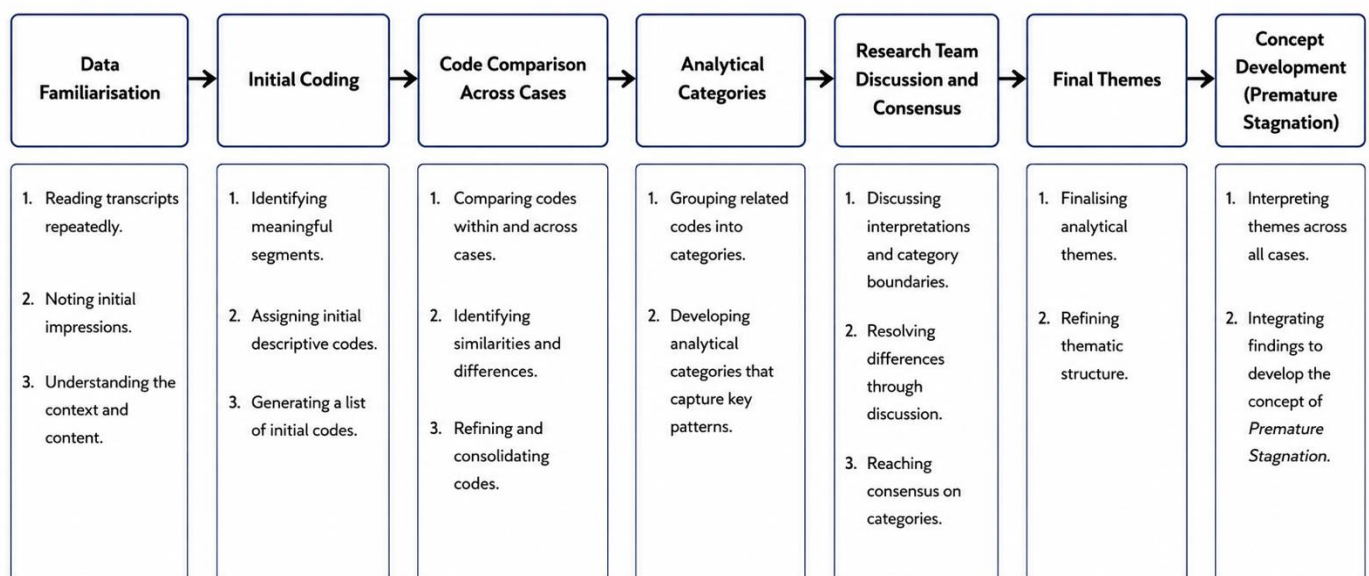


Figure 1. Thematic analysis process

Data checking was conducted by the research team iteratively to validate the interpretations of participants' experiences, as well as extensive discussion to reach

consensus on how to understand the data, thereby strengthening analytical credibility. Ethical considerations were addressed through voluntary participation based on

informed consent, and participants' confidentiality was protected through anonymized coding in data reporting [85]. Table 2 presents representative examples of the initial coding process, illustrating how descriptive codes were progressively grouped into analytical categories and refined into the final themes reported in the findings. The analysis moves beyond theme identification toward tracing structural configurations that account for the failure of transition from exploration to involvement. Empirical findings are interpreted through a conceptual framework integrating TALC, CBT, and institutional perspectives to explain the relationships among organizational capacity, participation, and economic integration. Cross-case analysis ensures that the identified patterns are consistent and represent recurring mechanisms, thereby supporting the conceptualization of premature stagnation as a structural failure at the initiation stage.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Administrative legitimacy as symbolic recognition without operational translation

The designation of villages as tourism destinations through the Decree of the Regent of Bandung Number 556/KEP.923-DISBUDPAR/2023 represents a form of administrative legitimacy within the framework of policy-driven tourism development. This policy constitutes part of a broader governmental initiative to expand rural tourism, through which 50 villages were formally designated as tourism villages, following a prior decree in 2022 that established an additional 50 villages under the same classification. Normatively, such legitimacy is expected to function as an initial trigger for the formation of destination management systems through institutionalization processes. However, empirical findings indicate that this legitimacy fails to operate as a mechanism for system activation and instead remains symbolic in the absence of operational capacity. Administrative recognition is not translated into structures capable of coordinating activities, leaving formal legitimacy detached from the operational mechanisms required for destination formation. Under these conditions, legitimacy functions only as administrative recognition, while the role as foundation of a functioning destination system is not operating.

The disconnect between legitimacy and operational capacity is clearly reflected in field practices. In Sukamulya Village, the absence of a formal management body has encouraged the emergence of temporary and ad hoc arrangements. As reflected in the statement of a tourism management actor, this condition indicates an unplanned institutionalization process and confirms that management structures were not established from the outset. The situation is further exacerbated by the absence of active management practices following formal designation, demonstrating that administrative status is not accompanied by operational capacity.

"Because a tourism management body has not yet been established, we will form a temporary institution by recruiting youth..." (P001).

"The status of a tourism village already exists, but in practice, there are no activities that are truly operating optimally" (P002).

From a conceptual perspective, this condition can be

understood as an institutional void, where formal structures exist without the operational mechanisms required to coordinate economic and social activities [41, 56]. Within the context of this study, however, the phenomenon extends beyond a conventional implementation gap. The issue lies in the sequencing of policy formation, where administrative legitimacy is granted before institutional foundations and collective capacity have been adequately established. This condition, which is conceptualized in this study as premature formalization, indicates that administrative status precedes system readiness. Consequently, administrative legitimacy may generate formally stable yet operationally hollow arrangements. Under these conditions, destinations lack the organizational capacity required to coordinate actors, sustain participation, and integrate economic activities into coherent systems [45, 55, 68].

The absence of institutional capacity also destabilizes the social dimension, particularly through the failure to cultivate collective awareness. Information regarding the designation of tourism villages is often not systematically disseminated. As reflected in the statement from a community member (P006), legitimacy is not distributed as collective knowledge capable of fostering engagement. From the perspective of CBT, this condition helps explain why participation fails to emerge, as social involvement depends on institutionalization processes capable of building shared understanding [15, 66].

"I only recently found out that this village has been designated as a tourism village, even though I know that some local residents have often visited Hantap Dam" (P006).

Furthermore, from a path dependence perspective, legitimacy granted without foundational capacity creates weak initial conditions that constrain future development trajectories [31, 32]. Consequently, the destination remains unable to transition from exploration into the involvement stage as conceptualized in the TALC framework (Figure 2). Instead, the stagnation phenomena showed that development becomes trapped within a passive exploration phase, where administrative legitimacy paradoxically contributes to structural stagnation from the outset and lays the groundwork for premature stagnation.

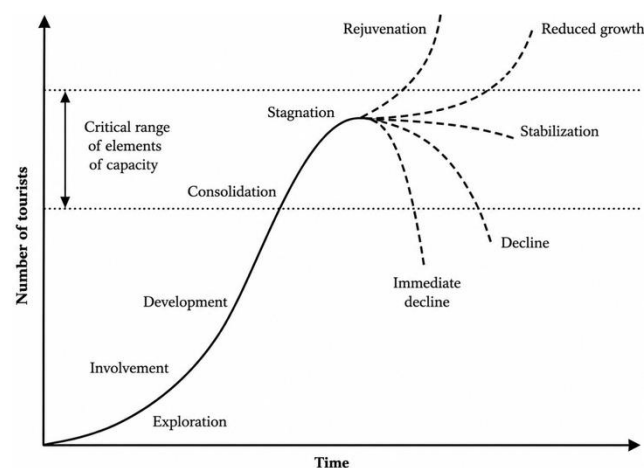


Figure 2. Original Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) proposed by Butler [24]

4.2 Institutional fragility and the absence of collective capacity

Institutional conditions across the three research locations

demonstrate that the formal establishment of organizational structures does not automatically generate operational capacity. Although institutional arrangements such as the Tourism Awareness Groups (Kelompok Sadar Wisata / POKDARWIS) in Jatisari Village and Nagrak Village have been officially established, they have not evolved into functional destination systems. This weakness is reflected in the limited ability to mobilize members into coordinated action, particularly in initiating early collective activities capable of signaling operational presence. Informants consistently described difficulties in organizing members and a prevailing sense of disengagement among local actors, resulting in institutions that exist formally yet remain inactive in practice. These conditions indicate that institutional formation functions primarily as performative compliance with policy mandates rather than as an organic institutionalization process rooted in local readiness. This finding aligns with the literature on policy-driven development, which suggests that top-down institutional formation frequently produces operationally weak structures when local actors are excluded from the foundational stages of development [11, 34, 58, 61]. Consequently, these institutions persist as stagnant administrative structures instead of evolving into dynamic systems capable of sustaining collective action.

This fragility is particularly evident in Jatisari Village, where formal organizational structures lack genuine member engagement. As reflected in the statement of a tourism management actor, the institution was established primarily through top-down appointment mechanisms, while the ideal approach should focus on internalization of shared roles and responsibilities. Without a participatory foundation, the organization fails to consolidate into a collective actor and remains dependent on isolated individuals. Under these conditions, institutional structures lose the collective ownership required for community-based sustainability and function merely as formal administrative containers devoid of collective agency.

“Members do exist, but only a few are truly active, perhaps because the formation of the management body was carried out through direct appointment by the village government, those involved do not feel a sense of responsibility” (P003).

Conceptually, this condition demonstrates that institutional capacity emerges through the ability to coordinate actors, distribute roles, and sustain collective decision-making [19, 20, 68]. In these cases, the absence of participatory mechanisms renders institutions incapable of mobilizing collective action. This weakness is further intensified by the temporal gap between administrative designation and actual institutional formation. From a path dependence perspective, such delays indicate that policy decisions introduced without adequate foundational structures create unstable developmental trajectories from the outset [21, 31, 70]. This condition is reflected in the statement from P003:

“The tourism village status was designated in 2023 but the POKDARWIS institution was only established in 2025.”

The consequences of this fragility are reflected in fragmented and individualistic activity patterns that fail to develop into cohesive destination systems. Economic activities remain oriented toward individual benefit rather than collectively organized value creation. Within the framework of collective action theory, this condition reflects a coordination failure in which actors are unable to establish shared rules or equitable mechanisms for benefit distribution

[63, 65]. The heavy dependence on village government further indicates that community-based institutions such as POKDARWIS have not achieved organizational autonomy and continue to function primarily as extensions of state bureaucracy. As a result, these fragile institutional arrangements inhibit transition toward the involvement stage within the TALC framework and put destinations within a condition of early-stage stagnation. This condition is reinforced by the statement from P003:

“What is currently being done is more individual effort, not yet integrated into a unified tourism village system... profits are also individual” (P003).

4.3 The decoupling of social support from operational participation

This study reveals that community participation is never institutionalized as an operational mechanism from the first place. Across the three research locations, community support exists primarily as a positive social disposition that remains detached from the destination management system. This finding suggests that the principal constraint on tourism development lies in the absence of structures capable of transforming individual support into coordinated collective action. Much of the CBT literature conceptualizes participation as a gradual process that develops alongside tourism activities [15, 16]. The findings of this study, however, indicate that participation cannot emerge organically without institutional arrangements capable of organizing engagement from the early stages of development.

The dynamics observed in Sukamulya Village clearly illustrate this disconnect, where a generally supportive community remains detached from destination management practices. Testimonies from informants (P004 and P007) indicate that participation persists in the form of latent social support without mechanisms capable of translating support into operational engagement. This condition is reinforced by fragmented information dissemination, which limits both public understanding and opportunities for involvement. As a result, community members remain socially supportive yet institutionally disconnected from the development process.

“In principle, the community supports the program, but a process and stages are needed to ensure they are truly ready to be involved” (P004).

“I found out that my village became a tourism village from a friend, but honestly, I have never directly visited those places” (P007).

Conceptually, these findings challenge assumptions regarding the organic emergence of participation within policy-driven tourism development. Participation requires institutional architectures and participatory mechanisms capable of deliberately organizing engagement from the initiation phase. Without such structures, social support remains latent and fails to evolve into collective practice. The uneven levels of readiness among residents further demonstrate the absence of coordinated strategies capable of integrating individual support into shared action. From a collective action perspective, this reflects the failure to establish coordination arenas and shared rules through which collaborative potential can be mobilized [63, 64]. This condition is also reflected in the statement from P005:

“Further outreach is essential. Some residents may already be prepared because they’ve received the information, but those who still don’t fully understand the programme are not

ready, and this could lead to confusion” (P005).

Ultimately, this condition reflects a participation design failure, where community engagement mechanisms are absent from the institutional structure of tourism development itself. Participation remains unstructured because clear pathways for role distribution, coordination, and articulation are never established. Under these conditions, community members become passive observers of a program they nominally support, while the ideal state is they become active participants within a functioning destination system. Within the TALC framework, this condition helps explain why destinations fail to transition from the exploration stage toward involvement, as the participatory foundations required for further development never fully materialize. Consequently, the absence of operational participation should be understood as a structural mechanism that reinforces premature stagnation.

4.4 Fragmented economic practices and the failure of system integration

The findings of this study indicate that tourism potential across the three villages has evolved into early-stage economic activities that remain fragmented and disconnected from an integrated destination system. As a result, these activities fail to generate sustainable collective value. This condition suggests that the principal challenge lies in the absence of coordination structures capable of linking economic activities within a coherent systemic framework. Within the tourism literature, systemic integration is widely regarded as a prerequisite for functional destination development because value emerges through the strategic interconnection of actors, activities, and supporting networks [19, 45, 86]. Fragmentation therefore reflects more than an ordinary early-stage condition; it signals a failure in the formation of destination systems from the outset.



Figure 3. Gunung Singa and the agricultural landscape of Sukamulya Village as emerging nature-based tourism assets within a fragmented destination system

Source: Research documentation (2025).

In Sukamulya Village, tourism potential has generated clear expectations regarding the integration of nature-based tourism, culinary activities, and cultural attractions (Figure 3). An informant described an ideal tourism experience in which these elements operate as interconnected components of a unified destination experience (P009). This testimony demonstrates that local actors already possess a cognitive understanding of tourism as an integrated system. However, institutional mechanisms capable of organizing such

integration remain absent, producing a disconnect between imagined destination structures and operational coordination systems. Similar conditions have frequently been associated with weak coordination capacity in policy-driven tourism development contexts [11, 17, 61].

“It would be great if, after coming down from Mount Singa, we could try the village’s traditional food, or if there were cultural festivals at certain times of the year” (P009).

This fragmentation becomes more pronounced in Jatisari Village, where economic activities evolve independently and fail to form cohesive value chains. Economic initiatives therefore remain atomistic and disconnected from broader destination structures. From the perspective of institutional economics, this condition reflects the absence of incentive systems capable of encouraging collaboration among actors. Within collective action theory, it indicates the absence of shared rules governing trust, coordination, and benefit distribution [63, 64, 87]. The absence of institutional arrangements also intensifies competition once economic value begins to emerge. In both Jatisari and Nagrak, competition among actors increased as tourism activities became economically profitable, demonstrating that economic growth without institutional coordination tends to generate unregulated competition.

“In the case of Lembur Awi tourism, the community and local leaders initially worked together to develop the area, both morally and materially, through collective self-help. However, after some time, once the tourism activities started to generate income, some of those involved began trying to take control of the tourism activities for their own personal interests” (P003).

At a broader level, this condition reflects an institutional void in which coordination mechanisms fail to regulate relationships among actors [41, 56]. Consequently, tourism potential remains unable to evolve into a cohesive destination system, while economic activities continue to operate without a shared destination narrative or integrative governance structure. These findings demonstrate that economic activity alone does not automatically stimulate destination development. Functional destination systems require institutional arrangements capable of integrating actors, activities, and reward structures into coherent configurations. In the absence of such integration, destinations remain unable to transition from the exploration stage toward involvement within the TALC framework. Fragmentation therefore becomes a structural mechanism that reinforces premature stagnation through the failure of system formation itself.

4.5 Premature stagnation as an early-stage structural lock-in

Within destination development literature, stagnation is conventionally positioned as a terminal phase emerging after a prolonged period of growth, as conceptualized in the TALC model [23, 24]. The findings of this study, however, reveal a fundamentally different developmental trajectory within policy-driven tourism village development. Rather than emerging after destinations have progressed through successive stages of growth, stagnation occurs before destinations are able to transition from exploration to involvement. This condition originates from the failure to establish the institutional and social foundations required for operational destination formation during the earliest stage of development. Consequently, stagnation reflects a structural

failure occurring at the point where destination systems are expected to begin taking shape. The analytical problem therefore shifts from explaining destination decline to explaining why destinations fail to progress beyond the exploration stage despite possessing formal administrative legitimacy.

The findings further demonstrate that this failure cannot be attributed to a single institutional deficiency but instead emerges through the cumulative interaction of four interrelated structural mechanisms identified across the three cases. First, administrative legitimacy remains symbolic because it is not translated into operational institutional arrangements. Second, institutional structures consequently fail to develop the collective capacity necessary for coordinating destination development. Third, the absence of effective institutions further prevents community participation from becoming operationally organised. Fourth, tourism-related economic activities continue to evolve independently without systemic coordination. Together, these conditions prevent the emergence of the organisational characteristics expected to support the transition from exploration to involvement within the TALC framework. Such condition confines destination development to prolonged exploration and inhibits the formation of a functional destination system.

Building on these findings, this study proposes the concept of premature stagnation to explain situations in which destination development becomes structurally stalled before reaching the involvement stage. Because this study extends Butler's TALC, the proposed concept must be interpreted in relation to the transition from exploration to involvement. Within the TALC framework, progression beyond the exploration stage is expected to be accompanied by the

emergence of organisational arrangements, increasing community participation, and progressively more structured destination development [24, 26]. The cross-case findings consistently demonstrate that these transition characteristics failed to materialise despite formal policy designation. Hence premature stagnation can be identified through four observable characteristics in which a tourism destination remains unable to establish (1) an operational destination management institution, (2) effective institutional capacity for collective coordination, (3) structured community participation, and (4) integrated tourism-related economic activities.

Across the three tourism villages examined, these structural conditions remained consistently evident throughout the study period. At the time of data collection, all three villages had remained in this condition for more than two years after their designation under Regent Decree No. 556/KEP.923-DISBUDPAR/2023. Within the empirical context of this study, the persistence of these conditions indicates a structural failure of stages transition. Figure 4, extending Butler's TALC, illustrates this alternative developmental trajectory, in which destination development remains structurally confined to the Exploration stage, and the explicit decision point between the Exploration and Involvement stages. Rather than assuming that destinations naturally progress beyond exploration, the proposed model argues that such progression depends on the fulfilment of several necessary conditions, namely operational destination management, institutional capacity for coordination, structured community participation, and integrated tourism-related economic activities. Conversely, when one or more of these conditions remain absent, destination development becomes locked into an alternative pathway conceptualised as Premature Stagnation.

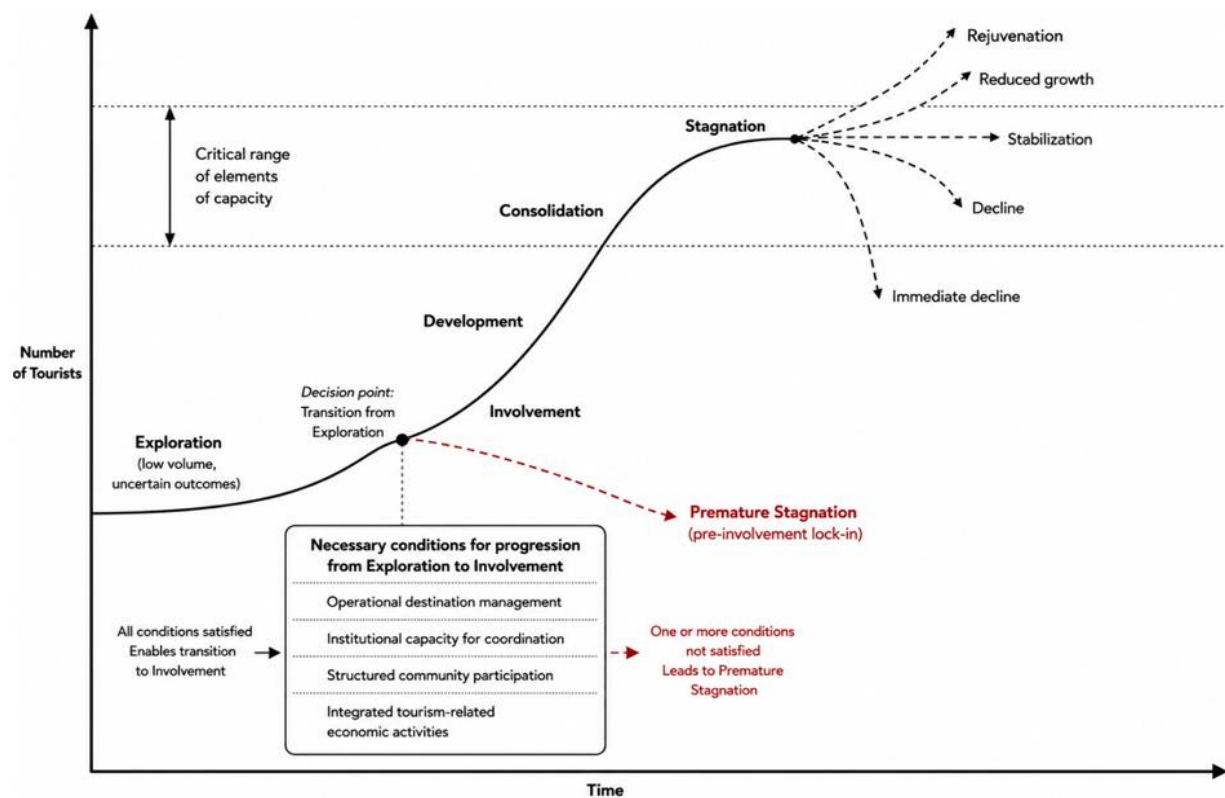


Figure 4. Proposed extension of Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), introducing an explicit decision point and an alternative premature stagnation pathway before the Involvement stage

Source: Adapted from Butler (1980) [24]; modified by the authors (2025).

The broader implications of this condition are reflected in a trajectory characterised by structural lock-in. Initial policy decisions that confer legitimacy without corresponding institutional capacity create weak starting conditions that constrain subsequent transformation processes. Fragile institutions, fragmented participation, and disconnected economic activities subsequently reinforce one another, generating a self-reproducing structure that remains unstable yet persistent over time [31, 41]. Under these conditions, conventional interventions such as infrastructure provision or additional tourism programming frequently fail to produce meaningful transformation because they do not address the underlying absence of systemic integration. This finding explains why physical development alone does not automatically catalyse destination evolution when the principal constraint lies in the weakness of institutional coordination structures.

These findings also reveal important implications for policy-driven tourism development. Administrative designation alone is insufficient to stimulate destination formation when detached from institutional preparation and participatory design. More effective policy approaches therefore require sustained investment in institutional capacity, including the establishment of local organisations, mechanisms for coordination, and structured pathways for community participation from the outset. Destination development is consequently more likely to evolve sustainably when approached as a gradual process of collective learning, institutional consolidation, and rule formation rather than as a purely administrative intervention. Such an orientation increases the likelihood that policy initiatives will support the emergence of operational destination systems and reduce the risk of early-stage stagnation.

4.6 Synthesis of findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that premature stagnation does not emerge through a single institutional failure, but through the sequential interaction of multiple structural weaknesses that collectively inhibit destination formation. Administrative legitimacy initiates the development process, yet in the absence of institutional readiness it produces premature formalization rather than operational activation. Weak institutional capacity subsequently limits the ability of local actors to organize participation, coordinate collective action, and integrate economic activities into coherent destination structures. Under these conditions, community support remains socially dispersed while tourism-related economic activities continue to evolve in fragmented and disconnected forms. The cumulative effect of these interrelated weaknesses prevents the emergence of an operational destination system and ultimately anchors development within the exploration stage.

The findings further reveal that early-stage stagnation should not be understood as a temporary developmental delay, but as a structurally reproduced trajectory. From a path dependence perspective, weak initial conditions generate self-reinforcing dynamics in which institutional fragility, fragmented participation, and weak economic integration continuously reproduce one another over time. As these dynamics become increasingly embedded, destinations experience a form of structural lock-in that constrains subsequent transformation. The conceptual framework developed in this study (Figure 5) synthesizes these

relationships by illustrating how policy-driven tourism development may unintentionally generate stagnation at the earliest stage of destination evolution. Rather than functioning as isolated institutional deficiencies, these dimensions operate as interconnected mechanisms that collectively prevent transition toward the involvement stage within the TALC framework.

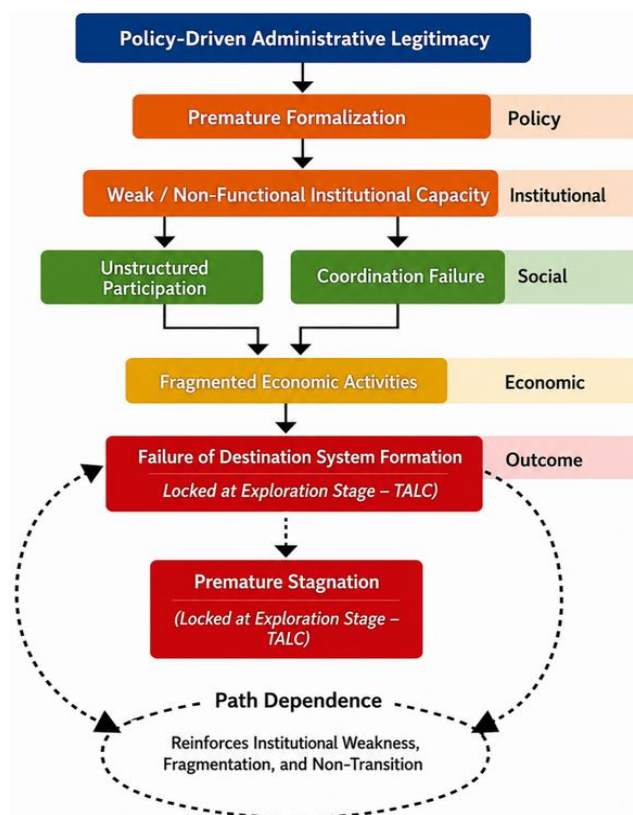


Figure 5. Conceptual framework of premature stagnation in policy-driven tourism development
Source: Developed by the author (2025).

While these findings contribute conceptually to the understanding of premature stagnation in policy-driven tourism development, several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis is confined to tourism villages operating within a specific regional policy framework and therefore does not aim to establish statistical generalization across broader tourism contexts. Furthermore, although the qualitative approach enables an in-depth examination of institutional dynamics and structural configurations, the study remains primarily focused on the initiation phase of destination development. Long-term trajectory shifts therefore remain insufficiently observed. Future research may extend this analysis through longitudinal approaches capable of examining how destinations transition from conditions of premature stagnation toward involvement, institutional consolidation, or alternative developmental pathways over time.

5. CONCLUSION

The concept of stagnation in destination development has conventionally been positioned as a terminal phase within the destination lifecycle. However, the findings of this study reveal a fundamentally different configuration within policy-

driven tourism development contexts. In the case of tourism villages in Bandung Regency, stagnation emerges not after a period of growth, but at the point where destination systems fail to evolve beyond the exploration stage into operational structures. Administrative legitimacy, although formally established through policy designation, is not accompanied by the institutional capacity necessary to coordinate actors, structure participation, and integrate economic activities. Under these conditions, stagnation is more appropriately understood as a systemic failure of formation, instead as a phase of decline from a previously established system.

This condition emerges through the interaction of structurally disconnected dimensions, including symbolic legitimacy, fragile institutional arrangements, unstructured participation, and fragmented economic practices. The absence of coordination mechanisms prevents tourism potential from developing into an integrated destination system, thereby inhibiting transition toward the involvement stage within the TALC framework. Based on these findings, this study proposes the concept of premature stagnation to explain situations in which destination development becomes locked at the exploration stage due to the absence of adequate institutional and social foundations. This concept extends the TALC by demonstrating that stagnation is not exclusively a late-stage phenomenon, but may emerge as a structural condition from the initiation phase of development. Furthermore, these dynamics generate a path-dependent trajectory characterized by structural lock-in, in which institutional fragility and fragmentation continuously reproduce one another over time.

The findings of this study also carry broader implications for policy-driven tourism development. Administrative designation alone is insufficient to stimulate destination formation when not accompanied by institutional preparation and mechanisms for collective coordination. Strengthening local organizations, designing structured participation processes, and establishing integrative governance mechanisms therefore become essential prerequisites for transforming tourism potential into operational destination systems. More broadly, this study highlights the importance of understanding destination development not as a linear progression driven solely by growth, but as a process fundamentally shaped by the quality of initial institutional configurations. Under policy-driven development contexts, the absence of institutional foundations may generate long-term stagnation before developmental dynamics fully emerge.

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