

Institutional Capacity, Service Utilization, and Public Perceptions of Community-Based Tourism Programs: Governance Implications in Zamboanga City, Philippines

Abigail Irene B. Marquez, MPA*

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ABSTRACT

Local governments increasingly adopt Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as a development strategy to promote inclusive growth, improve public service delivery, and localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). In decentralized governance contexts, the effectiveness of CBT initiatives depends not only on community participation but also on institutional capacity, service utilization, and public perceptions of government performance. Despite the growing body of CBT literature, limited empirical attention has been given to how administrative capacity and governance arrangements shape community utilization of tourism programs and public perceptions of their effectiveness. This study examines the relationship between institutional capacity, service utilization, and public perception of CBT initiatives in Zamboanga City, Philippines. Using a mixed-method research design, the study analyzes survey data and key informant interviews to assess how local government structures, coordination mechanisms, and administrative practices influence community engagement and utilization of CBT services. Findings indicate that while CBT initiatives are generally perceived as accessible and culturally relevant, variations in institutional capacity and inter-agency coordination significantly affect service utilization and public confidence in local tourism governance. The study contributes to public administration literature by situating CBT within the discourse on service delivery and institutional performance and offers policy-relevant insights for strengthening governance systems to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of community-based tourism programs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has gained prominence as a policy instrument for promoting inclusive development, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment in developing countries. Anchored in principles of participation and local ownership, CBT is increasingly integrated into local government development agendas as a means of generating livelihood opportunities while preserving cultural and environmental assets (Goodwin, 2012; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). In decentralized governance systems, such as that of the Philippines, local government units (LGUs) play a central role in planning, implementing, and sustaining CBT initiatives.

While existing studies highlight the potential socio-economic benefits of CBT, evidence suggests that outcomes vary significantly across local contexts. Scholars increasingly argue that these variations are

shaped not only by levels of community participation but also by institutional capacity, governance arrangements, and the quality of public service delivery (Osborne, 2006; Peters, 2018). Weak coordination, limited administrative resources, and unclear mandates often undermine CBT programs, resulting in uneven service utilization and mixed public perceptions (Tosun, 2000; Nunkoo, 2017).

In the Philippine context, CBT initiatives are frequently promoted as mechanisms for inclusive growth and cultural sustainability. However, empirical studies examining how communities perceive and utilize CBT services, and how these perceptions are shaped by local governance capacity, remain limited. Much of the literature focuses on cultural impacts or economic outcomes, with less attention given to CBT as a form of public service delivery subject to administrative performance and institutional constraints.

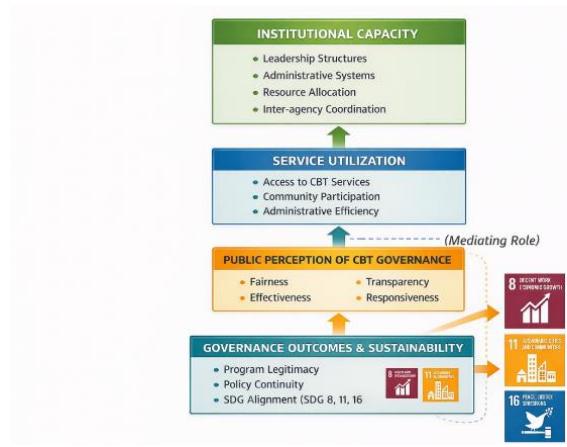
This study addresses this gap by examining CBT initiatives in Zamboanga City through a public administration lens, focusing on institutional capacity,

* Western Mindanao State University, Zamboanga City, Philippines
Email: marquez.abigail@wmsu.edu.ph

service utilization, and public perception. By analyzing how governance structures and administrative practices influence community engagement with CBT programs, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of CBT as a governance and service delivery mechanism. The findings aim to inform policy reforms that strengthen institutional capacity and improve the effectiveness and sustainability of community-based tourism initiatives.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework of Community-Based Tourism as Local Public Service Delivery



The framework illustrates the causal relationship between institutional capacity, service utilization, and public perception of CBT governance, with public perception mediating governance outcomes and sustainability aligned with SDGs 8, 11, and 16.

This study is anchored in public administration and governance theories that emphasize institutional capacity, service delivery, and citizen perceptions as critical determinants of policy effectiveness. Drawing from New Public Governance (Osborne, 2006), Institutional Theory (Peters, 2018), and contemporary public management scholarship, the conceptual framework positions Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as a form of local public service delivery rather than solely a tourism or cultural intervention.

Consistent with the governance perspective articulated by Bovaird and Löffler (2016), public services such as CBT are understood as outcomes of complex interactions among public institutions, communities, and other stakeholders. From this perspective, effective CBT governance depends not only on community participation but also on the capacity of public institutions to coordinate actors, design enabling systems, and sustain service delivery over time.

At the core of the framework is institutional capacity, defined as the ability of local government units to design, coordinate, and sustain CBT initiatives through appropriate leadership structures, administrative systems, resource allocation, and inter-agency coordination.

Institutional capacity shapes how CBT programs are implemented and determines the consistency, accessibility, and quality of services delivered to communities.

Institutional capacity is hypothesized to directly influence service utilization, referring to the extent to which community members access, participate in, and benefit from CBT-related programs and services. Service utilization reflects not only program availability but also administrative efficiency, clarity of procedures, and responsiveness of implementing agencies. Variations in utilization signal differences in governance effectiveness at the local level.

Service utilization, in turn, influences public perception of CBT governance, encompassing community assessments of fairness, transparency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of local government tourism initiatives. Public perception is treated as both an outcome of service delivery and a mediating mechanism shaping future participation and institutional legitimacy. This approach is aligned with Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2017), who emphasize that citizen trust in public institutions is strongly influenced by perceived transparency and procedural fairness, not merely by service outcomes.

The framework further assumes that public perception mediates the relationship between institutional capacity and long-term governance outcomes, including program sustainability, legitimacy of local tourism policies, and alignment with sustainable development objectives such as SDG 8 (inclusive economic opportunities), SDG 11 (community-based local development), and SDG 16 (effective and accountable institutions).

Thus, the conceptual framework illustrates a dynamic relationship in which institutional capacity influences service utilization, service utilization shapes public perception, and public perception feeds back into governance outcomes and sustainability of CBT initiatives. This framework situates CBT squarely within the discourse of public management and governance, emphasizing institutional performance, citizen trust, and service legitimacy.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employed a mixed-method research design to examine the relationship between institutional capacity, service utilization, and public perception of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) governance in Zamboanga City. The mixed-method approach was selected to capture both the measurable patterns of service utilization and perception and the contextual governance dynamics shaping CBT implementation at the local level. This design aligns with public administration research traditions that emphasize triangulation and explanatory depth when analyzing governance performance and service delivery outcomes (Peters, 2018; Osborne, 2006).

The quantitative component focused on assessing levels of service utilization and public perception of CBT

governance, while the qualitative component explored institutional capacity, administrative processes, and coordination mechanisms underpinning CBT initiatives. Integrating both approaches enabled a comprehensive analysis of CBT as a form of local public service delivery rather than a purely tourism-driven intervention.

2.2 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey administered to community members involved in or affected by CBT initiatives, including residents of selected barangays hosting tourism-related activities. The survey measured service utilization, perceptions of governance effectiveness, transparency, and responsiveness, as well as perceived sustainability of CBT programs.

Qualitative data were obtained through key informant interviews (KII) with local government officials, barangay leaders, tourism officers, and community organizers involved in CBT planning and implementation. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide designed to elicit insights on institutional roles, coordination practices, administrative challenges, and policy support mechanisms. Document analysis of local tourism plans, barangay resolutions, and program reports supplemented interview data to strengthen contextual understanding.

2.2 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify patterns in service utilization and public perception of CBT governance. Frequency distributions, weighted means, and comparative analyses were employed to assess variations across barangays and respondent groups. These analyses provided empirical grounding for evaluating governance effectiveness and community engagement levels.

Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis, following a systematic coding process that identified recurring themes related to institutional capacity, administrative coordination, leadership, and policy integration. Qualitative quantifiers such as “*most*,” “*many*,” “*several*,” and “*a few*” were used consistently to indicate the relative prevalence of identified themes, ensuring analytical transparency and symmetry with quantitative findings.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative results occurred at the interpretation stage, allowing governance patterns identified statistically to be explained and contextualized through institutional narratives.

2.4 Ethical Procedures

The study adhered to established ethical standards in social science and public administration research. Participation in surveys and interviews was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of

confidentiality and anonymity, with no personally identifiable information disclosed in the analysis or reporting of results.

Permission to access relevant documents and conduct interviews was secured through appropriate institutional channels. Data were used exclusively for academic research purposes, and all findings were reported in aggregate form to prevent attribution to specific individuals or offices.

2.5 Research Instruments

The primary quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended items measured on a Likert scale. The instrument was designed to assess service utilization, perceptions of governance effectiveness, transparency, responsiveness, and perceived sustainability of CBT initiatives. The questionnaire was reviewed for content validity and clarity prior to administration.

The qualitative instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide aligned with the study's conceptual framework. Questions focused on institutional arrangements, administrative capacity, inter-agency coordination, and policy support for CBT initiatives. The flexibility of the interview guide allowed respondents to elaborate on governance experiences while maintaining consistency across interviews.

3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This section presents the findings of the study based on the research questions and variables identified in the conceptual framework. Results are organized according to the core analytical constructs: institutional capacity, service utilization, and public perception of CBT governance, with attention to their interrelationships and implications for governance outcomes and sustainability.

3.1 Institutional Capacity Supporting Community-Based Tourism

Findings indicate that institutional capacity for CBT governance in Zamboanga City varies across barangays and implementing units. Most key informants reported that the city government, through its tourism and cultural offices, provides general policy direction and logistical support for CBT initiatives. However, only some barangays demonstrated the administrative structures necessary to consistently plan, implement, and monitor tourism-related programs.

Qualitative data show that many barangay officials emphasized leadership commitment as a critical factor influencing CBT implementation. Barangays with active barangay captains and tourism focal persons exhibited clearer role delineation, more regular coordination meetings, and stronger engagement with city-level offices. In contrast, several respondents noted limited technical capacity, particularly in documentation,

budgeting, and program evaluation, which constrained institutional continuity.

Document analysis further revealed that while CBT initiatives are referenced in local tourism plans, formal institutionalization through ordinances, long-term programs, or permanent units remains limited. As a result, institutional capacity was largely person-dependent, increasing vulnerability to leadership changes.

3.2 Service Utilization of CBT Programs and Activities

Quantitative findings show moderate levels of service utilization across surveyed communities. Most respondents reported participation in CBT-related activities such as fiesta events, cultural performances, and community tourism projects, indicating that programs are accessible and visible at the community level.

However, utilization patterns were uneven. Many respondents reported participation primarily during major events, particularly fiestas and festivals, while fewer reported sustained engagement in capacity-building activities, livelihood programs, or planning processes. This suggests that CBT service delivery remains event-driven rather than continuous.

Qualitative findings support this pattern. Several key informants observed that community participation peaks during fiesta periods, when resources, publicity, and political attention are concentrated. Outside these periods, participation declined due to limited follow-through, unclear schedules, and lack of sustained administrative support. These findings indicate that service utilization is strongly shaped by institutional capacity and program continuity.

3.3 Public Perception of CBT Governance

Public perception of CBT governance was generally favorable but cautious. Quantitative results indicate that most respondents viewed local CBT initiatives as culturally meaningful and beneficial to community identity. Respondents expressed positive perceptions of inclusiveness and cultural relevance, particularly in relation to fiesta-based activities.

However, perceptions of governance effectiveness and transparency were more mixed. While many respondents believed that local government support was visible, a significant proportion expressed uncertainty regarding decision-making processes, fund allocation, and long-term planning. This reflects a distinction between cultural approval of CBT activities and critical assessment of governance processes.

Qualitative interviews revealed that most community members associated CBT success with visible outputs, such as events and performances, rather than governance outcomes such as sustainability or policy integration. Several informants emphasized that trust in CBT governance depended on consistent engagement, clear communication, and demonstrated benefits beyond short-term economic gains.

3.4 Governance Outcomes and Sustainability Implications

The interaction between institutional capacity, service utilization, and public perception produced mixed governance outcomes. Barangays with stronger institutional arrangements exhibited higher service utilization and more positive public perceptions, contributing to greater program legitimacy and continuity. Conversely, where institutional capacity was weak, CBT initiatives were perceived as temporary and politically contingent.

Findings suggest that public perception functions as a mediating variable between service delivery and governance outcomes. Positive perceptions enhanced community support and participation, while uncertainty or skepticism weakened engagement and reduced sustainability prospects.

In relation to sustainable development, CBT initiatives contributed to short-term economic opportunities aligned with SDG 8 and reinforced cultural identity consistent with SDG 11. However, fragmented coordination and limited policy integration constrained collaborative governance arrangements envisioned under SDG 16, limiting long-term institutional sustainability.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Discussion and Interpretation of Results

This study examined Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Zamboanga City through a public administration lens, focusing on the causal relationships among institutional capacity, service utilization, and public perception of CBT governance. The findings provide empirical support for the conceptual framework and offer important insights into how governance arrangements shape the sustainability of CBT initiatives.

First, the results affirm that institutional capacity is a foundational determinant of CBT performance, consistent with New Public Governance and Institutional Theory (Osborne, 2006; Peters, 2018). Barangays and local units with clearer administrative structures, designated tourism focal persons, and regular coordination mechanisms demonstrated stronger program continuity and more predictable service delivery. Where institutional capacity was limited, CBT initiatives tended to be personality-driven and vulnerable to leadership transitions. This finding aligns with earlier studies emphasizing that weak institutionalization undermines the long-term effectiveness of community-based development programs (Tosun, 2000; Goodwin, 2012).

Second, the analysis reveals that service utilization operates as an intermediate outcome of governance effectiveness rather than merely a measure of participation. Although community members actively engaged in fiesta-based activities, utilization was largely episodic and event-centered. This pattern reflects a governance model that prioritizes visibility and short-term

outputs over sustained service provision. The results support the argument that without consistent administrative follow-through, CBT risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010; Mason, 2008).

Third, findings confirm that public perception mediates the relationship between service utilization and governance outcomes. Positive perceptions were strongly associated with cultural legitimacy and social cohesion, particularly when CBT initiatives aligned with local traditions and identities. However, mixed perceptions regarding transparency, planning, and accountability indicate that cultural acceptance does not automatically translate into governance trust. This distinction reinforces public administration scholarship emphasizing that legitimacy is multi-dimensional, requiring both cultural resonance and institutional credibility (Bryson et al., 2016).

Importantly, the mediating role of public perception explains why similar levels of participation can produce divergent governance outcomes across barangays. Where service utilization was accompanied by clear communication, inclusive decision-making, and visible administrative commitment, public trust increased and sustainability prospects improved. Conversely, when participation occurred without institutional clarity, perceptions remained cautious, weakening long-term support.

From a sustainable development perspective, the findings indicate partial alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. Fiesta-based CBT initiatives contributed to SDG 8 by generating short-term livelihood opportunities and local economic activity, and to SDG 11 by reinforcing place-based cultural identity. However, limited inter-agency coordination and weak policy integration constrained progress toward SDG 16, particularly in terms of accountable, transparent, and resilient local institutions. This underscores the need to view CBT not only as a cultural or economic intervention but as a governance reform instrument.

Therefore, the analysis demonstrates that CBT effectiveness depends less on the presence of cultural assets and more on the quality of public administration systems that support them. Institutional capacity enables service utilization; service utilization shapes public perception; and public perception, in turn, determines governance legitimacy and sustainability. These findings extend existing CBT literature by situating community participation within a broader governance performance framework and by empirically validating public perception as a critical mediating variable.

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Zamboanga City as a form of local public service delivery, with particular attention to the

relationships among institutional capacity, service utilization, and public perception of CBT governance. Anchored in public administration and governance theory, the research moved beyond conventional tourism-focused analyses to assess CBT as a governance intervention shaped by administrative systems, institutional arrangements, and citizen experiences.

The findings demonstrate that institutional capacity is the primary enabling condition for effective CBT governance. Local government units with clearer organizational structures, defined roles, and coordination mechanisms were better able to deliver CBT-related services consistently and predictably. In contrast, weak institutional arrangements resulted in fragmented implementation, uneven access to services, and reliance on ad hoc leadership. This confirms that CBT outcomes are fundamentally administrative in nature and cannot be sustained through community participation alone.

The study further establishes that service utilization is an indicator of governance performance rather than mere participation levels. While communities actively engaged in CBT activities, utilization patterns revealed that many initiatives remained episodic and program-based rather than institutionalized services. This limits CBT's capacity to generate sustained economic and social benefits and constrains its contribution to long-term local development goals.

Critically, the research validates public perception as a mediating variable between service delivery and governance outcomes. Positive perceptions of fairness, transparency, and responsiveness strengthened trust in local institutions and enhanced program legitimacy. Conversely, gaps in communication, planning, and accountability weakened public confidence, even in contexts where participation was high. This finding underscores the importance of citizen perception as both an evaluative outcome and a feedback mechanism in public service delivery.

From a sustainable development perspective, CBT initiatives in Zamboanga City demonstrated partial alignment with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through livelihood generation and local economic activity, and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through place-based development and cultural continuity. However, progress toward SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) remained limited due to weak institutionalization, insufficient policy coherence, and fragile collaborative governance arrangements. Without deliberate administrative reforms, CBT risks remaining a peripheral development activity rather than a transformative governance strategy.

Thus, the study contributes to public administration scholarship by reframing CBT as a governance-dependent public service intervention and by empirically demonstrating how institutional capacity and public perception jointly shape sustainability outcomes.

5.2 Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed to strengthen CBT governance and enhance its contribution to sustainable development:

1. **Institutionalize CBT within Local Development Frameworks:** Local governments should formally integrate CBT into comprehensive development plans, annual investment programs, and sectoral strategies. This includes establishing permanent CBT coordination units or focal persons to reduce dependence on political leadership and ensure continuity across administrations.
2. **Strengthen Administrative and Inter-Agency Coordination:** Clear delineation of roles among tourism offices, planning units, barangays, and partner agencies is essential. Regular coordination mechanisms, such as inter-agency committees or technical working groups, should be institutionalized to improve policy coherence and implementation consistency.
3. **Shift from Event-Based Programs to Service-Oriented Delivery:** CBT initiatives should be reframed as ongoing public services rather than one-time projects. This requires standardized procedures, transparent guidelines, and

predictable support mechanisms that enable communities to access services continuously rather than episodically.

4. **Integrate Citizen Feedback and Perception Monitoring:** Local governments should systematically collect and use community feedback to assess CBT governance performance. Incorporating perception indicators into monitoring and evaluation systems will strengthen accountability, improve responsiveness, and reinforce public trust.
5. **Align CBT Governance with SDG Localization Strategies:** Explicit alignment of CBT programs with SDG 8, SDG 11, and SDG 16 should guide policy design and evaluation. Doing so will position CBT as a strategic instrument for inclusive economic growth, sustainable local development, and institutional strengthening.
6. **Build Administrative Capacity at the Barangay Level:** Targeted capacity-building programs focusing on planning, financial management, and participatory governance should be provided to barangay officials and implementers to reduce disparities in CBT performance across communities.

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