

Symbolic Capital and Women's Leadership in Village Tourism: Evidence from Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Women's participation in village tourism governance is part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 (Gender Equality), but remains unequally distributed across rural tourism institutions. This study examines how women's participation and division of labor are structured, how their symbolic capital is formed, and the extent to which this symbolic capital can be converted into leadership within Ladesta (the Indonesian term for Village Tourism Institutions) in Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah, Malang Regency, Indonesia.

Methodology: This research applied a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative case study design. Data were generated through in-depth interviews with eight informants from Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah. To validate interpretations and map convergences and tensions between cases, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the same eight informants. Documentation was used to trace Ladesta's organizational structure and records of activities related to women's participation. Data were analyzed using interactive field analysis (data condensation, data display, and drawing/verifying conclusions) and interpreted through Bourdieu's modalities.

Main Results: The findings indicate that women are formally included in Ladesta, but their roles vary across villages and across organizational arenas. Women's involvement in core management depends on their structural position and whether they have regular access to meetings, agenda-setting, and decision-making forums. Sources of symbolic capital also vary. In Gubugklakah, legitimacy is generally associated with family status and proximity to village elites; in Poncokusumo, it is more often based on education and organizational experience. In both cases, symbolic capital helps women acquire normative roles, but it does not necessarily translate into leadership. Conversion to leadership is constrained by unequal communication and gendered expectations that treat leadership and public decision-making as male domains, preventing women from asserting competence and authority.

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Discussions: Symbolic capital mainly opens the door to organisational membership, but it does not automatically produce women's leadership. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (2013), it only matters when it can be converted into authority within the Ladesta Organization, where recognition is still shaped by patriarchal norms. In Poncokusumo, women's education and organisational experience provide cultural and social capital that is more easily read as competence, so women gain a stronger voice in meetings and decision-making. In Gubugklakah, legitimacy based on family status often leads to formal roles without real influence. Strengthening leadership requires both confidence building and more inclusive rules for decision-making and supportive organisational communication.

Conclusions: Symbolic capital can open access to organisational roles, but leadership requires supportive social networks, an inclusive organisational culture, and women's confidence to mobilise capital. Strengthening women's leadership therefore needs leadership training, expanded access to education, and organisational reforms that support SDG 5 on equal opportunities for leadership and decision-making.

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Introduction

The limited participation of women in the management of Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah Tourism Villages contradicts the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 (Gender Equality). In community-based tourism, gender equality is not only a normative agenda but also a governance requirement: women's knowledge, relational labour, and organisational skills are part of the institutional capacity needed to manage attractions, facilities, accessibility, and stakeholder support within tourism villages (Boluk et al., 2017; Kaunda & Shereni, 2024; Kimbu et al., 2024).

Empirically, women's representation in Ladesta (Indonesian term for Village Tourism Institutions) structures remains limited and uneven across the two cases. A comparison of gender distribution among Ladesta administrators shows that Gubugklakah has four women out of 16 staff members, while Poncokusumo has six women out of 23 staff members (Avina et al., data documentation, March 12, 2024). Beyond numeric representation, the main issue concerns where women are positioned and how far they influence planning and decision-making within Ladesta's core management.

Several studies have found that women's marginalization in rural tourism governance is shaped by various barriers: limited access to resources (Khan et al., 2025), traditional gender roles that prioritize domestic responsibilities (Kitole & Genda, 2024), unequal access to organizational education and training (Fathizadeh et al., 2022), and minimal involvement in decision-making processes (Rao et al., 2022). These constraints operate differently in the two

villages. In Poncokusumo, women's participation is more visible in organizational routines and some decision-making roles; in Gubugklakah, women's involvement tends to be concentrated in support and technical activities, while strategic roles remain male-dominated.

Prior studies have shown that women's marginalisation in tourism village management is due to factors such as weak coordination, limited skills, and patriarchal structures (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Batool et al., 2025; Rao et al., 2022; Singhania et al., 2021). Meanwhile, research on women's symbolic capital and leadership has largely focused on formal urban institutions (e.g., government bureaucracy and higher education), emphasising education, organisational experience, and social status as sources of legitimacy (Gallant, 2014; Meza-Mejia et al., 2023; Spark et al., 2019; Vial et al., 2016). What remains under-examined is how symbolic capital operates in rural tourism villages and, crucially, why symbolic recognition does not automatically translate into leadership influence in gendered community organisations.

This study addresses this gap by examining women's symbolic capital in Ladesta within two rural tourism village contexts—Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah—and by analysing the mechanisms that enable or constrain the conversion of symbolic capital into women's leadership. Using Bourdieu's framework (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Mead, 2021), the study contributes to debates on gender equality in community-based tourism by showing that leadership is shaped not only by symbolic capital, but also by the interaction between cultural/social capital, women's habitus (confidence and willingness), and the organisational field (norms, rules of participation, and inclusivity of decision-making).

Literature Review

Bourdieu's Capitals and Women's Leadership in Village Tourism

Bourdieu conceptualises capital as resources that become effective within a social field: economic capital (material resources), cultural capital (education, skills, dispositions), social capital (networks and relationships), and symbolic capital (recognised legitimacy, honour, and prestige) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). Symbolic capital is not a separate asset detached from other resources; rather, it emerges when cultural, social, or economic capital is recognised and legitimated in a specific field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Mead, 2021). This implies that analysing women's leadership requires tracing how women accumulate various forms of capital and how these are transformed into symbolic legitimacy under local value systems (Pattenden, 2023).

In gendered social studies, symbolic capital can support women's access to public roles, yet its conversion into authority is never automatic (Spark et al., 2019). Recognition may be granted selectively, and its effects depend on field-specific rules, including patriarchal norms that define appropriate roles for women. As a result, symbolic capital can function in two directions: it may enable women's leadership by legitimising women's competence, but it may also reproduce inequalities when legitimacy is tied to elite credentials, family status, or conformity to gendered expectations (Medir et al., 2024; Spark et al., 2019; Vial et al., 2016).

Studies on women's leadership in tourism and community-based destinations suggest that trust, moral reputation, and perceived contribution can matter as much as formal position, particularly in rural settings where collective norms shape legitimacy (Khan et al., 2025; Kitole & Genda, 2024; Rao et al., 2022; Singhania et al., 2021). However, other studies consistently show structural barriers: traditional gender roles, limited education and training opportunities, and

restricted participation in decision-making (Dewi et al., 2025; Santos et al., 2025). These findings indicate that empowerment requires more than symbolic recognition; it requires organisational arrangements that allow women to speak, influence agendas, and access strategic roles.

In rural tourism villages, the conversion process becomes especially visible. Women may accumulate cultural capital through education and organisational experience, social capital through community networks and religious organisations, and sometimes symbolic capital through family status (Dewi et al., 2025; Jayashree et al., 2021). Yet the field may still restrict conversion into leadership influence when organisational communication is not egalitarian, when decision-making is concentrated in male-dominated cores, or when women's habitus is shaped by long-standing expectations that discourage public authority (Bryan et al., 2021).

Based on previous research, this study examines two tourist villages to identify women's sources of capital and explain how these resources are recognized as symbolic capital and contribute to women's more influential roles in Ladesta's organizational routines. The novelty of this research lies in its explanation of the mechanism of converting symbolic capital into women's leadership in tourist village management.

Method

Research Approach

The study employs a constructivist paradigm with a qualitative approach to facilitate comprehension of the dynamics of women's roles and leadership in the management of Gubugklakah and Poncokusumo Tourism Villages. The constructivist paradigm was selected due to its emphasis on the notion that social reality is shaped by individuals' experiences, interactions, and meanings, which are constructed within a specific context (Neuman & Robson, 2018). In this study, the role and legitimacy of women's symbolic capital is understood as the result of an evolving social construction. A qualitative approach enables researchers to explore the profound meanings of informants' experiences, as well as capture the cultural nuances and social structures that influence women's involvement in tourism village management (Neuman & Robson, 2018).

Participants and Selection Criteria

Eight informants participated in this study (Table 1). Participants were selected purposively to represent variation in roles and levels of participation within Ladesta, including women who were active and less active in organisational routines, as well as male administrators occupying strategic positions. This composition enabled the study to capture women's experiences of participation and the organisational rationales that shape gendered role distribution. The sample size was maintained until the data reached interpretive saturation, indicated by recurring patterns regarding capital sources, participation constraints, and decision-making dynamics across the two villages.

Table 1

Informant List in Research

Initial	Gender	Position
Y1	Women	Secretary of Ladesta Poncokusumo
Y2	Women	Member (Social Media Specialist) of Ladesta Poncokusumo
Y3	Women	Member (Marketing and Treasurer) of Ladesta Poncokusumo
Y4	Women	Member (Consumption Division) of Ladesta Gubugklakah
Y5	Women	Member (Documentation Division) of Ladesta Gubugklakah
Y6	Man	Head of the Ladesta Poncokusumo
Y7	Man	Member (Tour Guide) of Ladesta Poncokusumo
Y8	Man	Chairman-Secretary of Ladesta Gubugklakah

Source: Data processed by researchers

Data Collection Technique

Data were generated through in-depth interviews, a focus group discussion (FGD), and documentation.

1. In-depth interviews were conducted with the eight informants (table 1) to explore individual trajectories of participation, perceived legitimacy, and experiences of inclusion/exclusion in Ladesta decision-making.

2. FGD: One focus group discussion was conducted with the same eight informants (table 1) to validate and refine interpretations emerging from interviews, and to surface convergences and tensions between the two village contexts.

3. Documentation was used to trace organisational structures, role distribution, and records of Ladesta activities related to women's participation. Documents were selected based on their relevance to (a) organisational membership/structure, (b) roles and divisions of work, and (c) program/activity records where participation and decision-making were observable.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using interactive field analysis techniques (Miles et al., 2014) through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation was conducted by coding interview and FGD transcripts to identify recurring themes related to women's roles and women capital. Data display was developed through thematic narratives and cross-case comparison, enabling the identification of patterns and contrasts between Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah. Conclusions were drawn iteratively and verified through triangulation across methods and sources.

To sharpen the analysis of interactive fields, this study operationalizes Bourdieu's capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Mead, 2021) as a framework that codes it into three groups: (1) sources of capital (cultural/social/economic cues if any), (2) recognition mechanisms that generate symbolic capital, and (3) conversion and constraint mechanisms that explain whether symbolic capital becomes leadership influence or remains nominal inclusion. This coding structure allows a systematic comparison of how women's capital is valued as leadership across the two village contexts.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Participation was voluntary, and informants were anonymised using initials (Y1–Y8) to protect confidentiality. To strengthen trustworthiness, the study applied methodological triangulation across interviews, FGD, and documentation. The FGD functioned as interpretive validation by checking the consistency of themes and clarifying disagreements across cases, while documentation provided contextual corroboration for organisational structures and activity patterns.

Findings and Discussion

Organisational Context in the Tourism Villages of Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah

In Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah (Malang Regency, Indonesia), tourism governance is organized through Ladesta (Village Tourism Institution), which assigns its members to a core management team and several divisions. This structure is crucial because it determines who regularly joins planning meetings, who sets the agenda, and who signs off on decisions about programs and public representation. Document research and analysis revealed that women are formally present in both organizations, but their numerical representation remains limited: Gubugklakah has four women out of 16 staff, while Poncokusumo has six women out of 23. Beyond membership numbers, a key finding is how Ladesta's internal design distributes voice, authority, learning, and routine access among its members.

In both village locations, Ladesta resembles a small bureaucracy: a chairperson/acting chairperson, a secretary, and functional divisions such as tour guides, marketing, documentation, consumption, and social media. Role allocation is also influenced by gender—women are positioned as secretaries, treasurers/marketing, social media specialists, documentation, and consumption, while men more often occupy the roles of head/chairperson and tour guide. In practice, core management tends to control routine meetings, information flow, agenda setting, and final approvals, while divisions carry out day-to-day tasks. Core positions are generally considered more prestigious and closer to the center of key decision-making. This creates a governance divide between doing the job and setting the direction.

In Poncokusumo, organizational routines create a more visible pathway for women to enter the center of governance by becoming Ladesta Secretaries. Women are not only assigned to service tasks but also appear in administrative roles that require coordination, record-keeping, and follow-up on decisions. These roles increase repeated interactions with other leaders and divisions, gradually normalizing women's presence in meetings and planning. Women describe learning through practice—"we learned a lot about managing a tourist village" (Interview with Y1)—so that participation becomes habitual rather than an occasional invitation. In Bourdieu's terms, repeated participation helps women build credibility within the field, making their competence and confidence more recognizable in organizational life over time.

In Gubugklakah, organizational templates produce different patterns because the field is shaped by patriarchal expectations. Women describe having space in Ladesta, but they are generally relegated to support and technical activities, while central Ladesta positions are dominated by men. This reflects local doxa—the taken-for-granted belief that decision-making is a male responsibility—many assume it's a man's job—and that women should remain behind the scenes (Dewi et al., 2025; Santos et al., 2025). Norms of propriety, domestic priorities, and

gendered assumptions about competence can create doubt and scrutiny when women speak in forums (Charoenkul, 2022; Santos et al., 2025).

The organizational environment also encompasses practical constraints that shape participation. Work in Ladesta is generally considered voluntary rather than paid employment, so taking on strategic roles can be time-consuming, irresponsible, and socially risky. In such settings, informal rules—who is invited, who speaks first, and how disputes are handled—are as important as position. When communication is unequal, women may attend activities but remain marginalized in deliberations, especially if meetings are dominated by male voices. Studies of community-based tourism also emphasize that the quality of governance and participation rules are crucial for inclusion (Kaunda & Shereni, 2024; Lee-Anant & Kungwansith, 2025; Rao et al., 2022).

These two villages demonstrate that Ladesta is not a neutral platform. It is a governance space where gender norms, organizational routines, and role design interact to shape who can translate contributions into authority. This context is important because it explains why formal inclusion may not lead to real influence. It also provides the foundation for the next section, which examines how women participate in Ladesta, how sources of symbolic capital are acquired by women, and how symbolic capital can be converted into stronger women's leadership in village tourism governance.

Women's Participation and Division of Labour in Tourism Villages

Women in both villages are formally allocated space to participate in tourism governance through Ladesta, yet the depth of participation differs across organizational arenas. The evidence shows that women are allowed to engage in management activities, but their involvement in the core structure varies across Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah. In practice, this contrast is evident in the division of labor, such as who handles routine coordination, who attends meetings, and who can help set the agenda. This section examines participation across operational tasks, routine organizational processes, and strategic deliberations to demonstrate how the division of labour shapes authority in Ladesta.

In Poncokusumo Village, women's active participation in Ladesta management can be seen as a symbol of empowerment. Women in this village are involved in administrative activities and decision-making processes that guide the development of the tourism village. Several studies have shown that women's involvement has been shown to foster a deeper understanding of the intricacies of the organization, while simultaneously ensuring the sustainability of village tourism. The presence of women in prominent positions in the Ladesta community signals a social shift that supports their participation in public affairs (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Batool et al., 2025; Rao et al., 2022). The following is evidence from interviews with informants (Ladesta Secretary) from Poncokusumo:

"In Poncokusumo, we feel we are given the same opportunity to be involved in the management of the Tourism Village. We not only participate in routine activities, but also play an active role in making important decisions for village development. In Ladesta, we learn a lot about managing a tourism village. It may not be easy at first, but with the support of fellow women and men in the village, we are starting to get used to it. In the future, we want more women here to be involved in important roles,

for example like me who is trusted as the secretary of Ladesta." (Interview with Y1, Secretary of Ladesta Poncokusumo)

Even in Poncokusumo, participation is shaped by role allocation, so not everyone experiences the organisation as equally deliberative. One member (Y7) admits he is "not very active in the meetings," because the secretary and head usually lead and decide, and he is mainly present when visitors need nature tours. This illustrates a wider organisational logic: meeting attendance and agenda access follow division-based responsibilities. For women, being placed in administration, planning, or coordination roles increases exposure to decision spaces and makes influence more feasible. By contrast, members assigned to service tasks may remain peripheral even when they contribute labour.

In Gubugklakah, women's participation is positioned closer to supportive tasks than to core decision-making. Y4 state their involvement is commonly described as "helping," which places them in roles such as marketing assistance and welcoming tourists rather than strategic planning. Although women are present in Ladesta activities, their authority remains constrained by informal norms that associate leadership with men. As hospitality work is treated as an extension of domestic responsibilities, strategic discussion becomes masculinized (Singhanian et al., 2021). These taken-for-granted expectations reproduce unequal authority and concentrate strategic power among men (Kitole & Genda, 2024; Santos et al., 2025).

"We have space to participate in Ladesta, our role is still limited. We contribute more in the supporting section, such as helping with marketing or welcoming tourists. In the Ladesta structure, we are not yet in a core position. There are cultural barriers that make us awkward. Many assume that it is a man's job. We still hope for change, but for the good of Gugubklakah." (Interview with Y4, member of the Gubugklakah Ladesta)

Education emerges as a practical resource that strengthens women's confidence to speak in meetings and propose ideas. Y3 argues that women with higher education tend to be more active in meetings, contribute ideas, and feel more confident "in speaking and making decisions," making them more ready to be involved in Ladesta. In everyday terms, education supports organisational literacy: reading plans, drafting minutes, managing information, and explaining program choices. When these skills are recognised as competence, women gain more voice in discussions and are seen as legitimate contributors to governance.

"I think education is very influential. Female friends here who have higher education tend to be more active in attending meetings, contributing ideas, even holding leadership positions (e.g. Y1 as secretary), and I am still studying for my bachelor's degree. We are also more confident in speaking and making decisions. So education makes us more ready to be involved in the Ladesta organisation." (Interview with Y3, member of the Gubugklakah Ladesta)

At the same time, limited educational access can intensify hesitation and push women toward technical assistance rather than strategic participation. Y5 explains that many women "do not continue their education," sometimes feel "inferior" about joining management, and are

more comfortable helping with technical activities. This suggests that participation is not only about being invited, but also about feeling prepared to speak, disagree, and take responsibility in public settings. When confidence is low, women may accept roles that keep them busy while leaving decisions to others. Over time, this reinforces a cycle where silence is read as lack of competence. This pattern aligns with higher-education leadership studies showing that educational and professional capital strengthens women's leadership trajectories mainly when it is affirmed through everyday symbolic interactions and organisational recognition, which legitimise women's competence and expand their access to decision arenas (Gallant, 2014; Meza-Mejia et al., 2023).

"Here, many women do not continue their education. So sometimes they feel inferior to join the management. They are more comfortable helping with technical activities. I think, if access to education was wider, maybe women could also take more important roles in the organization..." (Interview with Y5, member of the Gubugklakah Ladesta)

A further pattern is the mismatch between women's practical competence and their limited authority in strategic arenas, especially in Gubugklakah. The data note that women are active in technical domains such as dance training or tour guiding, yet strategic decisions remain concentrated among men in core positions. In the FGD, Y4 stresses that even when women have the ability, they are not involved in determining the direction of policy. This gap indicates that capability alone does not grant authority when decision rules and norms restrict access to strategic forums (Fathizadeh et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2023).

"There are indeed many women who are active here, but more in the technical part, such as being a dance trainer or tour guide. But for strategic decisions, it is still the men who are in the core positions who make the decisions. So even though we have the ability, we still haven't been involved in determining the direction of policy..." (FGD with Y4, member of the Gubugklakah Ladesta)

These differences are reinforced by everyday communication norms inside Ladesta. In Poncokusumo, repeated involvement in routine coordination helps normalise women's speaking role, as Y1 describes gradually becoming "used to it" with support from women and men. In Gubugklakah, women report discomfort in core spaces because expectations still position them as supporters rather than decision-makers. When meeting talk and agenda-setting are dominated by core actors, women's ideas are less likely to be heard, recorded, or turned into organisational action. Informal discussions among core men can further pre-shape decisions before meetings begin, narrowing space for women to intervene.

"I may not have a university background, a bachelor's degree or much organisational experience. But I want to keep learning and contribute to Ladesta. For me, leadership is not always about degrees or years of experience, but about the willingness to get involved and do the best for the village." (Interview with Y1, Secretary of Ladesta Poncokusumo)

Table 3 summarises women's participation by arena and clarifies how opportunities for involvement translate into different types of work across the two villages. Overall, participation is shaped by role allocation, routine access to meetings, and confidence-building resources such as education. In Poncokusumo, more inclusive routines allow participation to become habitual and socially recognised in governance (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Mead, 2021). In Gubugklakah, support roles and patriarchal expectations restrict participation to implementation, even when women contribute substantial labour. This pattern helps explain why some forms of recognition remain superficial, and it sets up the next section on symbolic capital and why conversion often stops.

Table 3

Participation Arenas and Gendered Roles in Ladesta

Participation arena	Poncokusumo (women's typical participation)	Gubugklakah (women's typical participation)
Routine coordination	Administration, documentation, coordination tasks that connect to planning	Support tasks around events and visitor handling
Meeting access	More regular presence in meetings for some roles (e.g., secretary)	Less regular access to core meetings; attendance often not linked to agenda-setting
Confidence to speak	Strengthened by education and organisational experience	Weakened by limited education and feelings of inferiority
Strategic deliberation	Some involvement in decisions (uneven across roles)	Strategic direction concentrated in male core
Technical/operational work	Present, but not the only sphere	Strong concentration in technical roles (e.g., guiding, training)

Source: Data processed by researchers

Sources of Women's Symbolic Capital in Village Tourism

Women's leadership in Ladesta is strongly shaped by how women's resources are recognised as legitimacy inside the organisation, not only by whether women participate. This matters because many tourism-governance studies show that women's marginalisation in rural tourism often comes from limited access to resources, domestic expectations, limited training, and restricted decision roles (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Batool et al., 2025; Rao et al., 2022; Singhanian et al., 2021). What is less discussed is why recognition and inclusion do not automatically become influence, especially in rural organisations. This section therefore traces where women's symbolic capital comes from, and why it sometimes stops at nominal inclusion rather than becoming leadership power.

In Poncokusumo, women's symbolic capital is largely shaped by education and organisational experience, particularly participation in religious and community organisations that develop coordination, communication, and program management skills. This is clearly expressed by Y3, who says experience helps women gain credibility because they can plan activities, manage public communication, and organise collective tasks in Ladesta. Importantly,

these capacities are not treated as merely personal or private abilities. Once the organisation recognises them as relevant to tourism governance, women's competence becomes a public resource that supports their legitimacy in village tourism management.

"My experience in the Nahdliyin Organization (Nahdlatul Ulama) gave me a lot of learning about organizing, very useful in my duties in Ladesta. In addition, my education also convinced me to play a role in the tourist village." (Interview Y3, Member of Ladesta Poncokusumo)

Recognition mechanisms in Poncokusumo also appear more practical and routine. Women who hold administrative and coordination roles (e.g., secretary, treasurer/marketing) are repeatedly involved in managing documents, schedules, and organisational communication. Over time, routine involvement becomes a form of legitimacy because it makes women's work visible and trusted. This coincides with Bourdieu's argument that symbolic capital emerges when cultural/social resources are recognised as legitimate within a field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Mead, 2021). Thus, in Poncokusumo, symbolic capital is not mainly given; it is produced through repeated contribution that is socially acknowledged in meetings and coordination.

However, Poncokusumo also demonstrated that symbolic capital does not guarantee leadership influence for all women. Document tracer analysis found that some women with significant symbolic capital were able to enter Ladesta, but not all played an active role in key decision-making. This suggests that the conversion of symbolic capital into leadership depends not only on recognition but also on women's willingness and ability to actualize themselves within the Ladesta organization. Existing studies indicate that women's leadership is depicted as more visible among those with a strong willingness to participate and those supported by an open organizational environment (Fathizadeh et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2025).

In Gubugklakah, women's symbolic capital is often shaped by their family's social status and connections with elites or village officials, rather than by organizational experience. As Y4 explained, recognition often reflects family connections with community leaders or village officials, which can position women within organizational structures. Y4 explained that one female member was invited to become a member of the Ladesta committee and was appointed to an administrative position. This suggests that women's symbolic capital in Gubugklakah stems from their family status, which ultimately led to their position as a Ladesta committee member.

"In Gubugklakah, even though I am registered in Ladesta, my role is limited. I was invited by my family, especially my uncle who was appointed as the village secretary. I am more often an administrative administrator and am not involved much in decision-making or meetings." (Interview Y4, Member of Ladesta Gubugklakah).

This pattern suggests that recognition in Gubugklakah may be formal: women maybe included because they represent respected family networks, but their recognized role is limited to being registered as formal administrators in the organization. This finding explicitly notes that women in Gubugklakah may be treated as administrators only normatively, with limited opportunities to contribute to major decisions or strategic planning in the organization. This

finding points to a problem of converting symbolic capital into leadership: women's symbolic capital exists, but the organization does not provide a pathway for that recognition into leadership power.

The Chairman at Ladesta helps explain why women's participation often stops at supportive roles instead of converting into core authority. Y8 notes that Ladesta's core structure is dominated by men and links women's reluctance to the absence of a fixed salary in leadership positions. Y5 similarly describes women choosing backstage tasks such as managing homestays, food, and documentation. Together, these accounts indicate two constraints: decision-making remains concentrated in a male-led core, while leadership carries high time and responsibility costs with uncertain economic rewards. As a result, leadership is framed as risky and unrewarding for women. Informants shared the following perspectives:

"The core structure of Ladesta is all male, we have given opportunities for women, especially to become Treasurer, or even proposed as Chairperson, but indeed women do not want to become core administrators, because there is no fixed salary" (Interview Y8, Chairperson-Secretary of Ladesta Gubugklakah)

"The previous Chairperson used to offer women who wanted to be actively involved, but they preferred to be behind the scenes, yes taking care of homestays, food, documentation, and rarely wanted to." (Interview Y5, Member of Ladesta Gubugklakah)

Focus group discussions and document reviews revealed that patriarchal views remain strong, shaping the belief that public decision-making is the responsibility of men, while women are seen as more suited to domestic/support roles. These findings suggest that patriarchal societies often have cultural mechanisms that limit women's leadership, including norms of modesty, domestic roles, and gendered assumptions about competence. When these norms dominate meetings and role distribution, symbolic recognition remains merely normative, preventing women from exercising real authority within Ladesta. Informants shared the following perspectives:

"In our meetings, men usually speak first and lead the discussion, while women tend to listen and support. If women talk too much, they can be seen as not modest, so many of us stay behind the scenes." (FGD Y5, Member of Ladesta Gubugklakah)

"In my opinion, if the environment is supportive, women can really develop into leaders, even if they do not have a higher education background or status that is considered 'wow'. What is important is that there is space and opportunity, and that they can make a real contribution to the management of tourist villages." (FGD Y3, Member of Ladesta Poncokusumo)

"I myself am not very active in the meetings, the secretary and the head take the lead and make the decisions. I am only there when there are visitors who want to go on nature tours in Poncokusumo." (FGD Y7, Member of Ladesta Poncokusumo)

Importantly, symbolic capital can also reproduce inequalities among women. When recognition relies heavily on elite family ties (as in Gubugklakah) or educational credentials and organizational experience (stronger in Poncokusumo), women without these resources may be less visible and trusted, even if they possess practical competence. This is crucial for community-based tourism because women's organizational work, relational work, and local knowledge are integral to governance capacity—thus excluding some women is not only unfair but also undermines institutional effectiveness. In this sense, symbolic capital can be a gatekeeping tool, not simply a pathway to empowerment (Dewi et al., 2025; Santos et al., 2025).

Table 3 shows that women's sources of legitimacy in Ladesta differ across villages. In Poncokusumo, symbolic capital is built on education and organizational experience, making it easier to be recognized for work competency in program management, coordination, and administration. Because recognition is based on visible and repeated contributions, some women gain a voice in meetings, although influence on decisions remains dependent on willingness to participate and organizational support. In Gubugklakah, symbolic capital is more tied to family status and elite proximity, conferring formal positions but not always providing access to strategic agendas and decisions. Patriarchal norms, unequal communication, and low incentives directly limit real leadership.

Table 3

Sources of Women's Symbolic Capital and Conversion Outcomes in Ladesta

Aspect	Poncokusumo	Gubugklakah
Main source of symbolic capital	Education + organisational experience (e.g., Nahdliyin mass organisation)	Family status and ties to village elites/officials
How it is recognised	Seen as competence for organising and program work; legitimacy grows through routine contribution	Recognition provides organisational entry/title, but often not decision-making access
Typical conversion outcome	Some women gain voice in meetings; yet not all convert recognition into decision influence	Nominal inclusion ("registered") without strategic influence; core remains male-dominated
Key constraints	Conversion depends on willingness, supportive environment, Patriarchal norms	Patriarchal norms, unequal communication, low economic incentives for core roles

Source: Data processed by researchers

The mapping of symbolic capital sources in Table 3 confirms that symbolic capital in organizations is not natural but rather is shaped by sources of legitimacy and rules of recognition that operate within a specific social context (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Miller, 2014; Spark et al., 2019). Symbolic capital can arise from visible competence (e.g., education, organizational experience, and regular contributions) or from social status and proximity to influential figures; however, this kind of recognition does not automatically translate into leadership. The conversion of legitimacy into influence depends on organizational mechanisms that provide

access to deliberative spaces (meetings, agenda setting, decision-making), as well as socio-cultural conditions that shape self-confidence and the boundaries of gender roles (Guo et al., 2023; Singhanian et al., 2021; Vial et al., 2016).

Forming Women's Leadership: Conditions for Conversion

This section explains how the recognition of women's symbolic capital translates into actual leadership in Ladesta. In Bourdieu's view, capital only matters if it is recognized on the ground and can be converted into authority, not just formal titles (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Mead, 2021). Here, conversion means that trusted and respected women can also shape agendas, speak in meetings, and influence strategic decisions. Studies of community-based tourism also argue that gender equality in governance requires access to day-to-day decision-making, not just participation in operational work (Kitole & Genda, 2024; Rao et al., 2022).

In both villages, leadership developed through the interaction between women's personal preparedness (confidence and willingness) and an organizational environment that enabled participation. We note that women's involvement depended on their structural position and willingness, but also on regular access to meetings, agenda-setting, and decision-making forums. Simply put, symbolic capital opens doors, while organizational routines determine whether women can enter and remain. This framework reflects broader gender leadership research, which finds that recognition must be supported by rules and relationships that legitimize women's voices (Spark et al., 2019).

The example of Poncokusumo illustrates how women's willingness can offset limited formal qualifications when the organization is also supportive. One informant, Y1, explained that leadership is not always about degrees or years of experience, but about a willingness to learn and contribute. This demonstrates a practical pathway to conversion: regular engagement builds skills, relationships, and trust, which then strengthens legitimacy. This also aligns with studies showing that in rural organizations, perceived contribution and reliability often carry leadership weight, along with education and status (Fathizadeh et al., 2022; Gallant, 2014; Meza-Mejia et al., 2023; Rao et al., 2022).

However, even in Poncokusumo, conversion is uneven and depends on the routines of participation among members. In a FGD, participant Y2 admitted that she was "not very active in meetings," and that the secretary and head led and made decisions. This suggests that women's leadership is not guaranteed simply by appointing one woman to a key position. Leadership becomes stronger when participation in meetings becomes routine, responsibilities are shared, and more than one actor—women and men—treat women's input as normal in agendas and policy discussions (Medir et al., 2024; Vial et al., 2016).

Women in Poncokusumo described having equal opportunities to join management, learn routines, and participate in important decisions. In the FGD, informant Y1 added that women can develop into leaders when there is "space and opportunity" to make real contributions. Such settings reduce fear and make public speaking less risky. This report aligns with literature suggesting that inclusive participation rules and a collaborative organizational culture help women convert legitimacy into influence (Batool et al., 2025; Guo et al., 2023; Vial et al., 2016).

"In Poncokusumo, women are given equal opportunities to be involved in the Ladesta management, learn how the organisation works, and take part in important

decisions in Ladesta. When there is space and opportunity to make real contributions, women can develop into leaders.” (FGD Y1, Secretary of Ladesta Poncokusumo)

The example of Gubugklakah demonstrates the opposite situation: women's skills are recognized primarily in technical work, while authority remains concentrated in a core of men. In the FGD, Y5 explained that although women can be dance instructors or tour guides, “for strategic decisions, it's still men... who make the decisions.” This reflects the rules of recognition in the field, where decision-making is considered a male domain (Rao et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2025). Consequently, symbolic recognition can occur without leadership influence, as the field limits where women can speak and which contributions are considered strategic.

Conversion also depends on how Ladesta links incentives and burdens to leadership roles. Male informant Y8 (secretary of Ladesta Gubugklakah) stated that the core structure is all men, and that women often refuse core positions because there is no fixed salary. Informants Y4 and Y5 explained how many prefer to work behind the scenes, managing homestays, food, or documentation. These statements demonstrate rational calculations shaped by gender expectations and household responsibilities: strategic roles require time and public exposure, while supporting roles are more aligned with daily domestic routines (Kitole & Genda, 2024). Informants shared the following perspectives:

“The core structure of Ladesta here is all men. Many women refuse to take core positions because there is no fixed salary, while the responsibility is bigger.” (FGD Y8, Chairman-Secretary of Ladesta Gubugklakah)

“Women are usually involved, but more behind the scenes. Most of us handle administrative work and support tasks, not the core roles where decisions are discussed.” (Interview with Y5, Member of Ladesta Gubugklakah)

“Many women prefer to stay behind the scenes—taking care of homestays, food, and documentation—because it fits better with daily routines than being in the core management.” (Interview with Y5, Member of Ladesta Gubugklakah)

If conversion is hampered by conditions on the ground, strengthening leadership requires changing pathways to authority, not simply training women. The findings argue that change requires greater space for women to participate in decision-making. Operationally, Ladesta could begin by inviting women to speak at meetings, by rotating meeting facilitation, and by establishing agenda-setting rules that capture women's suggestions and act on them. These low-cost changes can reduce informal policing and make authority less personal and more procedural, which is important in community organizations where norms often override formal structures (Bryan et al., 2021; Dewi et al., 2025; Jayashree et al., 2021; Medir et al., 2024).

Table 4 summarizes the conditions that facilitate or hinder the conversion of women's symbolic capital into leadership. It shows that conversion is supported by access to routine decision-making, inclusive communication, and networks that normalize women's authority, as seen in Poncokusumo. It also shows that conversion is hampered when decisions remain in the male core and leadership is perceived as expensive with limited rewards, as in Gubugklakah. In

other words, leadership emerges when recognition is balanced with access, support, and fair decision-making rules.

Table 4

Conditions for Converting Symbolic Recognition into Women's Leadership in Ladesta

Conversion element	Poncokusumo	Gubugklakah	Implication for leadership
Entry into structure	Women can enter roles and learn routines	Women enter mainly in supporting divisions	Entry alone is not influence
Access to decisions	More routine involvement in meetings and decisions	Strategic decisions concentrated in male core	Decision access is the key bridge
Communication climate	Space/opportunity encourages voice	Voice limited by norms and role expectations	Talk norms shape authority
Networks and support	Support from men/women can grow confidence	Support often channels women "behind the scenes"	Support must include decision pathways
Incentives and role cost	Leadership can be valued as contribution	Core roles seen as burdensome, no fixed salary	Incentives affect willingness to lead
Typical outcome	Higher chance of sustained influence	Symbolic roles without strategic influence	Conversion often stops at nominal inclusion

Source: Data processed by researchers

Conclusion

This study shows that women's participation in Ladesta in Poncokusumo and Gubugklakah is shaped by the interaction between women's capital resources and the organizational context in which participation is recognized and translated into influence within the organization. In Poncokusumo, women's symbolic capital is more strongly rooted in cultural and social capital—education and organizational experience—supported by a more inclusive organizational environment that facilitates participation in meetings and decision-making. In Gubugklakah, women's symbolic capital often stems from family social status and nominal inclusion, but patriarchal norms and unequal organizational communication limit its conversion into leadership. The mechanism for converting symbolic capital into women's leadership can be achieved when legitimacy is accompanied by regular access to deliberative spaces—meetings, agenda-setting, and decision-making forums—so that women can voice their opinions and exercise their authority. Without this mechanism, the legitimacy of symbolic capital tends to stop at formal inclusion and does not develop into a sustainable influence in realizing women's leadership in tourism villages.

By demonstrating why symbolic capital may stop at access rather than authority for women's leadership, this study contributes to SDG 5 (Gender Equality). These findings imply that advancing gender equality in village tourism governance requires (1) strengthening women's cultural and social capital through leadership training, mentoring, and expanding access to education, and (2) reforming organizational mechanisms in Ladesta to institutionalize inclusive decision-making, transparent role distribution, and egalitarian communication. These combined interventions are necessary to transform women's symbolic recognition into sustainable leadership influence in community-based tourism management.

This study is limited by its study of only two tourism villages, with a limited number of participants, depending on the empirical context; therefore, the findings provide in-depth explanations but are not intended for broad generalization. Therefore, future studies should include more cases and a wider range of participants to provide a more general understanding of how women's leadership opportunities are shaped in diverse rural tourism contexts.

Author Contributions

DAAA: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Resources, Project Administration, and Funding Acquisition. DWa: Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation. DWi: Methodology, Writing – Review and Editing, Supervision.

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

This study involved the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in a limited capacity to support the research process. AI-assisted tools (ChatGPT and DeepL) were utilized for language refinement, grammar checking, and improving the clarity of the manuscript and overall readability. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation of results, or generation of original scientific insights. The authors reviewed and revised the output as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Ethics

This study received ethical approval from KERIS-P (Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Ethics Committee) Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya (No. 00836/DST/UN10.F1101/B/PP/2024). All procedures followed relevant ethical guidelines, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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