

GOVERNING WITHOUT AUTHORITY: MUNICIPAL BROKERAGE IN FRAGMENTED BLUE ECONOMY GOVERNANCE

Qurnia Indah Permata Sari¹, Ibnu Asqori Pohan², Fathul Bari³, Bunga Qeila Anthea Anwar⁴

^{1,2,4}Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia

³Institut Hijau Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: qurniaindahpermatasari@ub.ac.id

Abstract

This article examines how municipal governments exercise governance functions in implementing the blue economy when higher levels of government hold formal authority over marine space. Drawing on a qualitative case study of coastal Singkawang, Indonesia, the study analyzes how authority fragmentation shapes municipal action across fisheries services, administrative facilitation, fuel recommendation support, seafood value chain development, fish market coordination, marine waste management, and mangrove-based coastal initiatives. The findings show that although the municipal government has limited formal authority over marine areas, it remains a strategic actor because it is the closest public institution to fishers, traders, seafood processors, and coastal communities. The article develops the concept of municipal brokerage without authority to explain how local governments govern through facilitation, coordination, policy translation, and everyday problem-solving rather than through direct jurisdictional control. This concept contributes to the blue economy governance and multi-level governance literature by showing that authority fragmentation not only creates governance gaps but can also produce brokerage roles for municipal governments positioned close to local communities. The article argues that recognizing these brokerage functions is essential for designing more responsive, inclusive, and socially grounded blue economy policies in non-metropolitan coastal cities.

Keywords: *Blue Economy Governance, Municipal Brokerage, Authority Fragmentation, Multi-Level Governance, Coastal Communities, Indonesia.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The blue economy has become an important policy agenda for coastal development because it seeks to connect economic growth, environmental sustainability, and the welfare of coastal communities. In many policy debates, the blue economy is presented as a way to create new economic opportunities from marine and coastal resources while maintaining ecological protection. However, the implementation of the blue economy is not solely a matter of resource potential. It is also a governance problem that involves authority, coordination, institutional capacity, and the ability of public actors to respond to the everyday needs of coastal communities (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2023; Voyer et al., 2021).

This governance problem becomes more complex in decentralized and archipelagic states. Coastal and marine governance often involves multiple levels of government, including national, provincial, and municipal authorities. Formal authority over marine space may be located at higher levels of government. At the same time, the everyday problems of fishers, fish traders, seafood processors, and coastal communities are often experienced and reported at the municipal level. This situation creates a tension between formal jurisdiction and practical responsibility. Municipal governments may have limited authority over marine areas, but they remain the closest public institutions to coastal communities (Niner et al., 2022; Văidianu et al., 2020; Voyer et al., 2020).

Existing studies on blue economy governance have emphasized the importance of policy coherence, cross-sectoral coordination, integrated coastal management, participatory governance, and multi-level institutional arrangements. The literature also shows that fragmented authority, sectoral silos, and overlapping jurisdictions can weaken the coherence of policy implementation in coastal and marine governance (Frohlich et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Voyer et al., 2020). Studies on sustainable blue economy also highlight that context, capacity, scale, equity, and coastal community participation are essential conditions for effective implementation (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2023; Niner et al., 2022).

A key gap remains in explaining how municipal governments continue to perform governance roles when they do not hold formal authority over marine space. This gap is important because the implementation of coastal policies often depends on actors who are closest to the community, even when their formal jurisdiction is limited. Non-metropolitan coastal cities may become important sites where municipal governments act as the first point of contact for fishers and coastal communities, while key regulatory authority remains at provincial or national levels (Harris & Thompson, 2023; Hidayati & de Vries, 2025).

This article addresses that gap by examining the case of coastal Singkawang, a non-metropolitan coastal city in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. In this case, formal authority over marine areas lies mainly with the provincial and central governments. However, the municipal government continues to play a strategic role in supporting fishers, facilitating administrative services, assisting fuel recommendation processes, supporting seafood processing, coordinating fish market governance, addressing marine waste issues, and engaging with mangrove-based coastal initiatives. These roles show that the city governs not primarily through direct authority over marine space, but through facilitation, coordination, translation, and everyday problem-solving.

The article develops the concept of municipal brokerage without authority to explain this phenomenon. Municipal brokerage without authority refers to a municipal government's role in bridging higher-level policies, sectoral agencies, fisher organizations, market actors, and coastal communities, despite its limited formal jurisdiction over the policy object. This concept builds on studies of institutional brokerage, boundary-spanning governance, bridging organizations, and collaborative governance, which show that actors positioned between institutions can connect fragmented systems, build trust, translate knowledge, and support coordination across boundaries (Angst et al., 2018; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Berdej & Armitage, 2016; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2015; Emerson et al., 2012).

The concept allows the article to argue that authority fragmentation not only creates governance gaps. It can also create brokerage roles for municipal governments positioned close to local communities. This perspective extends multi-level governance literature by showing that local governments are not merely lower-level implementers in a hierarchical system, but can act as active brokers that translate policies, facilitate access, coordinate actors, and solve everyday governance problems in fragmented policy settings (Chiba, 2026; Frohlich et al., 2023; Pahl-Wostl & Knieper, 2023).

The research question guiding this article is: How does a municipal government perform brokerage roles in blue economy governance when formal authority over marine space is located at higher levels of government? To answer this question, the article draws on a qualitative case study of coastal Singkawang based on interviews, field observations, and document analysis conducted in two stages between 2025 and 2026.

The article contributes to blue economy governance and multi-level governance literature in three ways. First, it shifts attention from formal authority to practical governance roles performed by municipal governments. Second, it shows that local governments can act as brokers even when they lack direct jurisdiction over marine space. Third, it highlights the

importance of non-metropolitan coastal cities as important sites for understanding how blue economy policies are translated into everyday governance practices.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Blue Economy Governance

The blue economy is commonly understood as an approach to coastal and marine development that connects economic use, environmental protection, and social welfare. It seeks to ensure that marine and coastal resources can support economic activities without damaging the ecological systems on which coastal communities depend. In this sense, the blue economy is not only an economic agenda but also a governance agenda, as it entails decisions about authority, coordination, participation, benefit distribution, and environmental protection (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2023; Voyer et al., 2021).

governance perspective is important because implementing the blue economy involves many sectors and actors. Fisheries, trade, marine conservation, coastal tourism, waste management, climate adaptation, and local economic development are often managed by different institutions. When these sectors operate separately, blue economy policies may become fragmented and difficult to implement. Previous studies have shown that policy coherence and institutional coordination are important conditions for sustainable blue economy development (Frohlich et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Voyer et al., 2020).

The literature also emphasizes that a sustainable blue economy should not only focus on marine industries or economic growth. It must also consider coastal communities, small-scale fishers, local livelihoods, equity, and social justice. Coastal communities are not only beneficiaries of blue economy policies. They are also actors whose knowledge, practices, and needs shape how coastal development works in everyday life (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021; Cohen et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2023). This point is particularly important in non-metropolitan coastal cities, where economic activities are often small-scale and closely connected to local ecological conditions.

Many blue economy policies are still designed through broad national or sectoral frameworks. These frameworks often fail to fully capture local capacity, institutional constraints, and the practical needs of coastal communities. Context, capacity, and scale are essential conditions for a sustainable blue economy (Niner et al., 2022). Blue economy implementation cannot be separated from the local institutional setting in which policies are translated into practice. Studying blue economy governance at the municipal level is important for understanding how national and provincial agendas are connected to everyday coastal realities.

2. Multi-Level Governance and Authority Fragmentation

Multi-level governance provides a useful lens for understanding how authority is distributed across different levels of government. It shows that a single level of government does not implement public policy; rather, it is implemented through interactions among national, regional, and local institutions. In coastal and marine governance, this interaction is especially important because marine space, coastal livelihoods, environmental protection, and local economic development often fall under different jurisdictions (Pahl-Wostl & Knieper, 2023; Văidianu et al., 2020; Voyer et al., 2020).

Authority fragmentation occurs when responsibilities are divided among multiple institutions or levels of government. Fragmentation is not always a problem in itself because it can clarify mandates and distribute responsibility. However, fragmentation becomes a governance challenge when formal authority does not align with practical needs in the field. In coastal governance, this can occur when higher levels of government exercise authority over

marine areas, while municipal governments remain responsible for addressing the everyday needs of fishers, traders, processors, and coastal residents (Chiba, 2026; Frohlich et al., 2023). Authority fragmentation in implementing the blue economy can create a gap between policy design and local implementation. National and provincial governments may design regulations, allocate authority, and manage marine space, while municipal governments face direct demands from coastal communities. This condition requires mechanisms that can connect formal authority with local needs. Existing studies on blue economy governance have highlighted the need for cross-sectoral and cross-level coordination to address institutional fragmentation and policy incoherence (Frohlich et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Voyer et al., 2020).

The challenge is not only about coordination among government agencies, but also about how policies are translated across scales. A policy that appears coherent at the national level may become difficult to implement at the local level if local actors lack resources, information, or authority. This is why authority fragmentation should be examined not only as a legal or institutional issue, but also as an implementation issue. In this article, authority fragmentation is understood as a condition in which formal authority over marine space is located at higher levels of government. At the same time, practical governance problems are experienced and addressed at the municipal level.

3. Institutional Brokerage and Boundary-Spanning Governance

Institutional brokerage helps explain how actors connect different institutions, sectors, and communities. A broker does not necessarily hold the highest authority. Instead, a broker creates links, translates information, facilitates access, builds trust, and mediates between actors who operate in different institutional spaces. In fragmented governance systems, brokerage is important because policy implementation often depends on actors who can navigate institutional boundaries (Angst et al., 2018; Berdej & Armitage, 2016).

Boundary-spanning governance is closely related to this idea. Boundary spanners work across organizational, sectoral, and administrative boundaries. They help connect actors who may have different mandates, languages, resources, and priorities. In environmental and water governance, boundary spanning is often associated with trust, connective capacity, and integrated performance across institutions (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2015). In natural resource governance, connectors and coordinators can play important roles in linking otherwise separated actors and improving cooperation (Angst et al., 2018).

Collaborative governance literature also provides an important foundation for understanding brokerage. Collaboration requires face-to-face dialogue, trust-building, shared understanding, and commitment among stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Collaborative governance involves principled engagement, shared motivation, and joint capacity for action (Emerson et al., 2012). These ideas are relevant to blue economy governance because coastal problems often require cooperation among government agencies, market actors, civil society, and local communities.

Brokerage and boundary spanning are especially important in coastal and marine governance because problems rarely fit neatly within one sector. Fisher administration, fuel access, fish market governance, seafood processing, marine waste management, and mangrove conservation require cooperation among various agencies and community actors. Bridging organizations have been shown to support marine governance by connecting actors, facilitating collaboration, and improving governance outcomes in Indonesia's marine systems (Berdej & Armitage, 2016). This suggests that brokerage can be a key mechanism for addressing fragmented authority and weak coordination in coastal governance.

4. Municipal Brokerage Without Authority

This article develops the concept of municipal brokerage without authority to explain how municipal governments govern in fragmented blue-economy settings despite having limited formal jurisdiction over marine space. The concept refers to the role of municipal governments in facilitating, coordinating, translating, and solving everyday governance problems when formal authority over the main policy object is located at higher levels of government. This concept builds on studies of multi-level governance, institutional brokerage, boundary-spanning governance, and collaborative governance, which show that governance often depends on actors who connect institutions, build trust, and coordinate across fragmented systems (Angst et al., 2018; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Berdej & Armitage, 2016; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2015; Emerson et al., 2012).

The concept also responds to studies on blue economy governance that emphasize policy coherence, institutional coordination, context sensitivity, and the centrality of coastal communities. These studies show that fragmented authority and sectoral silos can weaken blue economy implementation, especially when local capacity and community needs are not fully integrated into policy design (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2023; Frohlich et al., 2023; Niner et al., 2022; Voyer et al., 2020). In this article, municipal governments are understood as actors that are institutionally close to coastal communities but legally constrained in their authority over marine space.

Municipal governments may not directly control marine areas, but they remain important actors in governance because they are accessible to fishers, traders, seafood processors, community groups, and local organizations. This role is consistent with literature on place-based coastal transformation and local coastal development, which highlights the importance of local institutions in connecting broader policy agendas with everyday community needs (Harris & Thompson, 2023; Hidayati & de Vries, 2025). It also reflects multi-level governance literature, which shows that local action often depends on vertical and horizontal coordination across different levels of government and policy sectors (Chiba, 2026; Pahl-Wostl & Knieper, 2023; Văidianu et al., 2020).

Municipal brokerage without authority operates through four main mechanisms. First, translation occurs when municipal actors make higher-level policies understandable and workable for local communities. Second, facilitation occurs when municipal governments help communities access documents, services, programs, or administrative procedures. Third, coordination occurs when municipal governments connect different agencies, organizations, and community actors. Fourth, everyday problem-solving occurs when municipal governments respond to practical issues that do not fit neatly within formal jurisdictional boundaries. These mechanisms are informed by brokerage and boundary-spanning literature, which emphasizes connective capacity, trust-building, coordination, and the ability to bridge separated governance spaces (Angst et al., 2018; Berdej & Armitage, 2016; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2015).

Blue economy governance in practice shows these mechanisms through fisher administrative services, fuel recommendation facilitation, seafood processing support, fish market governance, marine waste management, and mangrove-based coastal initiatives. These roles show that municipal governments may govern not through direct jurisdictional control, but through proximity, local knowledge, trust, and the ability to connect actors across levels and sectors. This argument extends existing discussions on blue economy governance by showing that local governments are not only lower-level implementers, but can also act as active brokers in fragmented governance systems (Frohlich et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Voyer et al., 2020).

The concept of municipal brokerage without authority, therefore, contributes to the literature on blue economy governance and multi-level governance. Rather than viewing

authority fragmentation only as an institutional problem, this concept shows that fragmentation can also create brokerage roles for municipal governments positioned close to coastal communities. It shows that governance capacity can emerge not only from legal authority, but also from practical proximity, institutional trust, and the ability to coordinate across fragmented systems (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Pahl-Wostl & Knieper, 2023).

C. METHODS

1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to examine how municipal government serves as a broker in fragmented blue economy governance. A qualitative approach is appropriate because this study seeks to understand governance processes, actor relations, institutional roles, and everyday policy practices in a specific coastal context. The case study method is also suitable because the research focuses on a contemporary governance phenomenon and examines how municipal government acts when formal authority over marine space is held by higher levels of government (Yin, 2018).

The case study approach allows the research to examine in detail the relationship between formal authority and practical governance roles. In this article, coastal Singkawang is examined as a case of fragmented blue-economy governance in a non-metropolitan coastal city. The case is important because the municipal government does not hold direct authority over marine space. Yet it continues to meet the needs of fishers, fish traders, seafood processors, market actors, and coastal communities.

2. Research Site

The research was conducted in coastal areas of Singkawang City, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Singkawang was purposively selected because it is a non-metropolitan coastal city where the implementation of the blue economy is shaped by interactions among the marine authority, local livelihoods, fish market activities, seafood processing, marine waste issues, and mangrove-based coastal initiatives.

The research sites included coastal settlements, fish markets, seafood processing areas, mangrove sites, and relevant local government offices. Field observations were conducted at locations associated with fishing activities, fish trading, coastal environmental management, and community-based coastal initiatives. These sites were selected because they show how blue economy governance is experienced in everyday local practice.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Fieldwork was conducted in two stages. The first stage took place from May to July 2025 and focused on initial observations and interviews with coastal communities, fishers, fish traders, and local stakeholders. The second stage was conducted in June 2026 to deepen and verify the initial findings through follow-up observations and interviews with relevant stakeholders.

The study involved 14 informants. They consisted of three fishers, four fish traders, and seven stakeholders from local government agencies, fisher organizations, and market management. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in coastal livelihoods, fisheries, fish trading, seafood processing, environmental management, and coastal governance.

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore informants' experiences and perspectives on the implementation of the blue economy in Singkawang. The interview topics included the distribution of authority in coastal and marine governance, coordination among government levels, fisher administrative services, fuel recommendation support, fish market

governance, seafood processing, marine waste management, mangrove conservation, and the role of municipal government in supporting coastal communities.

Field observations were conducted to understand local practices and governance interactions in coastal areas. The observations focused on fish market activities, fisher services, seafood processing, coastal environmental conditions, marine waste issues, and mangrove-based initiatives. Document analysis was used to complement interview and observation data. The documents included relevant policy documents, institutional reports, scientific articles, and supporting materials related to coastal governance, fisheries, environmental management, and the implementation of the blue economy.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis began with organizing interview notes, observation results, and relevant documents. The data were then read repeatedly to identify patterns related to authority fragmentation, municipal roles, inter-agency coordination, fisher services, seafood value chains, marine waste management, and mangrove-based coastal initiatives.

The initial codes were grouped into broader analytical themes based on their relevance to the research question and theoretical framework. These themes included formal authority and local responsibility, as well as administrative, economic, environmental, and conservation brokerage. The analysis focused on how the municipal government translated higher-level policies, facilitated access to services, coordinated actors, and responded to everyday coastal governance problems.

Data from interviews, observations, and documents were compared to strengthen the validity of the findings. This triangulation helped determine whether the same issues appeared across different data sources. The analysis also examined differences among actors, particularly between formal government perspectives and the everyday experiences of fishers, traders, and coastal communities.

5. Research Ethics

This study adhered to the basic principles of qualitative research ethics. Informants were informed about the purpose of the research before the interviews were conducted. Participation was voluntary, and informants could choose not to answer questions that they considered sensitive. Verbal informed consent was obtained before interviews.

The article does not disclose the personal identities of field actors, such as fishers, fish traders, and community members, to protect informants. Information from government and institutional stakeholders is presented carefully and only in relation to their official roles. The analysis also avoids blaming individual actors and instead focuses on broader governance arrangements, institutional coordination, and policy implementation challenges. Research data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Formal Authority Above the City, Everyday Needs at the City Level

The findings show that a gap between formal authority and everyday coastal needs shapes blue economy governance in coastal Singkawang. Formal authority over marine space is primarily held by higher levels of government, especially the provincial and central governments. However, many practical problems affecting fishers, fish markets, seafood processing, coastal waste, and mangrove areas are addressed at the municipal level.

This condition reflects a broader challenge in blue economy governance, where fragmented authority, sectoral silos, and overlapping responsibilities can weaken policy coherence and local implementation (Frohlich et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Voyer et al., 2020).

In Singkawang, authority fragmentation does not simply eliminate the city's role. Instead, it changes the form of municipal action. The city does not govern mainly through direct legal control over marine space. It governs through assistance, coordination, and practical support. Fishers and coastal communities often interact more directly with municipal offices because these institutions are geographically closer, more accessible, and more familiar to local actors. This finding is consistent with studies that emphasize the importance of context, capacity, scale, and coastal community participation in implementing the blue economy (Evans et al., 2023; Niner et al., 2022). In everyday practice, the municipal government becomes a place where coastal actors seek information, administrative support, facilitation, and problem-solving.

The case of Singkawang, therefore, shows that the implementation of blue economy policies depends not only on the formal distribution of authority but also on the everyday capacity of local institutions to connect policy, services, and community needs. The municipal government becomes a broker between higher-level authority and local coastal realities.

2. Administrative Brokerage: Fisher Services and Fuel Recommendation Support

The first form of municipal brokerage is administrative brokerage. In Singkawang, fishers face various administrative requirements related to fishing activities, fisher identity, program access, and fuel recommendation support. These administrative processes are important because they influence fishers' ability to access services and sustain their livelihoods. The municipal government does not control marine space, but it remains involved in helping fishers navigate administrative procedures. Municipal actors provide guidance, information, and assistance to help fishers understand and complete the required documents. This role reflects the importance of facilitation and policy translation in fragmented governance settings, where local actors often need help to connect formal procedures with practical needs (Angst et al., 2018; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2015).

Fuel recommendation support is one example of this administrative brokerage. Fuel access is closely tied to fishers' daily livelihoods. When fishers need recommendations or administrative support, the municipal government serves as a bridge between local fishers and broader regulatory frameworks. The city helps translate formal requirements into practical steps that fishers can follow.

This finding shows that municipal brokerage operates through facilitation. The city does not replace provincial or central authority, but helps coastal actors access the administrative system. This role is important because coastal communities are often affected by blue economy policies but do not always have equal capacity to access formal institutions and administrative procedures (Cohen et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2023).

3. Economic Brokerage: Seafood Value Chains and Fish Market Governance

The second form of municipal brokerage is economic brokerage. In coastal Singkawang, the blue economy is not only related to fishing activities at sea, but also to fish trading, seafood processing, market governance, and local value chains. Fish markets and seafood processing activities are important spaces where marine resources are transformed into local economic value.

The findings show that municipal actors are involved in supporting seafood processing and market-related activities. This includes training, facilitation of product development, support for packaging and marketing, and assistance with basic legal requirements, such as household industry permits and halal certification. These forms of support are important for small-scale coastal actors seeking to increase the value of seafood products but who face limited capacity, facilities, and market access.

This finding supports the view that blue economy governance should focus not only on large-scale marine industries but also on local livelihoods, community development, and place-

based economic practices (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021; Harris & Thompson, 2023; Hidayati & de Vries, 2025). In Singkawang, economic brokerage connects blue economy ideas with everyday livelihood practices. For many coastal actors, the blue economy becomes meaningful when it helps improve income, product quality, market access, and business continuity.

Fish market governance also illustrates the municipal government's brokerage role. Fish markets connect fishers, traders, consumers, market managers, and government agencies. In these spaces, governance issues are not only about trade, but also about order, fairness, retribution, hygiene, infrastructure, and the relationship between formal and informal economic actors. The municipal government has a role in coordinating these issues so that fish trading can continue while local rules are maintained.

4. Environmental Brokerage: Marine Waste and Coastal Environmental Problems

The third form of municipal brokerage is environmental brokerage. Coastal Singkawang faces environmental problems related to waste, plastic pollution, and coastal cleanliness. Although marine space falls largely under higher-level authority, waste problems often begin on land and move toward rivers, coasts, and the sea. This creates a land-sea governance problem that cannot be solved by a single sector or level of government alone.

The findings show that the municipal government remains central in addressing coastal environmental issues because waste management is closely connected to municipal services. Local agencies can support waste reduction, coastal clean-up activities, community education, waste bank initiatives, and coordination with actors who can process or utilize collected waste. These actions provide important local entry points for implementing the blue economy.

This finding is consistent with studies showing that coastal and marine governance requires cross-sector coordination, policy coherence, and boundary-spanning arrangements because environmental problems often cross administrative and sectoral boundaries (Berdej & Armitage, 2016; Chiba, 2026; Voyer et al., 2020). Environmental brokerage occurs when the municipal government connects land-based waste management with coastal and marine concerns.

Marine waste is not only an environmental issue. It is also linked to public behavior, urban services, coastal livelihoods, tourism, fisheries, and community awareness. Therefore, the municipal government's role is important in facilitating practical coordination among actors affected by or involved in coastal environmental management. This shows that municipal brokerage is not limited to administrative or economic issues, but also includes everyday environmental problem-solving.

5. Conservation Brokerage: Mangrove-Based Coastal Initiatives

The fourth form of municipal brokerage is conservation brokerage. In Singkawang, a formal marine conservation status has not yet been established, unlike in some other coastal areas. However, the city has mangrove areas that are important for coastal protection, ecological resilience, education, and community-based environmental initiatives. This creates an opportunity for mangrove-based conservation to support blue economy governance.

The findings show that mangrove areas, especially in the northern coastal part of Singkawang, have the potential to serve as a basis for community-based coastal conservation. These areas are important because mangroves can provide coastal protection, reduce environmental vulnerability, offer ecological benefits, and contribute to local education and eco-based activities. Community groups and local actors can help maintain and promote these areas.

Municipal brokerage helps the city support, connect, and facilitate mangrove-based initiatives, even without full authority over marine conservation. This role is consistent with

literature on bridging organizations and collaborative governance, which emphasizes that actors located between institutions can connect communities, agencies, and policy agendas (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Berdej & Armitage, 2016; Emerson et al., 2012).

This finding also shows that conservation does not always begin from formal designation. In many local contexts, conservation can develop through community initiatives, local awareness, and gradual institutional support. Municipal government can act as a broker by helping these initiatives become more visible, connected, and supported by relevant institutions.

6. Summary of Findings: Four Mechanisms of Municipal Brokerage

The findings show that municipal brokerage without authority operates through four main mechanisms in coastal Singkawang. First, administrative brokerage helps fishers access documents, services, and fuel recommendation support. Second, economic brokerage supports seafood processing, fish market governance, and local value chains. Third, environmental brokerage connects municipal waste management with coastal and marine waste problems. Fourth, conservation brokerage supports mangrove-based coastal initiatives and links community action with broader conservation agendas.

Table 1 summarizes these four mechanisms of municipal brokerage in fragmented blue economy governance. It shows that the municipal government does not govern through direct authority over marine space, but through practical roles that connect higher-level policies with local coastal needs. Across the four mechanisms, municipal brokerage works through translation, facilitation, coordination, and everyday problem-solving.

Table 1. Mechanisms of Municipal Brokerage in Fragmented Blue Economy Governance

Mechanism	Main Municipal Role	Local governance practices in Singkawang	Brokerage function	Blue economy relevance
Administrative brokerage	Facilitating fisher access to services and documents	Assistance for fisher administration, fisher data, and fuel recommendation support	Translating formal requirements into practical administrative steps for fishers	Supports fisher livelihood continuity and access to public services
Economic brokerage	Supporting local seafood value chains and market coordination	Support for seafood processing, packaging, marketing, household industry permits, halal certification, and fish market governance	Connecting fishers, traders, processors, market managers, and local agencies	Strengthens local value-added activities and small-scale coastal economies
Environmental brokerage	Linking land-based waste governance with coastal and marine concerns	Waste management, coastal clean-up, waste bank support, community education, and coordination with waste-processing actors	Connecting municipal waste services with marine pollution problems	Supports cleaner coastal environments and circular economy pathways

Conservation brokerage	Supporting mangrove-based coastal initiatives	Facilitation of mangrove education, community initiatives, and coordination with relevant agencies	Linking community-based mangrove action with broader conservation agendas	Supports coastal resilience, ecological protection, and community-based conservation
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The table shows that municipal brokerage operates across administrative, economic, environmental, and conservation domains. Although these domains appear different, they share one common pattern: the municipal government acts as a connector between fragmented authority and everyday coastal governance problems. This finding supports the main argument of this article: in fragmented blue economy governance, municipal governments can govern without direct authority by facilitating access, translating policy, coordinating actors, and solving everyday problems. This argument extends existing discussions on multi-level governance and blue economy governance by showing that local governments are not only lower-level implementers, but also active brokers in fragmented policy systems (Frohlich et al., 2023; Pahl-Wostl & Knieper, 2023; Voyer et al., 2020).

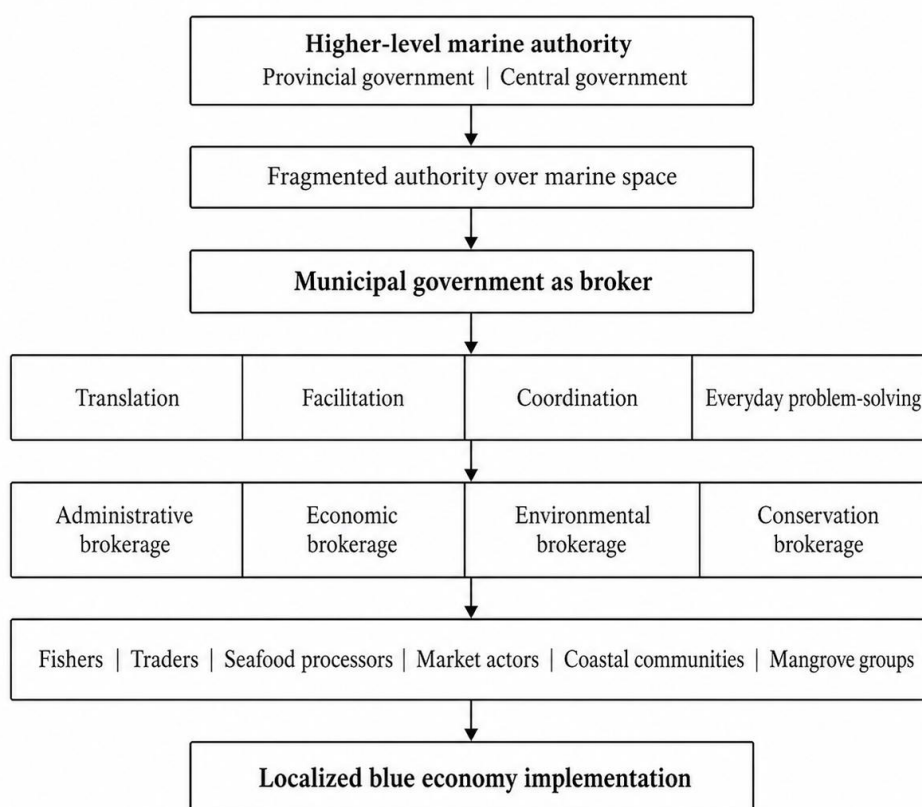


Figure 1. Illustrates the Analytical Logic of Municipal Brokerage Without Authority

Figure 1. Municipal brokerage without authority in fragmented blue economy governance. The figure shows how municipal government functions as a broker between higher-level marine authorities and everyday coastal needs. Although formal authority over marine space is at the provincial and central levels, municipal government supports the implementation of the blue economy at the local level by translating, facilitating, coordinating, and solving everyday problems.

1. From Authority Fragmentation to Municipal Brokerage

The findings of this study show that authority fragmentation not only creates implementation problems. It also creates brokerage roles for the municipal government. In coastal Singkawang, formal authority over marine space is primarily held by higher levels of government, while many everyday coastal problems are experienced at the municipal level. This creates a gap between legal authority and practical responsibility.

Existing studies on blue economy governance have emphasized that fragmented authority, sectoral silos, weak coordination, and unclear institutional arrangements can hinder policy coherence and implementation (Frohlich et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Voyer et al., 2020). The case of Singkawang supports this argument and adds an important point. Fragmentation not only produces gaps. It can also produce new forms of local action, especially when municipal government becomes the closest public institution to coastal communities.

The municipal government in Singkawang does not govern marine space through direct jurisdictional control. It governs through brokerage. This brokerage appears in administrative support for fishers, coordination of fish market governance, support for seafood processing, local responses to marine waste, and facilitation of mangrove-based coastal initiatives. These practices show that the city acts as a connector between higher-level authority and local coastal needs.

This finding extends the discussion on multi-level governance. Multi-level governance is often used to explain how authority and coordination are distributed across national, regional, and local levels (Pahl-Wostl & Knieper, 2023; Văidianu et al., 2020). However, the Singkawang case shows that the municipal level should not be understood only as a lower level of implementation. Even when formal authority is limited, municipal government can still shape policy implementation through practical proximity, local knowledge, and coordination capacity.

2. Governing Without Authority

The concept of municipal brokerage without authority helps explain how local governments act in fragmented governance systems. This concept refers to the capacity of municipal governments to facilitate, coordinate, translate, and solve everyday governance problems when formal authority over the main policy object is located at higher levels of government.

The Singkawang case shows four mechanisms of this brokerage. First, the city performs administrative brokerage by helping fishers access documents, services, and fuel recommendation support. Second, it performs economic brokerage by supporting seafood processing, fish market governance, and local value chains. Third, it performs environmental brokerage by connecting municipal waste management with coastal and marine waste problems. Fourth, it performs conservation brokerage by supporting mangrove-based coastal initiatives and connecting community action with broader conservation agendas.

These mechanisms show that governance capacity does not only come from formal legal authority. It can also come from accessibility, trust, local presence, and the ability to connect actors across institutional boundaries. This argument is consistent with studies on institutional brokerage and boundary-spanning governance, which emphasize the importance of connectors, coordinators, bridging organizations, trust-building, and connective capacity in fragmented governance systems (Angst et al., 2018; Berdej & Armitage, 2016; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2015).

The contribution of this article is to locate these brokerage functions specifically at the municipal level in blue economy governance. Municipal government is not simply a neutral intermediary. It is a public institution with local responsibilities, administrative capacity, and

direct contact with coastal communities. This makes its brokerage role distinct from that of civil society organizations, donor agencies, or informal networks. The municipal government has limited authority over marine space, but it has practical authority in service delivery, facilitation, coordination, and local problem-solving.

3. Contribution to Blue Economy Governance Literature

This study contributes to blue economy governance literature by showing that blue economy implementation in non-metropolitan coastal cities depends not only on marine resource potential or national policy design. It also depends on how local institutions translate broad policy agendas into everyday governance practices.

Previous studies have argued that a sustainable blue economy requires policy coherence, institutional coordination, social justice, community participation, and attention to context, capacity, and scale (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2023; Niner et al., 2022; Voyer et al., 2021). The findings from Singkawang support these arguments. Fishers, traders, seafood processors, market actors, and mangrove groups are not only beneficiaries of the blue economy policy. They are local actors whose needs shape how blue economy governance works in practice.

The article adds to this literature by showing that municipal brokerage is one mechanism through which blue economy policies become locally meaningful. For fishers, blue economy governance is experienced through administrative assistance, fuel recommendation support, and access to services. For traders and processors, it is experienced through market coordination, product development, packaging, and legal facilitation. For coastal communities, it is experienced through waste management, mangrove initiatives, and local environmental support.

This means that blue economy governance should not be understood only as a sectoral or national agenda. It should also be understood as an everyday governance process. In this process, municipal governments play a strategic role because they are close to the actors who directly experience coastal problems. This finding is especially important for non-metropolitan coastal cities, where blue economy activities are often small-scale, locally embedded, and closely connected to community livelihoods (Harris & Thompson, 2023; Hidayati & de Vries, 2025).

4. Rethinking Local Government Roles in Fragmented Coastal Governance

The case of Singkawang invites a rethinking of the roles of local government in fragmented coastal governance. In formal terms, municipal government may have limited authority over marine space. In practical terms, however, it remains central to the functioning of coastal governance. This difference between formal authority and practical relevance is important for understanding policy implementation in decentralized and archipelagic settings.

A formal-authority lens may make municipal governments appear weak or peripheral in blue economy governance. A brokerage lens makes their role more visible. They help translate policies, facilitate services, connect institutions, and respond to everyday problems. These functions are not marginal. They are central to how blue economy governance is implemented on the ground.

This argument is consistent with collaborative governance literature, which emphasizes that governance outcomes depend on dialogue, trust-building, shared understanding, and joint capacity for action among different actors (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012). In Singkawang, these collaborative elements appear through practical coordination among municipal agencies, fishers, traders, market actors, community groups, and higher-level institutions.

This argument also has practical implications. Strengthening blue economy governance requires more than clarifying legal authority. It also requires strengthening municipal capacity for coordination, facilitation, data management, community assistance, and cross-sectoral collaboration. Without these capacities, higher-level policies may remain disconnected from local coastal needs.

Policy design should recognize the municipal government as a strategic broker in coastal governance. Provincial and central governments can strengthen the implementation of the blue economy by establishing clearer coordination channels with municipal agencies, providing technical support, streamlining administrative procedures, and involving municipal actors in program planning. This would help reduce the gap between formal authority and local implementation.

The theoretical implication of this study is that authority fragmentation should not be understood only as a constraint. It can also be understood as a condition that gives rise to brokerage. In fragmented blue economy governance, municipal government may lack direct authority over marine space, but it can still govern through facilitation, coordination, policy translation, and everyday problem-solving.

The concept of municipal brokerage without authority, therefore, extends multi-level governance and blue economy governance literature. It shifts attention from “who formally holds authority” to “who practically connects actors, services, and policy needs.” This shift is important because governance often happens not only through formal jurisdiction, but also through everyday institutional work. This argument is related to studies on boundary spanning, bridging organizations, and collaborative governance, which show that actors positioned between institutions can play important roles in connecting fragmented governance systems (Angst et al., 2018; Berdej & Armitage, 2016; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2015; Emerson et al., 2012).

The Singkawang case shows this everyday institutional work in fisher administration, seafood value chains, fish market governance, marine waste management, and mangrove-based initiatives. These practices show that municipal government can serve as an active broker within fragmented policy systems. The concept can be useful for studying other non-metropolitan coastal cities where authority over marine space lies above the city, yet coastal problems are experienced locally.

The findings suggest several practical implications. First, coordination between municipal, provincial, and central governments should be strengthened, especially in areas where formal authority and local needs do not fully align. This includes fisher services, fuel recommendation support, fishery product development, fish market governance, marine waste management, and mangrove-based conservation.

Municipal governments also need greater capacity to serve as brokers. This includes administrative capacity, data management, community facilitation, inter-agency coordination, and support for small-scale coastal economic actors. These capacities are important because many coastal communities rely on municipal institutions as their first point of contact. This is in line with the blue economy literature, which emphasizes the importance of context, capacity, and scale in implementation (Evans et al., 2023; Niner et al., 2022).

Blue economy programs should also be designed to be accessible to small-scale fishers, traders, processors, and community groups. Policies that are too technical, centralized, or difficult to access may fail to reach the actors they are supposed to support. Municipal brokerage can help reduce this gap, but it needs support from higher levels of government.

Mangrove-based initiatives and marine waste management should also be connected to broader blue economy policy. These issues are not separate from economic development. They are part of the social and ecological foundation of coastal livelihoods. Strengthening these areas

can help implement the blue economy more inclusively and sustainably (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2023).

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on one non-metropolitan coastal city, Singkawang, so the findings are not intended to represent all coastal cities in Indonesia or other countries. However, the case provides an analytical contribution by showing how municipal brokerage works in a specific fragmented governance context.

The study also focuses on governance processes and actor roles rather than measuring the economic or ecological outcomes of blue economy programs. Future research could examine how municipal brokerage affects fisher income, seafood value chains, waste reduction, mangrove protection, or coastal community resilience. The concept of municipal brokerage without authority is developed from a qualitative case study. Future studies could compare several coastal cities to examine whether similar brokerage mechanisms appear in different institutional and ecological settings. Comparative research would help refine the concept and identify the conditions under which municipal brokerage becomes more effective.

E. CONCLUSION

This article examined how municipal governments serve as brokers in blue economy governance when higher levels of government hold formal authority over marine space. Drawing on a qualitative case study of coastal Singkawang, Indonesia, the article shows that authority fragmentation does not eliminate the municipal government's role in coastal governance. Instead, it changes the form of municipal action. The municipal government does not govern primarily through direct jurisdictional control over marine space, but through facilitation, coordination, policy translation, and everyday problem-solving.

The findings identify four mechanisms of municipal brokerage without authority. First, administrative brokerage helps fishers access documents, services, and fuel recommendation support. Second, economic brokerage supports seafood processing, fish market governance, and local value chains. Third, environmental brokerage connects municipal waste management with coastal and marine waste problems. Fourth, conservation brokerage supports mangrove-based coastal initiatives and links community action with broader conservation agendas. These mechanisms show that municipal government remains central to implementing the blue economy because it is the public institution closest to fishers, traders, seafood processors, market actors, coastal communities, and mangrove groups.

The main contribution of this article is the concept of municipal brokerage without authority. This concept explains how municipal governments can govern in fragmented policy systems even when they lack formal authority over the main policy object. It shifts attention from formal authority alone to practical governance roles, including proximity, trust, local knowledge, coordination capacity, and the ability to connect higher-level policies with local needs. In doing so, the article contributes to blue economy governance and multi-level governance literature by showing that authority fragmentation can produce not only governance gaps, but also brokerage roles for local governments.

The study also has practical implications. Strengthening blue economy governance requires more than clarifying formal authority. It also requires strengthening municipal capacity in administrative assistance, data management, inter-agency coordination, community facilitation, seafood value chain support, marine waste management, and mangrove-based conservation. Provincial and central governments should recognize municipal governments as strategic brokers in coastal governance and establish coordination mechanisms that enable local knowledge and needs to inform the implementation of the blue economy.

This study has limitations. It focuses on one non-metropolitan coastal city, so the findings are not intended to represent all coastal cities in Indonesia or other countries. The study also focuses on governance processes and actor roles rather than measuring the economic

or ecological outcomes of blue economy programs. Future research could compare several coastal cities to examine whether similar brokerage mechanisms appear in different institutional contexts. Further studies could also assess how municipal brokerage affects fisher livelihoods, seafood value chains, waste reduction, mangrove protection, and coastal community resilience.

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