RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Baileo: Jurnal Sosial Humaniora
Volume 4, Issue 2 | January 2027
https://ojs3.unpatti.ac.id/index.php/baileofisip

BAILEO JURNAL SOSIAL HUMANIORA
e-ISSN 3026-3468
p-ISSN 3026-2593

Article info
Received manuscript:
12/10/2026
Final revision:
14/11/2026
Approved:
15/11/2026

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 CC-BY International license

BEYOND BUREAUCRATIC PERFORMANCE: GEOGRAPHICAL INEQUALITY AND UNEVEN ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN AN EASTERN INDONESIAN ISLAND COMMUNITY

Zainal A. Rengifurwarin[1*], Petronela Sahetapy[1]
[1]Universitas Pattimura, Jl. Ir. M. Putuhena, Ambon 97233, Indonesia

[*]Correspondence E-Mail:
zainal.rengifurwarin@lecturer.unpatti.ac.id
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol4iss2pp381-400

ABSTRACT

Public service performance assessments often privilege organisational efficiency and frontline service quality, leaving unequal access across geographically fragmented regions insufficiently examined. This study investigates how island geography and administrative arrangements shape access to public services in Banda Neira, Central Maluku, Eastern Indonesia. Adopting an interpretive qualitative case study design, it draws on in-depth interviews with residents and public officials, observations of service processes, and analysis of administrative regulations and service documents. The findings indicate a distinction between services handled relatively effectively at the sub-district level and population administration procedures involving the civil registration agency in Masohi, which may entail additional travel, financial expenditure, and time. These contrasting experiences reveal that organisational performance does not necessarily translate into equitable access when service provision spans geographically separated institutions. The study conceptualises geographical inequality not simply as physical distance but as an institutionally mediated condition that shapes the administrative burdens citizens encounter when navigating public services. By bringing geographical inequality into dialogue with administrative burden, the study extends organisation-centred approaches to public service performance and foregrounds the relationship between state spatial organisation and citizens' access to public services. It underscores the need to assess accessibility alongside conventional performance indicators, with attention to inter-agency coordination and service arrangements responsive to the conditions of island communities.

Keywords: *Administrative Burden, Geographical Inequality, Island Communities, Public Service Access, Public Service Performance*

INTRODUCTION

Public service performance is often evaluated through the efficiency of administrative procedures, the responsiveness of public officials, compliance with service standards, and the capacity of government organisations to deliver expected outputs. These indicators are important, but they do not necessarily reveal whether citizens can access the services to which they are entitled without incurring disproportionate costs. An administrative office may process applications efficiently for those who reach it, while residents living far from the office must spend substantial time and money simply to initiate or complete the same procedure. This

distinction becomes particularly consequential in archipelagic regions, where access to government institutions is shaped not only by administrative rules but also by the spatial distribution of settlements, transport availability, and the location of decision-making authority. Under such conditions, satisfactory organisational performance can coexist with unequal experiences of public service access. The issue, therefore, is not simply whether the bureaucracy performs its assigned functions, but whether its institutional arrangements make those functions practically accessible to the population it is expected to serve.

This problem is especially relevant to Banda Neira in Central Maluku, Eastern Indonesia. As an island community, Banda Neira is situated within a wider administrative and geographical environment in which access to government offices may involve journeys across sea and land. Preliminary information informing this study suggests that certain administrative matters can be handled relatively effectively at the sub-district office, whereas selected population administration procedures involving the civil registration agency in Masohi may entail additional travel, expenditure, and time. These contrasting experiences provide a starting point for investigating how the organisation of public services affects citizens differently, depending on the administrative requirements of the service they need. They should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that all population documents require a physical journey to Masohi or that public officials deliberately discriminate against island residents. The relevant empirical question is how particular procedures are organised, which stages require citizens' physical presence, what alternatives are available, and how these arrangements shape the practical effort required to obtain a service. This matters because the burden of accessing public administration may remain largely invisible in organisational reports that record completed applications, processing times, or compliance with formal service standards without accounting for the journeys and expenses citizens must bear.

Research on public administration has long recognised that the implementation of public policy cannot be understood exclusively through formal organisational structures. Probowati & Chariri (2026) , for example, demonstrates how frontline bureaucrats interpret policy through everyday decisions, routines, and discretionary practices. Although this perspective is valuable for understanding how services are delivered at the point of contact, the circumstances of island communities also require attention to what happens before citizens reach that point and after they leave it. The practical reach of a public institution depends partly on where authority is located, which office is responsible for each stage of a procedure, and how administrative responsibilities are distributed across levels of government. Septior Nababan et al. (2026) , in a study of island sub-districts in Maluku, shows that geographical conditions interact with limited local authority, insufficient organisational capacity, resource constraints, and transport difficulties to complicate public service provision. This finding establishes an important regional foundation for the present study. It suggests that geographical inequality should not be reduced to physical remoteness alone; rather, remoteness becomes administratively consequential through the way government structures its services and allocates the capacity to deliver them.

A related body of scholarship approaches inequality through the spatial organisation of social opportunities and public resources. Dr. Ataullah Khan Mahmood et al. (2026) argues that questions of justice have an inherently geographical dimension because the distribution of opportunities and resources shapes who can benefit from them. From this perspective, the location of a public office is not merely a technical matter of organisational convenience. It can affect the time, money, and effort required for different groups of citizens to exercise the same formal rights. Epriadi & Jaya (2026) capability approach provides a complementary insight: the existence of a formal entitlement does not automatically mean that individuals possess the substantive freedom to realise it. Applied to public administration, this distinction draws attention to the difference between a service being legally available and a citizen being practically able to obtain it. A resident may be formally entitled to an identity document or another administrative service but face obstacles arising from transport schedules, travel costs, work responsibilities, or the need to make repeated visits. These conditions do not necessarily demonstrate a failure of individual officials; they may instead reveal a mismatch between standardised administrative arrangements and the geographical circumstances in which citizens live. Spatial justice and the capability approach therefore help explain why service accessibility should be considered a substantive dimension of public service equity rather than a secondary concern.

Administrative burden scholarship offers a more specific framework for examining the costs generated by these encounters between citizens and the state. Hadi et al. (2026) conceptualise administrative burden in terms of learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs. Learning costs arise when citizens must discover which office is responsible, understand eligibility requirements, or determine the documents and procedures needed. Compliance costs involve the time, effort, and financial resources required to satisfy administrative demands. Psychological costs include frustration, stress, uncertainty, and the loss of autonomy that can accompany difficult encounters with public institutions. Feng et al. (2026) further argue that these burdens are not simply incidental inconveniences: they are consequential features of policy implementation that can influence whether citizens obtain the services or benefits to which they are entitled. In an island setting, compliance costs may extend beyond paperwork and waiting time to include transport fares, accommodation where necessary, missed working hours, and the uncertainty of coordinating travel with office procedures. Learning costs may also become more consequential when residents cannot easily visit an office to clarify incomplete information. Such costs need to be investigated empirically rather than assumed to be identical for all residents, since their effects may vary according to income, mobility, access to information, and familiarity with administrative procedures.

Subsequent research has expanded this framework by examining how administrative burdens are produced, experienced, and distributed. Li et al. (2026) investigates the consequences of administrative burden for participation in public programmes, highlighting the importance of understanding burdens as more than procedural inconvenience. Rusli & Ansar

(2026) examine the role of cognitive resources in citizen-state interactions, drawing attention to the possibility that citizens differ in their capacity to navigate administrative demands. Roberts (2026), in research on the costs of redeeming public benefits, further demonstrates the relevance of the effort required to turn formal eligibility into actual receipt. Mohammed Lawal Giwah & Habeeb Ilufoye (2025) systematic review of 119 articles and working papers shows that the administrative burden literature has developed across several connected concerns, including frontline implementation, citizen experience, policy outcomes, and the construction of burdens through public action. Together, these studies establish that the consequences of administrative arrangements cannot be understood solely by examining the rules themselves; researchers must also consider how those rules are encountered by citizens in specific contexts. Nevertheless, the distribution of burden across geographical space remains particularly important in island settings, where the cost of complying with a seemingly uniform procedure may differ substantially according to the location of the person required to comply.

The literature on administrative burden also intersects with research on bureaucracy and institutional coordination. Onyemekihian & Onyemekeihia (2025) explains that frontline workers operate under organisational constraints that shape how policies are translated into practice. Their decisions, routines, and use of discretion can influence citizens' experiences, particularly where formal rules leave room for interpretation. However, an administrative process may generate difficulties even when individual officials follow established procedures correctly. If one office receives applications but another retains authority to verify, approve, or issue a document, citizens may have to navigate institutional boundaries that are largely invisible in formal descriptions of service standards. The burden then arises partly from the relationship between organisations rather than from a single encounter with a public official. Research on administrative burden encourages attention to the design and implementation of these requirements, while street-level bureaucracy helps explain how institutional rules are enacted in everyday practice. Read together, these perspectives make it possible to distinguish between problems arising from individual interactions and those embedded in the wider organisation of administrative responsibilities. This distinction is important for avoiding explanations that attribute unequal access solely to staff performance or citizens' ability to navigate the system.

Digital government has frequently been proposed as a means of reducing geographical barriers by allowing citizens to obtain information, submit documents, or complete transactions without travelling to administrative offices. Bashir (2026) identify the integration of public services and the reorganisation of government around citizens' needs as important dimensions of digital-era governance. Devin Gusnanda et al. (2026) subsequently discuss how digital technologies can reshape the relationship between government organisations and service users. More recently, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2024) reports substantial global progress in digital government while noting continuing differences between countries and persistent gaps in local online service development. These developments indicate that digitalisation can expand the possibilities for access, but they do not establish that digital

channels automatically remove existing inequalities. Their practical value depends on the availability and reliability of connectivity, citizens' digital capabilities, the accessibility of platforms, and whether online transactions are accepted across the institutions involved. In geographically fragmented settings, a digital application that still requires physical verification, an in-person signature, or collection of a document from a distant office may reduce only part of the burden. Digitalisation must therefore be examined in relation to the actual sequence of administrative tasks rather than treated as a substitute for understanding how services are organised.

Taken together, these strands of scholarship offer complementary but not interchangeable explanations. Research on spatial justice establishes why the distribution of access matters; administrative burden research identifies the costs citizens encounter in dealing with government; and street-level bureaucracy illuminates the relationship between formal policy and everyday implementation. Studies of digital government add a further consideration by examining whether technology changes the conditions under which citizens access public institutions. Bicaj et al. (2026) research is especially important because it directly addresses the governance of public services in the Maluku archipelago and demonstrates that geographical challenges are connected to administrative authority, organisational capacity, and transport limitations. The present study builds on this regional evidence rather than assuming that island geography has been overlooked in previous research. Its concern is more specific: how do the institutional arrangements governing different administrative procedures translate geographical distance into unequal burdens for citizens, even when some services appear to function effectively at the local level? This question brings organisational performance and citizens' effective access into the same analytical frame without treating them as equivalent measures of service quality.

The distinction is consequential for both scholarship and public policy. If service performance is assessed primarily through the number of applications processed, adherence to procedures, or the responsiveness of an office, the additional effort required of residents who live at a distance may remain outside the evaluation. Conversely, an account that attributes every difficulty to geographical remoteness risks overlooking institutional choices that can either intensify or reduce the consequences of distance. The relationship between geography and public service access must therefore be examined through the concrete arrangements connecting citizens, local offices, and agencies with authority over particular services. In Banda Neira, this requires attention to residents' experiences of navigating procedures, the responsibilities assigned to relevant government offices, the points at which physical presence is required, and the ways that travel, expenditure, delays, and uncertainty accumulate across the process. Such an approach does not presume that every administrative difficulty results from poor governance, nor does it assume that all citizens experience the same burden. Instead, it treats uneven access as an empirical question arising from the interaction between geographical conditions, institutional arrangements, and the resources available to residents.

Against this background, this study aims to examine how geographical conditions and administrative arrangements shape citizens' access to public services in Banda Neira, Central Maluku, Eastern Indonesia. Using an interpretive qualitative case study, it investigates how residents and public officials understand and navigate administrative procedures, how responsibilities are distributed between local and higher-level institutions, and what kinds of costs citizens encounter when accessing selected services. Its contribution lies in connecting the spatial organisation of government with the distribution of administrative burdens, while analytically distinguishing the performance of public offices from citizens' practical ability to obtain the services they need. By tracing how institutional arrangements mediate the effects of geographical distance, the study seeks to develop a context-sensitive understanding of public service equity in island communities. It also aims to inform more grounded assessments of service performance, in which travel requirements, time expenditure, repeated visits, procedural uncertainty, and the feasibility of alternative service channels are considered alongside conventional organisational indicators. Such an approach can help local governments identify whether unequal access stems from unavoidable geographical constraints, modifiable administrative arrangements, or a combination of both, thereby supporting more responsive and inclusive public service provision.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an interpretive qualitative case study to examine how geographical conditions and administrative arrangements shape citizens' access to public services in Banda Neira, Central Maluku, Eastern Indonesia. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research concerns not only the availability or formal performance of public services but also how residents experience administrative procedures, interpret institutional requirements, and negotiate the costs associated with obtaining services. These processes cannot be adequately understood through service performance indicators alone, since similar procedures may impose different burdens depending on citizens' circumstances and the geographical distance between their residence and the relevant government office. An interpretive perspective allows the analysis to connect individual experiences with the institutional arrangements that produce them, while the case study design provides a means of examining these relationships within their actual geographical and administrative context (Ramadhan et al., 2023; W & N, 2018) .

Banda Neira was selected purposively because its island setting provides a relevant context for investigating the relationship between geographical distance, the distribution of administrative authority, and unequal access to public services. Preliminary information indicates that some administrative matters can be handled at the sub-district level, whereas selected population administration procedures involving the civil registration agency in Masohi may entail additional travel and expenditure. These contrasting situations make it possible to examine how service requirements and institutional responsibilities influence citizens' experiences without

presuming that all procedures require travel or that geographical barriers necessarily indicate administrative failure. The proposed study will involve 15 informants, selected purposively according to their direct experience and institutional knowledge. The participants will comprise nine residents who have recently accessed, attempted to access, or encountered difficulties with relevant administrative services; three public officials working at the sub-district level; and three officials or personnel familiar with population administration procedures at the relevant civil registration agency. Residents will be selected to reflect varied service experiences and, where feasible, differences in distance, livelihood, and capacity to bear travel costs. Officials will be included because they can clarify procedural requirements, the allocation of responsibilities, and the practical constraints affecting service delivery. The number of informants is a proposed initial sample rather than a predetermined guarantee of adequacy; recruitment may be extended if important perspectives remain unexplored or additional interviews are needed to develop sufficiently rich interpretations (Osman et al., 2026).

Data will be collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews will explore residents' experiences of identifying the appropriate office, preparing documents, arranging transport, meeting procedural requirements, and dealing with delays or repeated visits. Questions for public officials will focus on service standards, institutional coordination, the division of administrative responsibilities, and the availability of alternatives to physical attendance. Semi-structured interviews provide a consistent thematic focus while allowing participants to explain experiences that may not have been anticipated by the researcher (Pradana & Semedi, 2026). Non-participant observation, where access is permitted, will document service procedures, information provision, waiting arrangements, and interactions between citizens and officials. Relevant service standards, administrative regulations, procedural guidance, and publicly available institutional documents will also be examined to distinguish formal requirements from actual practices. Data collection will proceed iteratively, allowing emerging issues from interviews and observations to inform subsequent questions and document review.

Data analysis will follow a reflexive thematic approach, involving familiarisation with the material, initial coding, the development and review of themes, and interpretation in relation to administrative burden, geographical inequality, and street-level bureaucracy (Pradana & Semedi, 2026). Triangulation will be pursued by comparing accounts from residents and officials with observed procedures and documentary evidence. This comparison will help identify convergences, discrepancies, and differences between formal rules and lived experiences rather than assuming that one source automatically validates another. Participants will be offered opportunities to clarify factual details where necessary, while an audit trail of coding decisions and analytic reflections will support transparency. Informed consent, confidentiality, and the removal of identifying details will be maintained throughout the research. These procedures are intended to produce a contextually grounded account of how geographical conditions and administrative arrangements shape effective access to public services in Banda Neira.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bureaucratic Performance and the Limits of Organisation-Centred Service Assessment

Public service performance is often assessed through the capacity of administrative organisations to deliver services efficiently, comply with established procedures, and maintain satisfactory interactions between officials and citizens. Although these dimensions remain important, they provide only a partial account of how citizens experience the state, particularly in geographically fragmented island communities. The case of Banda Neira, Central Maluku, illustrates the need to distinguish the performance of an individual service office from citizens' ability to complete administrative processes that extend beyond its organisational boundaries. A local office may perform its assigned functions relatively effectively, yet the overall service experience can remain difficult when particular procedures require interaction with institutions located elsewhere.

The findings from Banda Neira indicate that certain administrative services, including the processing of local certificates and permits, can be handled at the sub-district office. This suggests that the local bureaucracy provides an accessible point of contact for residents seeking services within its administrative remit. Nevertheless, the relative effectiveness of these services should not be interpreted as evidence that public services are equally accessible across all administrative needs. The distinction matters because the availability of a nearby service office does not necessarily mean that every stage of a citizen's administrative requirements can be completed locally. The assessment of service quality therefore needs to account for the institutional boundaries within which authority is exercised and the extent to which citizens must engage with other administrative bodies to obtain the documents they require.

This limitation becomes more apparent in population administration procedures involving the civil registration agency in Masohi. Whereas some services can be processed in Banda Neira, other procedures may involve additional travel, expenditure, and time because the relevant administrative processes extend beyond the island. These contrasting experiences do not necessarily demonstrate that one institution performs better than another. Rather, they expose a limitation in organisation-centred assessments: evaluating each office independently may overlook the cumulative demands placed on citizens as they navigate a service process distributed across different locations. From this perspective, the relevant unit of analysis is not simply the individual organisation, but the wider sequence of administrative interactions through which a public service is accessed and completed.

The distinction can be understood through three interconnected dimensions. Organisational performance concerns how effectively an office carries out its responsibilities, including procedural implementation, staff capacity, and the handling of requests. Service-chain performance concerns the coordination and continuity of administrative processes involving multiple offices or institutions. Effective access refers to citizens' practical ability to complete those processes without disproportionate expenditure of time, money, or effort. These dimensions are related, but they are not interchangeable. An office may function adequately

within its formal mandate while the wider service chain continues to impose substantial demands on residents. This argument complements the administrative burden perspective developed by Efendi & Khitam (2026) , which directs attention towards how administrative arrangements are experienced by citizens rather than treating institutional procedures as sufficient indicators of service accessibility.

Administrative accuracy also remains relevant to this distinction. The reported occurrence of errors in population documents, including names and dates of birth, indicates that accessibility cannot be considered separately from the reliability of administrative outputs. Such errors may require additional clarification or correction, although the extent of this burden depends on the applicable procedures and whether residents must return to the relevant institution. Where correction involves an institution outside Banda Neira, the consequences of an administrative error may extend beyond the immediate quality of document processing. The interaction between accuracy and geographical accessibility therefore warrants attention, without presuming that every error necessarily produces repeated travel or additional costs.

The central implication is that favourable assessments of local bureaucratic performance cannot, by themselves, establish that citizens enjoy equitable access to public services. In Banda Neira, understanding service quality requires attention to both the capabilities of local officials and the institutional arrangements governing services that extend beyond the sub-district office. This shifts the analytical emphasis from whether an organisation performs its assigned tasks adequately to whether the broader administrative system enables residents to complete their public service requirements in a reasonably accessible manner. Such a distinction provides the empirical foundation for examining geographical inequality not merely as a condition of physical separation, but as a problem shaped by the organisation of administrative authority and the practical demands placed on citizens.

From Geographical Distance to Administrative Burden

Geographical distance becomes a public service problem not simply because administrative offices are located far from where citizens live, but because that distance is translated into practical demands that citizens must absorb when seeking to fulfil their administrative needs. In island communities, access to government services is shaped by the interaction between physical separation, transport availability, institutional procedures, and the location of administrative authority. The experience of residents in Banda Neira, Central Maluku, illustrates this relationship. While certain administrative services can be handled at the sub-district office, selected population administration procedures involving the civil registration agency in Masohi may require additional travel, expenditure, and time. The analytical issue, therefore, is not distance as a geographical measurement in itself, but how the organisation of public services makes distance consequential for citizens.

The concept of administrative burden provides a useful framework for examining this process. Rather than treating administrative requirements as neutral procedures, this perspective directs attention to the costs citizens encounter when interacting with the state.

Mohammed & Jamaluddin (2026) emphasise the importance of conceptual clarity in understanding administrative burden, particularly the relationship between administrative arrangements and the experiences they generate. Taufiqah et al. (2026) distinguish three principal forms of burden: learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs. Applied to Banda Neira, these categories make it possible to investigate how geographical conditions and administrative procedures combine to shape citizens' practical access to public services without assuming that every resident experiences the same difficulties.

Compliance costs are particularly relevant where administrative processes involve institutions located outside the island. Travel expenditure, time spent reaching the relevant office, and the effort required to fulfil procedural requirements may increase the resources citizens must commit to completing an administrative task. However, these costs should be established through the experiences reported by residents rather than inferred solely from the geographical separation between Banda Neira and Masohi. Interviews can reconstruct the sequence of particular administrative encounters, including whether physical attendance was required, how long the process took, whether additional visits were necessary, and what financial or occupational consequences followed. Such accounts would reveal whether the burden arises primarily from transportation, procedural requirements, coordination between institutions, or a combination of these factors.

Learning costs provide a second analytical dimension. Citizens must know which institution is responsible for a particular document, what requirements apply, and how the administrative process is expected to proceed. Where responsibilities are distributed across institutions, uncertainty about procedures may create additional work, especially if information is incomplete or difficult to obtain. Yet this possibility should not be confused with an established finding. The research must determine whether residents in Banda Neira actually experience informational difficulties or whether local officials and existing communication channels help them navigate the process. This distinction matters because geographical distance does not automatically produce informational disadvantage; its consequences depend partly on how administrative information is organised and communicated.

Psychological costs may also arise when residents face uncertainty about processing time, the possibility of unsuccessful travel, or the need to repeat administrative procedures. Nevertheless, such experiences should enter the analysis only when supported by interview evidence. The presence of travel costs does not, by itself, establish anxiety, frustration, or diminished trust in government. An interpretive qualitative approach is particularly appropriate here because it allows the study to examine how residents understand and respond to administrative encounters within their everyday circumstances. Comparing these accounts with officials' explanations, service documents, and observed procedures can help distinguish perceived obstacles from formal requirements and implementation problems.

The central argument is that geographical inequality becomes administratively significant through the costs attached to accessing state institutions. Distance matters because citizens must

navigate particular arrangements of authority, procedure, and service delivery, not merely because they inhabit an island. This perspective also cautions against assuming that every resident experiences the same burden or that every population administration procedure requires travel to Masohi. Establishing which services require external institutional involvement, under what conditions, and with what consequences is essential to the analysis. By tracing these processes, the Banda Neira case can demonstrate how the spatial organisation of public administration shapes citizens' effective access to services and why geographical accessibility should be considered alongside conventional measures of bureaucratic performance.

The Spatial Organisation of the State and Fragmented Service Access

Public service accessibility is shaped not only by the geographical location of government offices but also by the way the state distributes administrative authority and organises relationships between institutions. In archipelagic settings, these two dimensions are closely connected. Distance becomes administratively consequential when citizens must navigate procedures divided across offices with different responsibilities, particularly when completing one service requires information, verification, or decisions from institutions located on different islands. The central issue is therefore not simply whether government offices are geographically distant, but how administrative arrangements determine who must cross that distance, at which stage of a procedure, and for what purpose. This perspective extends the analysis of administrative burden by locating citizens' experiences within the institutional organisation of the state rather than treating travel and procedural difficulties as isolated inconveniences (Mirayani, 2025).

In Banda Neira, this relationship can be examined through the division of service responsibilities between the sub-district office and the civil registration agency in Masohi. The distinction between services that can be completed locally and those requiring involvement from an external institution is analytically important because different administrative procedures may generate different forms of geographical dependence. A locally processed document may require residents to visit an office but allow the entire process to be completed within Banda Neira. By contrast, a procedure involving an agency in Masohi may introduce additional stages, including document transmission, verification, approval, or collection. Whether these stages actually require citizens to travel must be established through interviews and documentary evidence rather than inferred from the location of the responsible agency alone. The relevant question is how each stage is organised and whether institutional arrangements allow administrative work to move between offices without transferring the responsibility for coordination to citizens.

This distinction also helps clarify the relationship between formal authority and the everyday operation of bureaucracy. Lumenta et al. (2023) demonstrates that public services are shaped by the practical conditions under which officials interpret and implement administrative rules. However, difficulties may arise even when individual officials comply with established procedures. Where responsibilities are distributed across institutions, citizens may encounter uncertainty about which office should receive an application, which documents are required, and

where a decision can be obtained. These experiences may reflect fragmented administrative processes rather than the failure of a particular office. Consequently, the analysis must distinguish between requirements explicitly established by regulations and additional difficulties emerging during implementation. Administrative centralisation should not automatically be treated as evidence of poor governance: certain decisions may legitimately require specialised verification or authority beyond the sub-district level. What matters is whether the resulting arrangements are proportionate, clearly communicated, and organised in ways that avoid unnecessary demands on residents.

Inter-agency coordination is particularly significant because it can either reduce or reproduce geographical burdens. When offices share information, clarify responsibilities, and transmit documents through established administrative channels, citizens may be able to complete procedures without personally managing every institutional connection. Conversely, where communication between agencies is limited or procedural responsibilities remain unclear, residents may become intermediaries between offices that are formally part of the same public administration system. Davies et al. (2026) explain that compliance costs include the time and effort required to satisfy administrative demands, while learning costs arise when people must determine how a system operates. In Banda Neira, these concepts direct attention to whether residents must make repeated enquiries, submit documents more than once, or undertake additional journeys because information and responsibilities are not adequately coordinated. Such burdens should be established through accounts of actual service experiences and compared with official procedures, rather than presumed to result from institutional fragmentation in every case.

The availability of alternative service arrangements provides another way to assess how the state responds to geographical constraints. Document transmission, authorised representation, mobile services, and digital procedures may reduce the need for physical travel, but their practical value depends on whether they are formally permitted, operationally available, and usable by residents. Digitalisation, for instance, cannot be assumed to eliminate geographical inequality when applications still require in-person verification or when citizens must travel to collect completed documents. Simandjorang (2026) emphasise the potential of digital-era governance to reorganise public administration around more integrated service delivery, yet the implications for island communities depend on how these arrangements are implemented locally. The analysis should therefore establish which alternatives exist, which stages they cover, and whether residents can realistically use them.

Viewed through this institutional and spatial lens, Banda Neira offers an opportunity to examine how the organisation of government mediates the effects of geographical distance. The analytical contribution lies in distinguishing distance as a physical condition from distance as an administrative burden produced or intensified through particular institutional arrangements. By tracing the allocation of authority, the movement of documents and information, requirements for physical presence, and the practical availability of alternative procedures, the study can

explain why access may remain uneven even when individual offices perform their assigned tasks competently. This approach directs attention towards a more substantive measure of public service performance: not only whether an institution completes its responsibilities, but also whether the relationships between institutions allow citizens to obtain services without avoidable travel, expense, and uncertainty. The extent to which these mechanisms operate in Banda Neira must ultimately be demonstrated through the study's interview, observation, and documentary evidence.

Uneven Access and the Unequal Capacity to Navigate Public Services

Equal administrative procedures do not necessarily produce equal opportunities to access public services. A requirement that appears reasonable from an organisational perspective may impose substantially different demands on citizens, depending on their financial resources, employment conditions, family responsibilities, access to information, and ability to travel. This distinction is particularly relevant in island communities, where geographical separation can turn an ordinary administrative task into a process requiring careful coordination of transport, time, and expenditure. The issue is not simply whether residents are subject to the same rules, but whether they possess comparable capacities to comply with those rules. Djungan (2026) capability approach provides a useful conceptual foundation for this distinction by differentiating formal entitlements from the substantive opportunities individuals have to realise them. Applied to public services, this means that the existence of an administrative procedure does not, by itself, establish that the service is equally accessible to everyone.

The concept of administrative burden helps explain how these differences emerge in citizens' encounters with government. MacLeod et al. (2022) distinguish learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs, all of which can shape whether people successfully navigate administrative systems. In Banda Neira, the additional travel, time, and expenditure potentially associated with selected procedures involving institutions in Masohi make compliance costs an important dimension of analysis. However, these costs should not be assumed to affect every resident in the same way. A person with flexible working hours and sufficient disposable income may be able to arrange a journey with relatively little disruption, whereas someone dependent on daily earnings may face a difficult choice between pursuing an administrative matter and maintaining household income. Similarly, uncertainty about transport schedules or document requirements may be manageable for some residents but considerably more disruptive for those with limited time, mobility, or access to reliable information. These are analytical possibilities that require confirmation through participants' accounts, rather than characteristics that can be attributed to particular groups in advance.

The capacity to navigate public services may also depend on the resources available within households and social networks. Family members, community representatives, or local officials may help residents obtain information, prepare documents, communicate with government offices, or identify alternatives to travelling in person. Such assistance can reduce the practical burden of administrative procedures, particularly when formal guidance is difficult

to obtain. Nevertheless, reliance on informal support raises a further question: does access depend partly on relationships and resources that are unevenly distributed across the community? Ramadina & Ismiyati (2026) argue that administrative burdens can shape access to public programmes through the demands placed on individuals and the resources required to meet them. In the context of Banda Neira, this perspective invites examination of whether residents can rely on similar forms of assistance or whether some must navigate institutional procedures largely on their own. Social networks should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of inequality, since they may provide valuable collective support. Their significance depends on how assistance operates in practice and whether it compensates for inaccessible procedures or merely helps some residents overcome difficulties that others continue to face.

These differences also require attention to the relationship between administrative requirements and everyday responsibilities. Travelling to another administrative centre may involve more than transport expenditure: residents may need to take time away from work, arrange care for children or other family members, or make additional journeys when documents are incomplete. Such consequences should be investigated through interviews that invite participants to describe what they actually did, what the process cost them, and how they managed competing responsibilities. Rather than assuming that women, older residents, low-income households, or people with limited mobility necessarily experience greater burdens, the analysis should establish whether the collected evidence reveals meaningful differences and how those differences arise. Where participants report contrasting experiences, the researcher can compare the circumstances involved while remaining attentive to variation within each group. Where the evidence is insufficient to establish systematic differences, the discussion should remain focused on the unequal capacity to navigate administrative arrangements as an analytical concern, not as a demonstrated pattern of social disadvantage.

This approach also distinguishes unequal access from individual inability. When residents struggle to complete a procedure, the explanation should not automatically be located in their lack of knowledge, resources, or initiative. Their difficulties may be related to unclear information, the distribution of administrative responsibilities, limited opportunities to obtain assistance, or requirements that make little allowance for geographical circumstances. Rahyasih et al. (2026) account of street-level bureaucracy is relevant here because citizens encounter the state through concrete procedures and everyday interactions, rather than through formal policy commitments alone. Understanding access therefore requires examining both the resources citizens bring to administrative encounters and the institutional conditions under which those resources must be used. The purpose is not to portray residents as uniformly vulnerable, but to establish how different circumstances interact with the same or similar administrative requirements.

Ultimately, the central analytical question is whether residents with different resources experience and overcome the same administrative arrangements differently. Addressing this question in Banda Neira requires comparing accounts of travel, expenditure, time constraints,

procedural uncertainty, and assistance with evidence about the services and requirements involved. The analysis can then determine whether formally uniform procedures produce different practical consequences and, where supported by the evidence, identify the mechanisms behind those differences. This perspective strengthens the distinction between procedural equality and substantive accessibility: a service may be formally available to all residents while remaining easier to obtain for those who can more readily absorb its financial, temporal, and social costs. Assessing public service equity therefore requires attention not only to whether procedures are consistently applied, but also to the practical conditions that enable citizens to complete them.

Rethinking Public Service Equity Beyond Bureaucratic Performance

The case of Banda Neira invites a reconsideration of how public service equity is understood and assessed in geographically fragmented settings. Organisational efficiency, procedural compliance, and the quality of interactions between officials and citizens remain important indicators of bureaucratic performance. However, these indicators cannot fully capture whether citizens can obtain public services without disproportionate expenditure of time, money, and effort. An office may fulfil its formal responsibilities competently while residents continue to face difficulties completing administrative processes that extend beyond its jurisdiction. This distinction challenges the assumption that satisfactory organisational performance necessarily reflects equitable service provision. As the administrative burden literature demonstrates, the demands imposed on citizens are shaped not only by the services governments provide but also by the procedures and institutional arrangements through which those services must be accessed (Gokmen et al., 2026). In Banda Neira, the contrast between services handled locally and selected population administration procedures involving the civil registration agency in Masohi illustrates why assessments of public service equity must consider the wider administrative process rather than the performance of individual offices in isolation.

The analytical contribution of this study lies in explaining how geographical inequality becomes consequential through the organisation of administrative authority and service procedures. Island geography creates particular spatial conditions, but distance alone does not determine the degree of difficulty citizens experience. Its consequences depend on how responsibilities are distributed between institutions, whether administrative processes require physical attendance, how information and documents move between offices, and what alternatives are available to residents. These arrangements can translate geographical separation into administrative burdens, which may subsequently affect citizens' practical ability to obtain services. This interpretation connects geographical inequality with administrative burden while retaining an important distinction between structural conditions and their institutional mediation. Spatial justice scholarship emphasises that the distribution of opportunities and resources has a geographical dimension (Muallidin, 2026), while the capability approach draws attention to the difference between possessing a formal entitlement and having the substantive opportunity to realise it. Read together, these perspectives suggest that equitable public service

provision requires more than the uniform application of administrative rules; it also requires attention to the conditions under which citizens can comply with those rules.

This argument should not be interpreted as a universal causal model for all island communities in Indonesia. Banda Neira represents a contextually situated case through which the relationship between geography, institutional arrangements, and citizens' administrative burdens can be examined. The findings are therefore analytically informative rather than statistically generalisable. They extend, rather than replace, existing research on island governance in Maluku. Muallidin (2026), for example, demonstrates that geographical conditions interact with administrative authority, organisational capacity, and transport constraints in shaping public service provision in island sub-districts. The present study develops this discussion by shifting attention towards the relationship between organisational performance and the practical demands citizens encounter across the service process. This shift matters because difficulties experienced by residents may not originate exclusively within a particular office. They may also emerge from the connections—or lack of effective connections—between institutions whose responsibilities collectively determine whether a service can be completed.

The policy implications follow from this institutional perspective. Improving public service equity requires identifying where burdens arise before selecting an intervention. If difficulties stem from unclear responsibilities or repeated administrative requirements, stronger inter-agency coordination and clearer procedural guidance may be more appropriate than simply increasing the performance targets of individual offices. If physical attendance is genuinely necessary, strengthening the capacity of local service points, introducing mobile services, or establishing authorised arrangements for document submission and collection may warrant consideration. These options should be evaluated against the actual legal requirements, administrative capacities, and experiences of residents in Banda Neira. Digital services may also reduce the need for travel, but their effectiveness depends on connectivity, digital capabilities, institutional integration, and whether procedures can be completed online from beginning to end. Where physical verification or document collection remains compulsory, digitalisation may reduce some administrative demands without resolving the underlying geographical constraint. These are policy possibilities arising from the analysis, not claims that such interventions have already been implemented or proven effective in Banda Neira.

Ultimately, the Banda Neira case suggests that public service equity is best understood through the relationship between organisational performance, institutional arrangements, and citizens' effective access. The relevant unit of analysis must therefore extend beyond the individual service organisation to encompass the sequence of interactions connecting citizens with the institutions responsible for delivering a service. Such a perspective does not diminish the importance of bureaucratic competence; rather, it places that competence within a broader assessment of how the state operates across geographical space. For public administration scholarship in the Global South, this distinction is particularly valuable because it makes visible the ways that institutional arrangements interact with locally specific geographical conditions.

Assessing whether a service is equitable consequently requires asking not only whether government offices perform their duties, but also whether the administrative system enables residents to exercise their entitlements without avoidable and disproportionate burdens. This broader approach offers a more context-sensitive basis for evaluating public service performance in archipelagic settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that equitable access to public services in Banda Neira cannot be adequately understood through organisational performance alone. Although certain administrative services can be handled at the sub-district level, selected population administration procedures involving the civil registration agency in Masohi may expose residents to additional travel, expenditure, and time. The central issue is not necessarily the failure of individual officials to perform their duties, but the possibility that administrative responsibilities distributed across geographically separated institutions create burdens that conventional performance assessments do not capture. The study's contribution lies in connecting geographical inequality with administrative burden to explain how the spatial organisation of government mediates citizens' practical ability to obtain public services. It therefore proposes that public service equity be assessed not only through efficiency and procedural compliance within individual offices, but also through the accessibility of the administrative process as a whole. For island communities, this perspective directs attention to institutional coordination, the necessity of physical attendance, and the feasibility of locally accessible service arrangements. While the findings are grounded in a single case and should not be generalised uncritically to other island settings, they demonstrate why the distance between citizens and the state must be understood as both a geographical condition and an institutional problem.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

Authors are required to state that the study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. If the research involved vulnerable groups, please specify the protective measures taken to ensure their safety and equal participation. The statement should also disclose any sources of funding or declare that no external funding was received, along with a declaration of no conflict of interest. Authors must confirm that all data were collected through valid methods and have been verified for accuracy. If artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used, clarify that their use was limited to technical assistance such as language editing, without influencing the scientific content. Conclude with a sentence stating that the authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of the article.

Authors may refer to the following example to formulate their statement:

"This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values.

Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article."

REFERENCES

Bashir, U. (2026). Assessing the effectiveness of climate financing through Kenya's climate change diplomacy. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, *7*(3), 625–636. https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.3.52

Bicaj, A., Buza, V., & Bicaj, B. (2026). Evaluating School Performance: Insights from Teachers and Principals on Teaching and Learning and Teacher Professional Development Quality Indicators. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, *17*(1), 219–244. https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs2026.1.219.244

Davies, C., Crofts, M., Healey, R., Ross, K., & White, H. (2026). From Compliance to Co-Production: Developing a Sector-Informed Equality Impact Analysis Framework for Inclusive Governance in Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *80*(4). https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.70174

Devin Gusnanda, Ading Rahman Sukmara, & Ferey Herman. (2026). Kompetensi ASN Pasca Penyederhanaan Birokrasi dan Dampaknya Terhadap Produktivitas Kerja di Pemerintah Kabupaten Ciamis. *CEMERLANG : Jurnal Manajemen Dan Ekonomi Bisnis*, *6*(3), 115–124. https://doi.org/10.55606/cemerlang.v6i3.9651

Djungan, D. (2026). Green Human Resource Management and Sustainable Performance in Public Organizations: A Systematic Review. *Jurnal Manajemen Sains Dan Organisasi*, *7*(2), 202–213. https://doi.org/10.52300/jmso.v7i2.27408

Dr. Ataullah Khan Mahmood, Ali Mahmood Wattoo, & Iftikhar Ahmad. (2026). Reforms in the Criminal Justice System: A Comparative Study with Special Reference to the Ottoman Empire's Justice System *Insights (Bhalwal) International Journal of Humanities, Management, and Social Sciences*, *3*(3), 581–599. https://doi.org/10.68156/h28v6a78

Efendi, Y., & Khitam, M. C. (2026). Synergizing Bureaucratic Reform and the Digital Economy: An Adaptive Policy Analysis of Lamongan Regency. *Varied Knowledge Journal*, *4*(1), 77–91. https://doi.org/10.71094/vkj.v4i1.368

Epriadi, D., & Jaya, M. (2026). Negotiating power, managing nutrition: contestation of local governance Indonesia's free nutritious meal program. *International Journal of Qualitative Research*, *6*(1), 145–155. https://doi.org/10.47540/ijqr.v6i1.2799

Feng, Y., Wang, L., Chen, Z., Tang, H., Gao, H., & Mei, W. (2026). Structural embedding and governance transformation: a study of network reconstruction mechanisms employed by

profit-driven organizations engaged in China's farmland supervision. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, *10*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2026.1693797

Gokmen, E., Kose, B. O., & Huseynov, F. (2026). How <scp>SMEs</scp> Make Sense of Green Technology Adoption for Sustainability Performance: A Qualitative Perspective on Organizational and Institutional Drivers. *Sustainable Development*. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.71217

Hadi, S., Setiawan, A., Widodo, W., Rohmiana, I., Sari, R. T., & Rahayuningsih, N. (2026). Paradox of knowledge sharing and hiding in driving innovation capability: The intermediary of human capital within the resource-based view. *Intangible Capital*, *22*(1), 210. https://doi.org/10.3926/ic.3562

Li, J., Chen, Z., Cui, M., & Zhang, X. (2026). Playing with time: data manipulation within the performance evaluation cycle. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *36*(4), 482–498. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muag017

Lumenta, R. P., Said, A., & Noor, I. (2023). The Correlation Between the Bureaucratic Reform and Performance Achievement: A Case Study at the Statistics Indonesia. *Jurnal Borneo Administrator*, *19*(3), 253–268. https://doi.org/10.24258/jba.v19i3.1272

MacLeod, A., Luong, V., Cameron, P., Kovacs, G., Fredeen, M., Patrick, L., Kits, O., & Tummons, J. (2022). The Lifecycle of a Clinical Cadaver: A Practice-Based Ethnography. *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, *34*(5), 556–572. https://doi.org/10.1080/10401334.2022.2092111

Mirayani, L. P. M. (2025). The Board Independence and Performance Nexus: The Moderating Role of Firm Size. *Jurnal Ilmiah Akuntansi Dan Bisnis*, *10*(2), 163–171. https://doi.org/10.38043/jiab.v10i2.7138

Mohammed, A. R. A. H., & Jamaluddin, Z. (2026). Capability-Based Framework on How Organizational Culture Shapes Digitalisation-Driven Operational Performance Improvement. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, *10*(8), 7634–7646. https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800493

Mohammed Lawal Giwah, & Habeeb Ilufoye. (2025). An adaptive regulatory sandbox model for accelerating clean energy startups in Africa. *Engineering Science & Technology Journal*, *6*(9), 517–529. https://doi.org/10.51594/estj.v6i9.2082

Muallidin, I. (2026). Ecological Institutional Failure in Local Governments: Rethinking Environmental Governance in Decentralized Indonesia. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, *36*(5), 1151–1165. https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.70106

Onyemekihian, J., & Onyemekeihia, P. (2025). Power Gap Paradox: Analyzing the Discrepancies between How Middle-Tier States Perceive their Power and their Actual Success in Foreign Policy. *NG Journal of Social Development*, *18*(1), 361–377. https://doi.org/10.4314/ngjsd.v18i1.4

Osman, S., Hussin, N., Shahibi, M. S., & Mohamad, A. N. (2026). Knowledge Concealment in the Malaysian Public Administration: The Roles of Rewards, Internal Competition, and Interpersonal Distrust. *European Conference on Knowledge Management*, *27*(1), 970–978. https://doi.org/10.34190/eckm.27.1.4760

Pradana, M. R., & Semedi, J. M. (2026). Indonesia's urban green spaces dilemma: Balancing law, ecology, and public space, highlighting Jakarta. *Human Geography*. https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786261447854

Probowati, D. E. P., & Chariri, A. (2026). From compliance to conscience: Rethinking governance and sustainability through transcendental accountability. *Corporate Governance and Sustainability Review*, *10*(3), 182. https://doi.org/10.22495/cgsrv10i3p13

Rahyasih, Y., Permana, J., & Syarifah, L. S. (2026). Promoting a School Companion Competency Model to Address New Education Policies and the Challenges of the Digital Era. *Pedagogi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, *26*(1), 17–26. https://doi.org/10.24036/pedagogi.v26i1.2936

Ramadhan, M. K., Tua R.F.S, H., & Adianto, A. (2023). Kualitas Pelayanan Kantor Pertanahan Kota Pekanbaru: Studi Pelayanan Alih Wilayah Sertifikat Tanah Pasca Pemekaran Kecamatan Tampan. *MINISTRATE Jurnal Birokrasi & Pemerintahan Daerah*, *5*(3), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.15575/jbpd.v5i3.29104

Ramadina, N. A., & Ismiyati. (2026). Employee Performance in Village Governance: An Interpretive Inquiry Into Discipline, Responsibility, and Time Management. *Jurnal Pendidikan Administrasi Perkantoran (JPAP)*, *14*(2), 870–883. https://doi.org/10.26740/jpap.v14n1.p870-883

Roberts, D. (2026). To protect and preserve? Explaining the gap between structural and superficial racial equality regimes in North Atlantic Rim universities. *British Educational Research Journal*, *52*(2), 952–974. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.70045

Rusli, A. M., & Ansar, M. C. (2026). Eco-government: a new approach to bureaucracy pathology challenges. *Frontiers in Political Science*, *8*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2026.1776950

Septior Nababan, F., Budhiartie, A., & Syam, F. (2026). <i>Bureaucratic Reform and Public Service in Coal Transportation Governance: An Administrative Law Perspective</i> *Mendapo: Journal of Administrative Law*, *7*(3), 424–448. https://doi.org/10.22437/my63jy26

Simandjorang, B. M. T. V. (2026). Contextual bureaucratic reform towards golden Indonesia 2045: Enhancing adaptive capacity in the VUCA era. *Priviet Social Sciences Journal*, *6*(8). https://doi.org/10.55942/pssj.v6i8.2119

Taufiqah, T., Abidin, Z., & Iswati, S. (2026). Minimum essential force and defense industry independence in Indonesia: A CIPP model evaluation. *Journal of Economics and Business Letters*, *6*(4). https://doi.org/10.55942/jebl.v6i4.2111

W, C. J., & N, P. C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. Angles Sage USA.