

Evaluation of the Social Impact of the Development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone on Local Communities

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Abstract

The development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is a national strategic project aimed at promoting economic growth through tourism development; However, large-scale tourism development may also generate various social impacts on local communities. This study aims to evaluate the social impacts of the Mandalika SEZ development on local communities, particularly in terms of socio-economic conditions, socio-cultural changes, and land tenure. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through interviews, field observations, and documentation involving local communities, community leaders, local government representatives, and area managers. Data analysis was conducted using the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) approach referring to the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) to identify and evaluate the social consequences of the development process. The results indicate that the development of the Mandalika SEZ has created new economic opportunities for local communities, especially in tourism-related sectors, services, and small-scale businesses. However, these benefits have not been evenly distributed due to disparities in skills, education levels, and access to economic resources. In addition, the development has influenced social interactions, cultural practices, and land use patterns. Therefore, inclusive and participatory development policies are required to promote social equity and ensure socially sustainable tourism development in the Mandalika SEZ.

Keywords: social impact, special economic zone, tourism development, local community, Mandalika

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Introduction

The development stage is a very crucial evolutionary cycle in tourism development to ensure that a destination grows sustainably without experiencing a decline in quality (Ardhiati et al., 2021; Saptaningtyas et al., 2021; Syafruddin et al., 2023; Yuli, Septiani, et al., 2023). In this context, the Indonesian Government has designated the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK) as a national strategic program to encourage national economic growth based on environmentally friendly tourism. (Kurniansah et al., 2024) As a super priority tourism destination, the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK Mandalika) is designed with significant investment in world-class infrastructure development, which is expected to reduce poverty and improve community welfare through massive absorption of local labor (Fauzi et al., 2022).

However, in reality, this massive physical development has not yet had a significant impact on improving the standard of living of local residents (Caraka et al., 2023) The main factor that hinders the effectiveness of this development is the low quality of human resources, which makes it difficult for local communities to adapt and compete in the modern tourism ecosystem (Sopian et al., 2023). Evaluation of the regional transformation process also revealed complex socio-economic impacts, where development interventions often focused more on resettlement aspects than on efforts to restore economic independence for communities affected by relocation (Rani et al., 2024).

This condition is exacerbated by the phenomenon of conversion of agricultural land into commercial land triggered by economic pressures and development policies, which in the long term risks threatening local food security (Putri & Wijimulawiani, 2026). Although empowerment programs such as the Tourism Housing Facility (Sarhunta) have been launched, local communities still face major obstacles in the form of a lack of management skills and marketing strategies to face global competition (Kurniansah et al., 2024) The emergence of the risk of economic inequality and the potential for cultural commodification shows that the acceleration of infrastructure development has not been fully accompanied by mature social engineering for the surrounding population (Suleman et al., 2023; Yuli, Fathurrahim, et al., 2023; Zitri et al., 2024).

The gap between the physical progress of the area and the community's social preparedness requires an in-depth study to map the actual impacts on the ground. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the social impact of the development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone on local communities in order to formulate a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development strategy for the quality of life of the surrounding community.

Research Methods.

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design that aims to evaluate the social impact of the development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK) on the local community. (Murianto et al., 2021) The research was conducted in the area around the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province (Widaningrum et al., 2025).

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, comprising local government officials, area managers, community leaders, and local residents directly impacted by the Mandalika

Special Economic Zone (SEZ) development. Data were collected through interviews, field observations, and documentation, using primary and secondary data as sources of information.

Data analysis was conducted using the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) approach, which refers to the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) to identify and evaluate the social impacts of regional development. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation by comparing interview results, observations, and documentation.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic Impact of Mandalika Special Economic Zone Development on Local Communities

Research results show that the development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK) has had a significant socio-economic impact on the surrounding local community. The development of tourism infrastructure, such as accommodation facilities, commercial areas, and the hosting of various national and international events, has led to the creation of new job opportunities. Local communities have begun to engage in the tourism, services, trade, and construction sectors, both as workers and as small-scale entrepreneurs.(Alfian et al., 2022).

However, field findings also indicate that these increased economic opportunities have not been fully enjoyed equally by all levels of society. Some local communities still face limitations in skills, education, and work experience, making it difficult for them to compete with workers from outside the region. This situation has resulted in socioeconomic inequality, with certain groups receiving greater benefits than others. Changes in livelihood structures are also beginning to emerge, particularly a shift from traditional agriculture and fisheries to services and tourism.

Changes in Social Life Patterns in Society

The development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) has not only impacted the economy but also the social life patterns of the local community. The intense interaction between local residents and tourists and visitors has brought about changes in lifestyles, consumption patterns, and social relationships. Observations indicate that residents are beginning to adapt their daily activities to the needs of tourism, such as changes in working hours, types of businesses, and patterns of social interaction.

On the other hand, these social changes also pose challenges for local communities. One impact is the rising cost of living in the development area, along with rising prices for goods and services due to tourism activities. This situation has the potential to put pressure on low-income groups not directly involved in the tourism sector. These findings indicate that regional development requires supporting policies that can protect vulnerable groups from being disproportionately impacted.

Impact on Socio-Culture and Local Identity

The development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone also Bringing changes to the socio-cultural aspects of society. Several local traditions and cultural practices are beginning to be directed towards supporting tourism activities, both as cultural attractions and as part of regional promotion. On the one hand, this situation opens up opportunities for preserving and introducing local culture to tourists, thus giving regional culture greater economic value and broader appeal.

However, research also shows community concerns about the potential shift in cultural values. Local culture is at risk of commodification, where cultural practices are focused more on their commercial value than on their inherent social and philosophical meaning. If not carefully managed, this situation can diminish the role of culture as a social identity and glue for communities. Therefore, local community involvement in tourism management and decision-making is a crucial factor in maintaining the socio-cultural sustainability of the region.(Kurniawan & Qodir, 2022).

Impact of Land Tenure and Access to Resources

The research also shows that the development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) has resulted in changes in community land ownership and use. The conversion of land from agricultural, residential, and coastal areas to tourism has given rise to various social issues, particularly related to land acquisition processes, clarity of ownership status, and the amount of compensation received. For some communities, this change has impacted their primary livelihoods, which previously relied on agriculture and fisheries.

For coastal communities and traditional fishermen, regional development has implications for reduced access to living space and natural resources. This situation creates economic uncertainty and forces people to seek alternative livelihoods that may not align with their skills and experience. These findings emphasize that regional development requires policies that are more sensitive to local social conditions, particularly in land management and the protection of community rights.

Implications of Regional Development Policy

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the social impacts of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) development are multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, cultural, and land tenure aspects. Therefore, regional development cannot solely focus on economic growth and physical development. The government and area managers need to ensure policies that encourage increased local community capacity, transparency in land management, and increased community participation in the planning and management processes of the area.

An inclusive and sustainable development approach is key to ensuring the development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) provides more equitable benefits to the local community. Thus, the area's development will not only symbolize national tourism progress but also contribute significantly to improving the quality of social life in the surrounding community.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) has had a significant social impact on the local community. While the development of the area opens up new economic opportunities and increases activity in the tourism and service sectors, these benefits have not been felt equally by all levels of society. Limited skills, education levels, and access to resources are key factors influencing socioeconomic inequality. Furthermore, the development of the Mandalika SEZ also impacts social and cultural patterns, as well as community land ownership and use. Adapting culture for tourism offers opportunities for local cultural preservation, but also has the potential to lead to shifts in values and cultural commodification. Changes in land ownership and access to natural resources also impact the sustainability of local livelihoods. Therefore, more inclusive, participatory, and socially justice-oriented regional development policies are needed to ensure that the benefits of development can be enjoyed sustainably by local communities.

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