



Communication Justice and Reactive Participation: Deconstructing Development Communication Patterns In Mandalika

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Abstract

The development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone has generated tensions between state-led tourism development and the participation of the Sasak indigenous community. Existing studies have largely emphasized economic outcomes while paying limited attention to how development communication shapes community participation. This study aims to examine the dynamics of communicative interactions among development actors and their influence on the quality of community participation. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 12 purposively selected key informants representing local communities, customary leaders, youth, business actors, and the tourism authority. The findings reveal that development communication remains predominantly top-down, characterized by post-fact information, limited deliberative space, and unequal communicative access. These conditions foster reactive participation, in which community involvement emerges primarily as a response to communication injustice, economic exclusion, and perceived marginalization rather than collaborative engagement. The study contributes theoretically by proposing the Dialectical Communication Justice Model, which explains the interaction between communicative justice, social structure, and community agency in tourism development. Practically, the findings suggest strengthening deliberative communication and integrating local cultural institutions, such as *sangkep beleg*, into tourism governance to promote more inclusive and sustainable development.

Keywords: Communication Justice; Development Communication; Mandalika; Reactive Participation; Sasak Community.

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INTRODUCTION

Mandalika is a coastal area located in the southern part of Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara, designated by Government Regulation Number 52 of 2014 as a Special Economic Zone and included in Indonesia's national tourism agenda as one of the "10 New Balis." The area is expected to become not only a world-class tourism destination but also a strategic driver of regional and national economic growth (Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 50 of 2011 concerning the National Tourism Development Master Plan 2010–2025, 2011; Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 52 of 2014 concerning the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, 2014; Simatupang, 2024; Suryade et al., 2022). However, beyond the narrative of modernization and economic development, tourism expansion in Mandalika has generated complex social dynamics because it occurs within the traditional territory of the Sasak indigenous community, whose social life is strongly shaped by customary institutions, collectivistic values, and deliberative traditions (Ardana et al., 2020; Fibrianti, 2022).

Previous studies on Mandalika have primarily focused on tourism development, economic performance, environmental issues, and community impacts. While these studies acknowledge the importance of participation, they provide limited explanation of how development communication influences the quality of participation and shapes the relationship between government institutions, tourism authorities, and local communities. Likewise, studies on participatory development communication have rarely examined communication justice and community agency within the governance of tourism Special Economic Zones. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining how communication patterns influence community participation in Mandalika and by proposing communication justice as an analytical framework for understanding reactive participation in tourism governance.(Ardana et al., 2020; Fibrianti, 2022).

The Sasak community possesses strong social capital that has the potential to serve as a foundation for participatory tourism development through mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), deliberation, and respect for customary law. The conversion of coastal areas into global tourism facilities has triggered profound social transformations, primarily as a result of the technocratic and centralized nature of development strategies (Ruiz-Ballesteros & Cáceres-Feria, 2016). In practice, development communication in Mandalika still tends to be prescriptive, formalistic, and top-down; local communities are often positioned as policy objects, rather than as development subjects with sovereign rights (Melkote, 2018; Servaes, 1999, 2020).

This top-down character is reaffirmed by the National Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARNAS) through Government Regulation Number 50 of 2011, which positions the central government as the primary actor in determining the direction of national tourism development. Local communities and regional governments function more as policy implementers than decision-makers regarding the future of their regions (Government of Indonesia, 2011). This fact was further exacerbated after PT Pengembangan Pariwisata Indonesia (Persero)/ITDC (as the direct authority for spatial planning, investment, and management of tourism areas) was appointed as the managing body for Mandalika (Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 52 of 2014 concerning the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, 2014). Therefore, development communication is characterized by a vertical pattern, where the flow of information, decisions, and control is highly centralized within the state/corporation.

This leads to a misalignment of development policies with the expectations of local communities. Numerous studies and field reports indicate widespread land conflicts, relocation, inequities in the distribution of economic benefits, barriers to formal employment, and limited



public spaces for expression in Mandalika tourism (Jong, 2023a, 2023b; Suadnyana, 2025). Thus, development communication takes the form of informing and directing people after strategic choices have been made, often resulting in what the public perceives as post-facto information rather than allowing for genuine citizen deliberation. For example, this creates a crisis of social legitimacy, where physical growth and investment are often not accompanied by liberating human development (Melkote, 2018; Servaes, 2020).

The success of development is not solely measured by economic or infrastructure aspects, but also by the ability of communication to enable dialogue, reduce conflict, build a sense of ownership, and strengthen public participation (Matteoli, 2016; Servaes & Servaes, 2021; Torres & Manyozo, 2020). The participatory development communication paradigm critiques the linear model of modernization, which assumes that the dissemination of information will inevitably lead to public participation and development success (Melkote, 2018; Rogers, 1983). In contrast, the participatory paradigm positions communication as a dialogic, horizontal, and transformative process with cognitive mobilization that enables people to become meaning-makers and agents of social change (Melkote, 2018).

This study adopts Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) as its primary analytical framework to examine the dynamic relationship between institutional structures and community agency in Mandalika tourism governance. In this study, the concept of structure refers to government regulations, the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) framework, and ITDC governance, while agency refers to the communicative practices of the Sasak community in responding to, negotiating, and, at times, challenging these institutional arrangements. Structuration Theory therefore guides the analysis by explaining how communication practices simultaneously reproduce and transform existing governance structures.

Building upon this perspective, Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) is employed to examine how communication structures are appropriated by different actors during the development process. Rather than assuming that communication mechanisms automatically facilitate participation, AST enables the analysis of how deliberation forums, public consultations, and communication channels are used, adapted, or perceived by local communities in practice.

Within this integrated framework, communication justice functions as the analytical lens for assessing the quality of communicative interactions through dimensions such as access to information, the timing of information, recognition of local knowledge, deliberative opportunities, and influence on decision-making. These dimensions are used to interpret whether communication structures enable or constrain meaningful participation. Reactive participation is consequently understood as the empirical outcome that emerges when communication justice is perceived to be absent, leading community participation to become a form of resistance rather than collaborative engagement.

In addition to Structuration Theory, this study utilizes Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST), a theory developed by Poole and DeSanctis as an offshoot of Giddens. This means that communication structures need to provide space for actors to make informed decisions independently. (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994 in Littlejohn, Foss, and Oetzel 2017) In the development of Mandalika, forums for deliberation, socialization, and public communication operated more as administrative formalities or as ironic appropriations of the democratic process than as genuine spaces for deliberation (Widiani et al., 2024).



This conceptualization of development communication patterns relates to the structure of interactions and message exchanges among the government, ITDC, local communities, and business actors that shape power relations in tourism development (Servaes 2020; Nathanael et al. 2026). These communication patterns are not merely related to the dissemination of information but also to factual legitimacy, cultural representation, openness to dialogue, and community agency. Therefore, this study proposes the concept of communication justice as a platform for inclusive tourism development. Communication justice emphasizes more equitable distributional access to information, deliberation, and communicative power; this, in turn, makes local communities not merely objects benefiting from development, but subjects helped or hindered by its trajectory.

In this study, communication justice refers to the equitable distribution of communicative access, participation opportunities, recognition, and dialogic power among development actors. Communication justice emphasizes that local communities should not merely receive information after decisions are made, but must be substantively involved in deliberative processes that shape development trajectories

Regarding community participation, this study references Arnstein's Citizen Participation Ladder, which positions participation as the deployment of citizen power in development (Arnstein, 1969 in Servaes & Servaes 2021). In fact, Pretty (1995 in Servaes & Servaes 2021) stated that participation can shift from passive forms to an activity-centered and empowering approach. However, research findings from the Mandalika region indicate that community participation remains limited to consultative and symbolic levels, thus failing to generate meaningful involvement in decision-making (Nathanael et al., 2026). This research also uncovers an interesting irony: the more seriously a community group participates in development work, the lower their perceived satisfaction with success. This condition is referred to as reactive participation, a type of participation that arises from individual resistance to communication injustice in development, inequality in access to economic resources, and political exclusion (Melkote, 2018; Nathanael et al., 2026; Wulung et al., 2020).

In line with this background, this study measures how the dynamics of interactions among actors in Mandalika tourism development determine the quality of local community participation. This study also seeks to dismantle the linear paradigm of development communication by positioning communication justice as a prerequisite for inclusive, dialogical, sustainable tourism development.

METHODS

This study takes the Mandalika Special Economic Zone as its core research site. Building on the prior research of Nathanael et al. (2026), it adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the tensions between the government's technocratic bureaucratic structure and local communities' agency amid the special zone's development. It deconstructs the solidified linear development and communication model entrenched in mainstream perceptions, focuses on the phenomenon of "Reactive Participation" in the region spawned by a crisis of communicative justice, and captures the interactive dynamics of multiple actors that are often obscured by the grand narrative of national development.

Type of Research



This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded primarily in the interpretive-critical paradigm, which is appropriate for understanding the subjective experiences of the Sasak community while critically examining the power relations embedded in tourism development. The interpretive dimension enables the exploration of participants' meanings and lived experiences, whereas the critical dimension facilitates the analysis of communication inequality, institutional dominance, and community agency. In this study, the post-positivist paradigm is not positioned as an alternative philosophical stance but rather as a methodological orientation that supports systematic data collection, transparent analytical procedures, and empirical validation of qualitative findings. This methodological position enables the study to maintain analytical rigor while remaining consistent with its interpretive-critical perspective. The core goal of adopting this approach is to capture the authentic subjective experiences of community members, examine the dynamics of power relations within the research field, and unpack the anomalous conclusion proposed in previous quantitative research that "community participation has a negative impact on development success." This study introduces Giddens' (1984) concept of the duality of structure as its core analytical tool to explain how institutional structures and community agency interact through development communication practices, while the qualitative research framework provides the methodological foundation for the research design (Creswell & Baez, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Focus

The focus of this research is on the in-depth dynamics of communicative interactions and the quality of participation of the Sasak community as a local community, which is directed at the qualitative side of how participatory development is carried out in the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (KEK) established by Government Regulation Number 52 of 2014. Based on the Structuration Theory framework, (Giddens, 1984) this research highlights the agency of local actors as a reflexive balancing force against the technocratic structure of government policies. The focus of this research is carried out to try to break the linear line of communication in order to reveal "Reactive Participation" as something born from the crisis of information justice. Such as the analysis of the institutionalization process of local Sasak cultural capital such as sangkep beleq, as well as the issue of economic exclusion that influences the community's perspective in assessing whether success in sustainable tourism development occurs or not.

Data Sources

Data collection for this study was carried out along two separate tracks. Primary data was collected from four buffer villages including Kuta in the Mandalika Special Economic Zone. In-depth interviews were conducted with core local tourism stakeholders to explore dimensions including communication patterns and participation levels. Secondary data was sourced from relevant policies and previous studies to provide the background and regulatory support required for this research.

Data Collection Techniques

This study adopts the semi-structured in-depth interview method, which enables exploration of pre-set research topics while capturing new issues that emerge during field interactions. (Creswell & Baez, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study conducted face-to-face interviews adapted to



local culture in the Sasak community of the study village, with individuals who have direct experience of the researched phenomenon. All discussions were advanced around seven pre-set core themes covering such dimensions as community members' experiences receiving development information, their level of participation in decision-making processes, their understanding of development policies, the status of social conflicts, their access to tourism economic benefits, and their experiences of communication inequality.

Informant Selection Techniques

This study conducted field research on tourism development in Mandalika, adopting a purposive sampling scheme: For the core stratum, 12 key informants were recruited. All of these informants possessed professional knowledge, practical operation experience, and direct participation experience related to the region's tourism development, and fell into four categories: traditional leaders and ordinary community members, youth leaders, local tourism vendors, and representatives of ITDC, the region's management authority. The inclusion of ITDC representatives was intended to capture institutional perspectives regarding tourism governance, development communication strategies, and policy implementation within the Mandalika SEZ. Snowball sampling was used as a supplementary method to recruit additional informants who were difficult to identify in the initial stage. Ordinary community respondents were required to meet the basic criteria of being aged 15 to 64 and having resided locally for at least 3 years, with the following specific criteria: (1) residents living near the core tourism area; (2) individuals directly affected by development; (3) traditional leaders or community leaders who understand local social dynamics; (4) local economic actors; and (5) parties involved in the management of tourism development.

Table 1. Responden profile

No.	Informant Name/Identity	Actor Group	Village Origin/Role	Key Characteristics & Background
1	DP	Community/Customary Leader	Local Mandalika Village	Understands Sasak customary deliberation (<i>sangkep</i>) procedures and communication relations with the government.
2	LSW	Community/Customary Leader	Rembitan Village	58 years old (Junior High education); plays an active role in preserving Sasak culture and making customary decisions.
3	LJR	Community Leader	Sengkol Village (Hamlet Head)	47 years old (Senior High education); acts as a communication mediator between residents and the government/developer.
4	LS	Community Leader	Sengkol Village	43 years old (Senior High education); farmer and



No.	Informant Name/Identity	Actor Group	Village Origin/Role	Key Characteristics & Background
5	MFS	Youth Leader	Rembitan Village	lodging provider, understands local economic dynamics. 27 years old (Senior High education); tour guide, representing the productive generation adapting to tourism development.
6	IZ	Youth Leader	Kuta Village	Active in youth activities and participated in MSME (<i>UMKM</i>) development programs.
7	MNH	General Public	Mertak Village	Representative of common citizens' voices regarding the lack of transparency in communication ("post-facto information").
8	A	General Public	Kuta Village	Head of Kuta Village Youth, 24 years old; represents critical perspectives on unilateral policies and community resistance.
9	SHP.	Local Business Actor	Kuta Village (Merchant)	46 years old (Bachelor's degree); teacher and MSME actor experiencing direct economic impacts and issues with stall (<i>stand</i>) access.
10	BNF	Local Business Actor	Rembitan Village (Merchant)	39 years old (Elementary education); community-based merchant involved in daily local economic activities.
11	BSR	Local Business Actor	Sengkol Village (Merchant)	33 years old (Elementary education); business actor affected by tourism activity fluctuations in the core area.
12	ITDC Representative	Area Developer	ITDC Institution	Central policy actor responsible for designing and implementing infrastructure development in the Mandalika SEZ.

Research Instruments



This qualitative study uses the researcher themselves as its core research instrument, and conducts the research with a self-developed interview guide. The study cites the classic qualitative research argument proposed by Creswell & Creswell (2018) to support the rationality of this core research instrument. This interview guide converts the communication model X and participation quantitative indicator Z from Nathanael et al. (2026) into open-ended questions, covers four major dimensions, and adopts tools including mobile phones, voice recorders, and NVivo to complete data recording and dataset management.

Validity of Findings

The core requirement for the reliability and validity of qualitative research is that a study's interpretations cannot merely reflect the researcher's own goals and interests, but must accurately capture the genuine experiences of research participants. To meet this standard, the present study adopted the three core validation techniques proposed by Creswell and Baez (2021): member checking, source triangulation, and audit trail, and supplemented these measures with a peer debriefing process. Source triangulation requires comparing data from different information providers to construct a complete, holistic overview of the research subject; member checking involves returning transcripts and interpretation summaries to participants for corrections; peer debriefing reviews thematic coding to prevent and control research bias; and audit trail systematically documents the full research process to enhance accountability. Together, these steps comprehensively guard against interpretation bias on the part of the researcher.

Data analysis

This study adopts the iterative and dynamic spiral data analysis method proposed by Creswell and Poth (2018), and advances its analysis across five operational stages, as outlined below: first, we use NVivo to organize interview transcripts into a structured format; next, we read through all transcripts to draft analysis memos for the citizen agency model; we then complete three rounds of coding, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, extract two core themes such as "post-truth information" and "exclusion from access to the podium.", develop interpretations drawing on two categories of Structuration Theory and Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST), and ultimately construct a new conceptual model oriented to communicative justice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study is a qualitative research focused on the development communication model of Indonesia's Mandalika Special Economic Zone (abbreviated KEK). Its core objectives are to deconstruct the development communication logic of this special zone, and explore the subjective meanings underlying the agency of local residents. The study adopts a multi-village fieldwork design, conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants from 4 villages within the region, and used spiral analysis supported by NVivo software to process qualitative data.

The overarching core finding of this study is that a prominent communication legitimacy crisis runs through Mandalika's development process, which is primarily manifested in local residents' "passive participation". The top-down policy structure has completely crowded out space for citizens to participate in strategic decision-making. The following are the findings of in-depth interviews from the four villages.

a. Mertak Village: Marginalization through "Post-Fact Information" Patterns



The core problems identified in the first surveyed village, Mertak Village, are highly representative: the area implements a typical “post-fact information” communication model, where all information related to project decisions and construction is only shared with residents after the projects are implemented, leaving no room for local participation during the early planning stage at all. First-hand interview testimonies from Mertak Village residents LS, a man from Sengkol Village, who stated: *"Kalo saya ngga tau, setelah terjadi baru tau... Sesudah terjadi baru saya dapat informasi kalo ada pembangunan"* ["I don't know, I only know after it happens... I only get information about construction after it happens."]. and Mrs. MNH: *"Apa yang mereka mau lakukan itu saja kita hanya dikasih tahu setelah sudah ditetapkan... percaya ndak percaya karna kalaupun mau ngebantah pun ndk ada gunanya"*. ["We were only told what they wanted to do after it had already been decided... believe it or not, because even if we tried to argue, it would be pointless."] confirm that residents' right to speak has been fully marginalized, and the so-called participation is nothing more than procedural, formality-driven process. Communication scholar, Servaes (2020) critique of mechanistic development communication models further corroborates this study's core judgment: local residents' information sovereignty has been systematically neglected, communication justice has not been realized, and all communication arrangements only serve the technocratic goal of accelerating the implementation of investment projects.

b. Rembitan Village: Customary Structures as a Negotiation Bastion

Social conflicts occur frequently in most of Indonesia's tourist areas. In contrast, the Sade settlement in Rembitan Village, which lies within the core indigenous area of the Mandalika Tourist Zone, has maintained long-term stability by relying on the customary governance system of the Sasak ethnic group. Traditional leader LSW states that the village's sangkep beleq customary council holds substantial governing power, and that this indigenous deliberative tradition is by no means merely a cultural symbol, but a proven effective governance system. He said: *"Kita musyawarah adat. Tapi apakah musyawarah adat sekarang punya kekuatan atau hanya formalitas? Kalau kita di sini, ya punya kekuatan... Mengikuti adat"*. ["We hold customary deliberations. But do customary deliberations now have power or are they just a formality? If we're here, we have power... We follow custom."]

Against the background of mountain tourism development, while traditional customary governance can strengthen local autonomy, local communities have pointed out that development promotion is severely disconnected from the actual local environment. Large-scale villa construction in Kuta District ignores local ecological conditions and has increased environmental vulnerability, and researcher LSW has confirmed that floods occur frequently in this area every rainy season: *"Beberapa bagian di daerah Mandalika, di Kuta ini, itu beberapa daerah yang rusak. Terutama kalau musim banjir, musim hujan itu terkena banjir"*. ["Several parts of the Mandalika area, in Kuta, are damaged. Especially during the flood season, flooding occurs during the rainy season."]

MFS also put forward that the core pursuit of local communities has always been the harmonious coexistence of traditional values and modernization transformation. Taking Mandalika's development process as an example, the Indigenous community has been working wholeheartedly to protect and pass down its own customs. He said: *"Kalau kita di Rembitan ini tetap menjaga adat istiadat walaupun kemajuan zaman Contoh misalnya pembangunan pariwisata di Mandalika, Jadi adat istiadat kita tetap menjaga Tetap kami lestarikan"*. ["In Rembitan, we



maintain our customs despite the advancement of technology. For example, tourism development in Mandalika. So, we maintain our customs. We continue to preserve them."]

c. Kuta Village: An Arena of Reactive Participation and Economic Dissonance

This study uses Kuta Village, located at the core of Indonesia's Mandalika Special Economic Zone (Mandalika SEZ), which unpacks the core contestation between the region's macro-level development policy framework and local villagers' agency to secure their livelihoods, which forms the central analytical thread of this qualitative research. As the arena where these two sets of forces intersect and compete, the resistance launched by Kuta Village's villagers first exhibits the feature of passive participation centered on land-related rights and interests. Local youth leader Mr. A confirmed in a first-hand interview conducted for this study that Pantean's unilateral development not only cut off villagers' original means of earning a living by running street stalls, but the villagers' legitimate demands never received a formal response from the developer: "*Demo pernah, seperti kejadian di Pantean kemarin gara-gara pembangunan yang sepihak, jadinya masyarakat demo, karena udah nggak bisa jualan lagi kan di Pantean sekarang... Kalau misalnya pendapatnya nggak sesuai dengan aturan ya nggak didengar*". ["There have been demonstrations, like the one in Pantean yesterday, because of unilateral development. The community protested because they can't sell anything in Pantean anymore... If their opinions don't comply with the regulations, they won't be listened to."]

This inaction eventually forced villagers to organize a collective protest march. A second core contradiction concerns the unfair economic access faced by informal vendors. A locally coined term "setan", a distorted derivation of the word for street stall "stand", was created to describe these irregular, grey-market leased stalls. Through interviews with informants from the vendor community, this study found that informal vendors who had not joined the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) alliance or the Family Welfare Empowerment Movement (PKK) were not allowed to set up stalls for free at the Mandalika Circuit, and could only operate by paying to rent a stall space: "*Ya, kalau pengusaha-pengusaha yang tidak masuk UMKM atau tidak masuk PKK, itu nanti dia tidak bisa terkenal. Tidak bisa dapat undangan untuk masuk di sirkuit Mandalika, bisa jualan di situ, dia tidak akan dapat setan (stand). Dia harus bayar setan di situ*". ["Yes, if entrepreneurs aren't members of MSMEs or the PKK, they won't be able to become famous. They won't be able to get an invitation to the Mandalika circuit, and they can sell there, but they won't get a stand. They have to pay for the "setan" (trading stall).]. Finally, this study draws on the "form of state capitalism" theory proposed by Chaniago et al. (2024) to anchor the common patterns underlying these phenomena which local residents have consistently only been treated as appendages of the tourism economy, rather than the core subjects of regional development.

d. Sengkol Village: Hybrid Mediation Mechanisms

This study draws on first-hand fieldwork carried out in Sengkol Village, and finds that after the implementation of the Mandalika Circuit Project, local development communication still takes the village head, local traditional authority, as its core hub. Although the village head has begun to adapt digital tools such as WhatsApp groups to advance his work, grassroots independent development agency has remained persistently constrained. Most development information transmitted downwards is pre-drafted directive content. During interviews, the village's head Mr. LJR openly stated that all information related to the tourism project was only conveyed to him after



its final version was confirmed, which caused a sharp rise in his daily workload: *"Biasanya kalau pembangunan pariwisata ini, kita bahkan saja di tokoh masyarakat, sebagai kadus pun, dapat informasinya setelah sudah jadi rancangannya... Alhamdulillahnya ada perubahan, terutama pekerjaan saya nambah"*. ["Usually, with tourism development, even we, as community leaders, as hamlet heads, receive information after the draft is finalized... Thank God, there have been changes, especially since my workload has increased]. Villager LS, for his part, noted that villagers only learned of the Mandalika Project after it had been launched, and the lack of information transparency has become a core sticking point: *"Terkait dengan Mandalika, warga enggak tahu. Tapi setelah jadi baru tahu"*. ["Regarding Mandalika, residents don't know. But only after it was finished did we find out."]. Furthermore, the land rights issue caused by the long-delayed settlement of land requisition compensation for some plots within the circuit area has further intensified instability within the village. Jayang Rane noted: *"Waktu itu ada beberapa tanah yang masuk ke daerah sirkuit itu belum dibayarkan"*. ["At that time, some land within the circuit area had not been paid for."]

Analysis of Word Dominance and Theme Structure (Word Cloud and Tree Map)



Figure 1. Word cloud analysis diagram

In the initial stage of this study's qualitative analysis, the word frequency visualization method was used to identify prominent issues reflected in the perceptions of local communities. This paper draws on the word cloud presented in Figure 1 to analyze the narrative texts of respondents from Mandalika, Indonesia. It identifies four high-frequency Indonesian words: "warga" [the public], "pembangunan" [development], "pariwisata" [tourism], and masyarakat [community]. Citing Nathanael (2026) to interpret the connotations of these terms, the paper further explores the referents of "bicara" [talk] and "pendapat" [opinion], and deduces that the core local problem is low-quality dialogue, while the community has a strong demand to be heard.

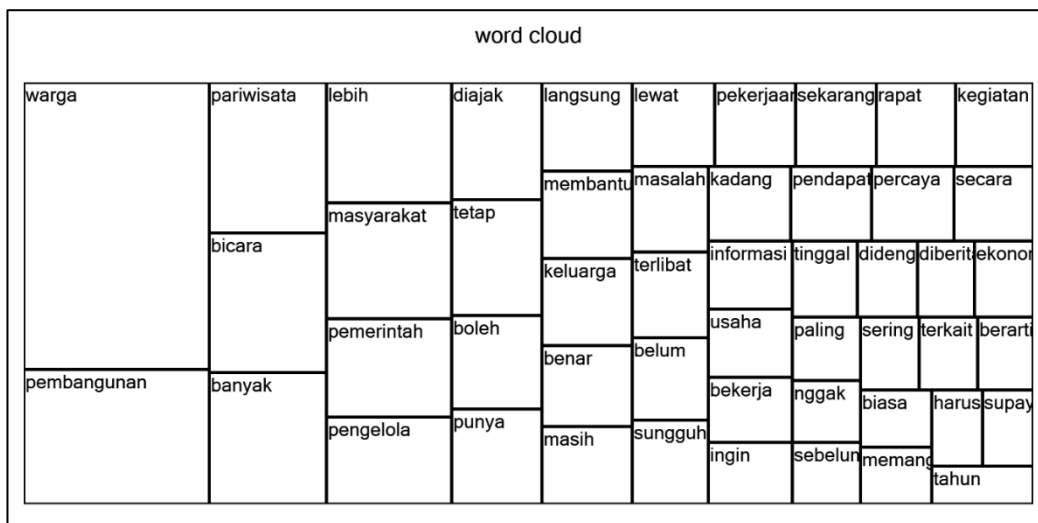


Figure 2. Visualizing word frequency treemap using NVivo

The research team of this study conducted advanced thematic analysis. Using the dendrogram presented in Figure 2 to visualize the thematic hierarchy of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone. Word frequency analysis lists the words “warga” [citizens], “pembangunan” [development], “pariwisata” [tourism], and “masyarakat” [society] as the most frequently used, indicating that local communities are at the center of development dynamics in Mandalika. The repeated use of the word “bicara” [talk] demonstrates the importance of communication in regulating and exchanging aspirations between communities and the government or management. The words “pendapat” [opinion], “didengar” [hear], “informasi” [information], “rapat” [meeting], and “diundang” [invite] imply that communication remains quite formal and not fully participatory. In terms of participation, community involvement, indicated by the words “terlibat” [involved], “membantu” [helping], and “usaha” [efforts], is minimized by the presence of “belum” [not yet], “masih” [still], and “kadang” [sometimes]. This participation lacks depth and sustainability. The words “ekonomi” [economy], “pekerjaan” [work], and “keluarga” [family] indicate that community involvement is driven primarily by economic motives. The development communication pattern has a top-down approach, resulting in communities being viewed more as beneficiaries than as active participants in development.

Hierarchy of Significance and Typology of Participation (Hierarchy & Chart Node)

This study adopted hierarchical visualization and distribution coding to identify the most frequently discussed dimensions. Drawing on two visual charts produced for this study, this research analyzes the quality and effectiveness of community participation in the development of the indigenous Sasak people in Indonesia’s Mandalika region: Figure 3, a hierarchy diagram, The hierarchical visualization reveals the most prominent aspects of community participation and communication patterns in Mandalika tourism development. Consultative participation has the largest share, indicating that community involvement is generally limited to input and discussion forums without decision-making. Collaborative participation is shown in a smaller share, indicating that active community involvement has not yet become a dominant pattern. Among the dimensions of social relations, dialogue and negotiation are important, but are also associated with social



tensions, indicating conflicting interests regarding access to and benefits from development. Regarding development communication, communities perceive one-way communication, which is only informative through media such as WhatsApp or village officials. Regarding development impacts, communities point to economic benefits and employment opportunities as well as social inequalities and vulnerabilities. These results highlight the need for dialogic communication, collaborative participation, and a more equitable balance of benefits.

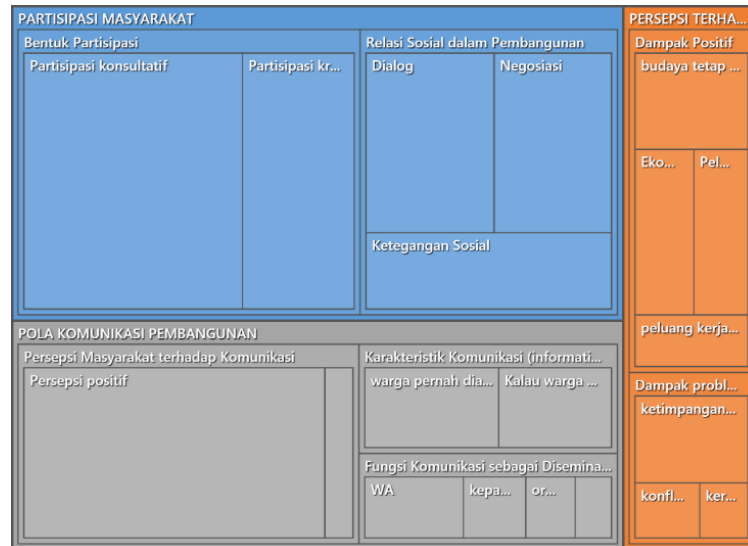


Figure 3. Hierarchy Chart

Figure 4, a community participation node diagram, presents an anomaly: citations related to participation forms reach 48, while citations related to collaborative social relationships number only 14. Nathanael (2026) interprets this gap as indicating that most local participation is procedural and individual-based, rather than an empowered collective partnership. On this basis, this study points out that local participation only stays at the consultation level: residents can engage in development efforts but hold no decision-making voice.

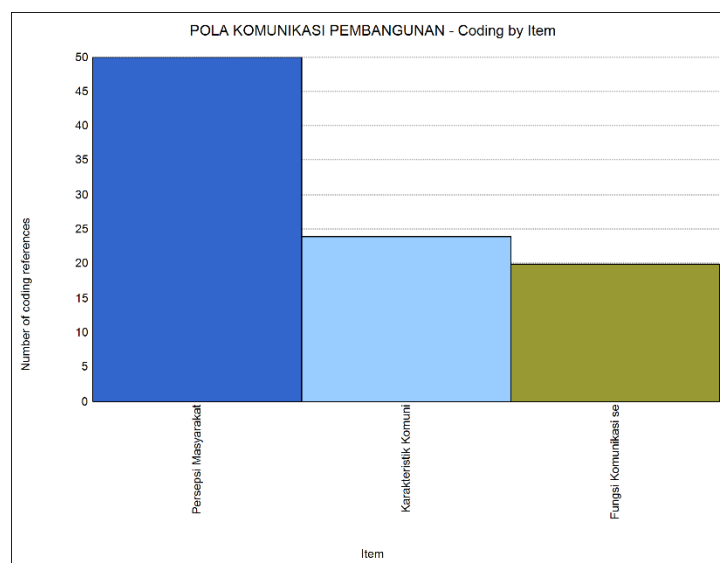


Figure 4. Community participation node chart



Figure 5 of this study (the node diagram of communication modes) shows that there are a total of 50 citations that associate communication with community cognition, while 20 citations only view communication as serving an information transmission function. The impact of relationships and sense of justice on communication quality far exceeds that of technical-level factors.

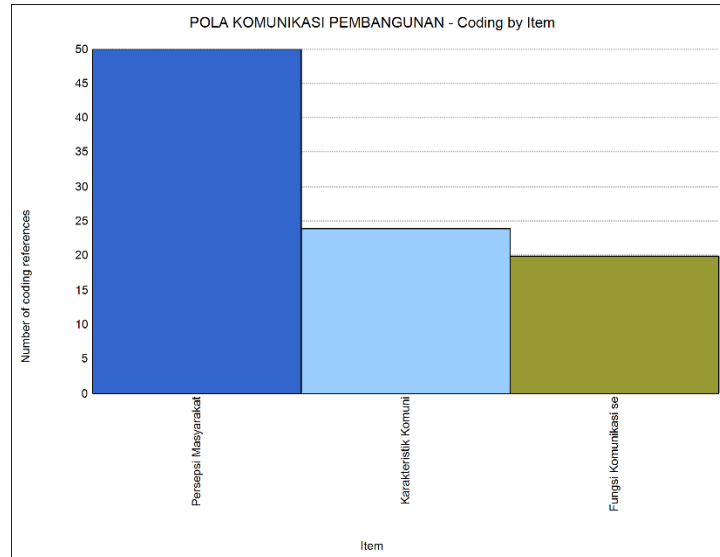


Figure 5. Communication pattern node chart

Dynamics of Development Perceptions and Impacts

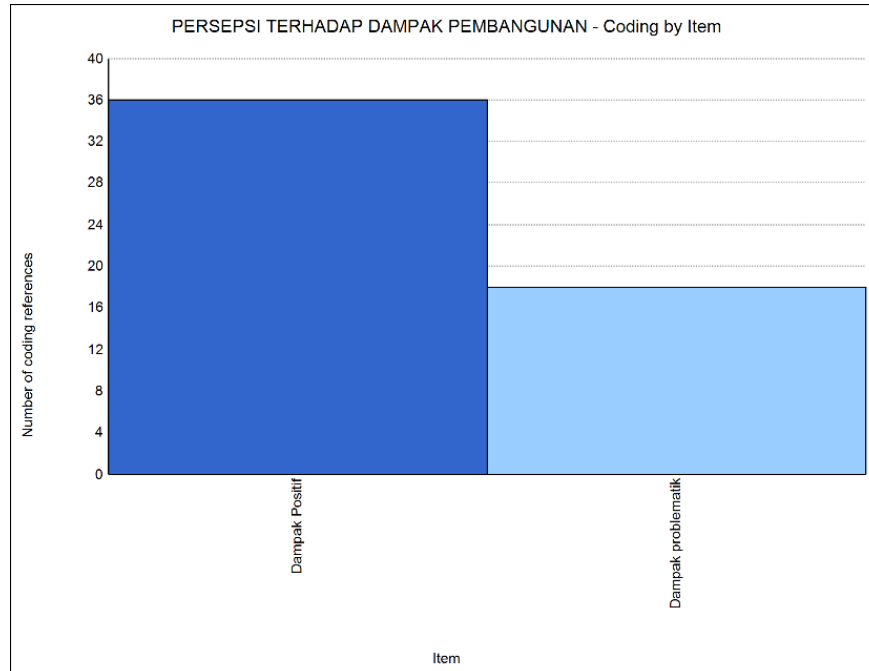


Figure 6. Impact perception node chart

The results of cognitive contradictions identified in this community development survey are presented in Figure 6 (Impact Perception Node Chart). Positive impacts, referenced 36 times, are primarily centered on income growth. Negative impacts, mentioned 18 times, include flood



disasters and land disputes, and ongoing continuity risks may undermine the legitimacy of the development initiative.

Visualization of Relationships and Transitional Conditions (Project Map)

This study used Project Map to generate a node-association circular graph for its final analysis.

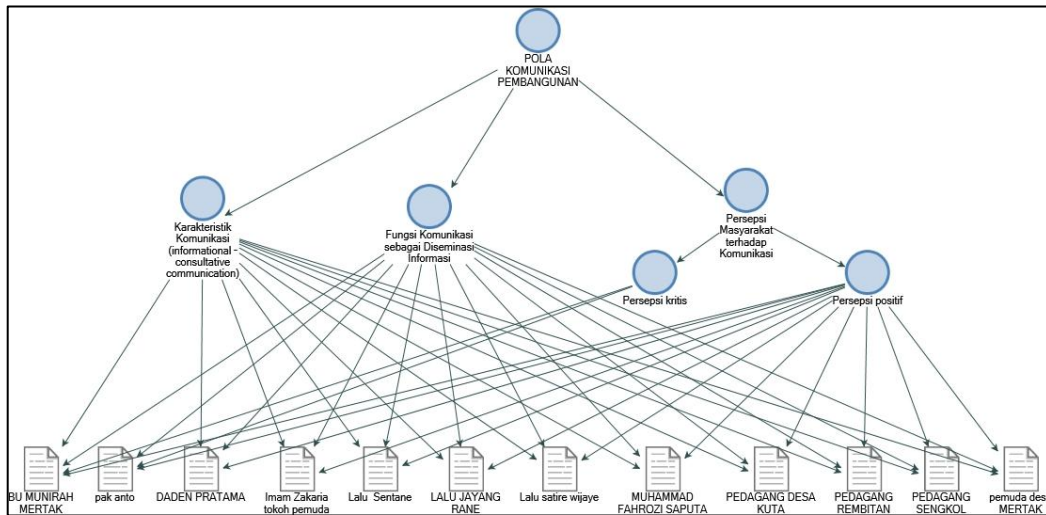


Figure 7. Communication pattern project map

The project map of communication patterns in Figure 7 presents a complex communication structure that includes core leading actors and information channels. Based on this observation, the communication model of Mandalika is classified as a mixed lineage. It adopts a top-down command-style approach, and is marked by insufficient responsiveness among regional managers

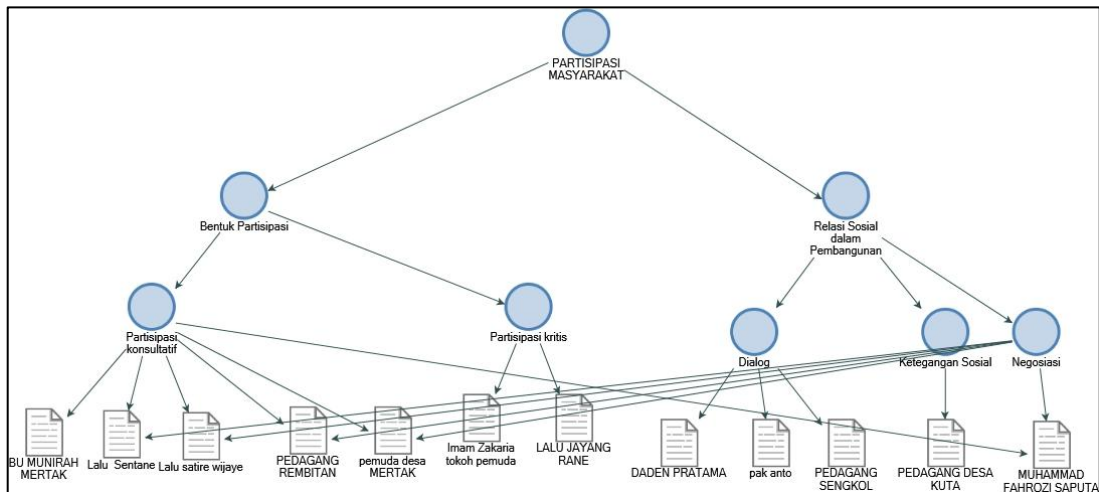


Figure 8. Communication participation project map

Figure 8, the Map of Community Participation Projects, produced in this study shows that community participation is far from merely the physical presence of residents. At its core is the meaning of participation conferred by the community. This map presents a dynamic scenario of participation, and also exposes that current participation remains only at the consultation level, with residents' demands hindered by rigid technocratic regulations.



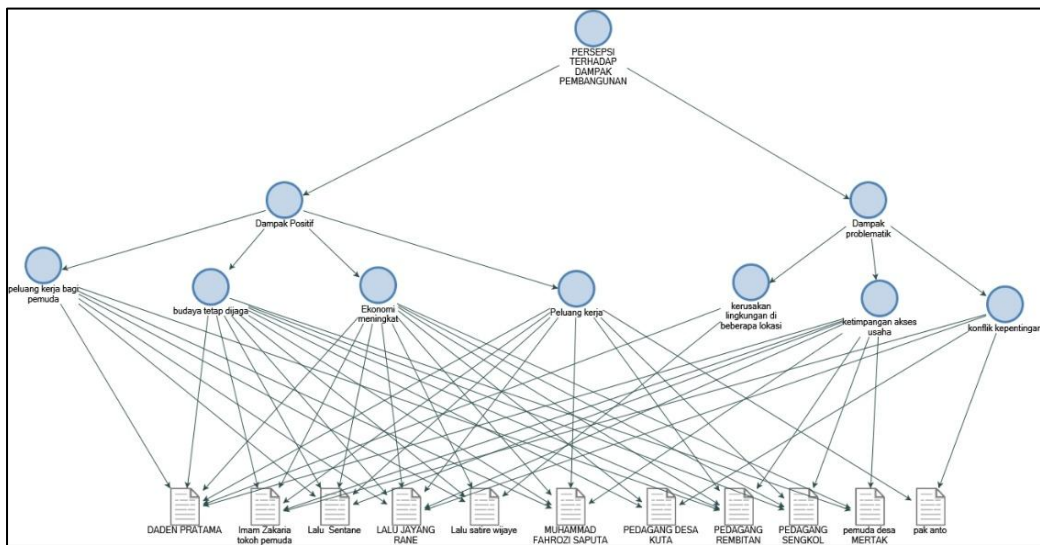


Figure 9. Community perception project map

Figure 9 introduced in this paper is a community-aware project map, covering three major research dimensions of society, culture, and economy. The survey findings of this study reveal that the feedback from the two groups of respondents presents an unexpectedly sharp contrast.

A key finding of this study is the identification of a communication pattern called “Post-Fact Information.” In the context of participatory development communication, information should be a prerequisite for public participation in strategic planning. However, as Nathanael et al. (2026) notes, information in Mandalika is politically “closed,” only being communicated to citizens after important decisions have been made—sometimes even after public development has actually begun.

This situation demonstrates the pervasiveness of the classical modernization paradigm, linear and instructive, where citizens are positioned as mere objects of policy. Digital-era dialogue has its own purpose: empowering citizens as active prosumers (Amelia & Balqis, 2023). However, in Mandalika, technological infrastructure such as WhatsApp Groups serves only as a one-way flow of commands. This “frictive” aspect of communication is reflected in the testimony of Mrs. MNH, a resident of Mertak Village: *"apa yang mereka mau lakukan itu saja kita hanya dikasih tahu setelah sudah ditetapkan... percaya ndak percaya karna walaupun mau ngebantah pun ndk ada gunanya"*. ["We were only told what they wanted to do after it had already been decided... whether we believed it or not, because even if we tried to argue, it would be pointless."]. Then LS, Hamlet Head Sengkol Village, also described the accuracy of the communication: *"Kalo saya ngga tau, setelah terjadi baru tau... Sesudah terjadi baru saya dapat informasi kalo ada pembangunan"*. ["I don't know, I only find out after it happens... Only after it happens do I get information that there's development."]

Theoretically, this phenomenon demonstrates the lack of success in “enabling meaning,” as articulated in Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984). The SEZ policy framework implemented by ITDC and the government is a restrictive framework, not an empowering one, information is used as a weapon of hierarchical control. Following Servaes, (1999), analyzing this communication pattern as a top-down flow represents communicative marginalization that can create insecurity among residents about whether this will be the end or a new future for their region. In her research, Chotijah (2021) even asserts that poor information management from the outset risks fostering skepticism and disillusionment among residents before major development agendas are launched.



From the perspective of the ITDC as the institutional developer of the Mandalika SEZ, tourism development is positioned as part of a national strategic agenda aimed at accelerating regional economic growth, infrastructure modernization, and global tourism competitiveness. The centralized communication model adopted by the institution was perceived as necessary to ensure administrative efficiency, investment certainty, and policy coordination within a rapidly developing tourism area. This demonstrates that communicative tensions in Mandalika emerge not merely from domination, but also from differing institutional rationalities between state-led development governance and local participatory expectations

Typology of Reactive Participation: The Paradox between Engagement and Critical Resistance

The level of community participation reported in this study presents a sociological paradox, contradicting the assumption of linearity with development. The success of the current perception of fatalism regarding tourism development within communities should be positively correlated (directly related) to the observed relatively low or even non-existent community integration. According to Nathanael et al. (2026), this phenomenon is defined as "reactive participation." While collaborative participation is rooted in volunteerism, Mandalika's participation appears to be an exercise in critical awareness of the detrimental social consequences of development within the Sasak community.

The community did not act as a chorus supporting the management plan, but rather acted collectively because they felt disadvantaged by land disputes, economic exclusion, and ecological impacts. Therefore, Mr. A called on youth leaders in Kuta Village and stated that demonstrations, protests, or demonstrations were a last resort, as if there were no procedures or dialogue to begin with, regarding the reasons for the protests. *"Demo pernah, seperti kejadian di Pantean kemarin gara-gara pembangunan yang sepihak, jadinya masyarakat demo, karena udah nggak bisa jualan lagi kan di Pantean sekarang"*. ["There have been demonstrations, like the incident in Pantean yesterday, because of unilateral development. So the community demonstrated because they can't sell anything in Pantean anymore."]. He also blamed the stalled discussions on technocratic regulations that leave little room for people to express themselves: *"Yang salah mungkin diskusinya ya, karena sosialisasinya kadang-kadang kurang, aturannya juga gimana ya, kurang sosialisasi dah pokoknya, sehingga masyarakat itu kayak tidak tahu, sehingga terjadi demo. Pokoknya sosialisasinya aja yang kurang... Kalau misalnya pendapatnya nggak sesuai dengan aturan ya nggak didengar"*. ["The problem is probably the discussion itself, because sometimes there's a lack of socialization, and the regulations are also lacking. Basically, there's a lack of socialization, so the community seems unaware, which leads to demonstrations. "The main thing is that there's just a lack of socialization... If, for example, your opinion doesn't comply with the rules, it won't be listened to."]

In addition to conflicts over access to economic resources, flooding is an environmental issue that typically triggers reactive forms of community participation. Wulung et al. (2020) observed that ignoring local wisdom and social aspirations in physical development can erode public support for national strategic projects. Traditional leader LSW also noted the failure of infrastructure to predict ecological disasters in Kuta Village: *"Beberapa bagian di daerah Mandalika, di Kuta ini, itu beberapa daerah yang rusak. Terutama kalau musim banjir, musim*



hujan itu terkena banjir". ["Several parts of the Mandalika area, in Kuta, are damaged. Especially during the flood season, flooding occurs during the rainy season."]

The Mandalika area in Kuta is severely damaged. Flooding during the rainy season is especially exacerbated during the flood season.

This similarity is explained within the framework of Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) (Littlejohn et al., 2017) as "ironic appropriation," or the ironic use of structure. Communities use forums or public spaces not to legitimize policies, but rather to renegotiate (or resist) structures they perceive as oppressive. The current participatory phenomenon in Mandalika indicates a crisis of social capital, where public trust in management is highly volatile (legitimacy is unstable at the micro level).

Customary Structures as a Negotiation Space: Citizen Sovereignty in Rembitan Village

In an era when tourism modernization is being swept away by a highly technocratic current, amidst the fading notion of the relationship between humans and nature, Rembitan Village—particularly Sade Hamlet, emerges as an affirmative exception, as traditional Sasak customary structures remain a powerful symbolic tool (indicative characteristics) and practical tool (protection/assurance barriers) to maintain citizen sovereignty. Qualitative analysis shows that communities in this region use customary law as a medium for negotiation with modern development structures like Mandalika.

Locally, customary deliberation (*sangkep beleq*) is recognized as an authority with real socio-legal power, not merely a tourism branding concept. Furthermore, LSW firmly stated that local practices are sovereign in his village: "*Kita musyawarah adat. Tapi apakah musyawarah adat sekarang punya kekuatan atau hanya formalitas? Kalau kita di sini, ya punya kekuatan... Mengikuti adat*". ["We hold customary deliberations. But do customary deliberations now have power or are they just a formality? If we're here, we have power... Following custom."]. As pointed out by Ardana et al. (2020) findings indicate that community participation in villages is greatly influenced by readiness and respect for cultural capital. MFS stated, "*Kalau kita di Rembitan ini tetap menjaga adat istiadat walaupun kemajuan zaman Contoh misalnya pembangunan pariwisata di Mandalika, Jadi adat istiadat kita tetap menjaga Tetap kami lestarikan*". ["In Rembitan, we continue to uphold our traditions despite the advancement of technology. For example, with tourism development in Mandalika, our traditions remain intact. We continue to preserve them."].

The success of integration in Rembitan, from a development communication perspective, can be attributed to the utilization of local cultural capital as a support structure for residents. Syafruddin et al. (2021) stated that the key to maintaining character education and local character in the Mandalika region is culture-based tourism. Since Dutta's Culture-Centered Approach (CCA) (Dutta, 2015), it has become clear that communication methods targeting shared community values produce greater levels of social harmony than unadapted, uniform instructional approaches. Furthermore, institutionalizing *sangkep beleq* into formal management decision-making systems, moving toward a deliberative-transformational model, is an urgent recommendation for sustainable tourism.

Economic Dissonance: Linguistic Agency and Exclusion from Access to "Stands" (Satan)

Arguably, the most unique qualitative finding is the emergence of a boustrophedonic linguistic institution in the use of the local term for "*setan*" to define a trading facility or stands.



This shift in pronunciation is not only a linguistic issue, but also reflects the communicative suffering and disaster faced by unregistered informal small businesses operators in the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Local traders in Kuta Village describe structural inequalities and a lack of access to the benefits of economic development. SEIU assesses that their access to the economy is well-managed by well-organized groups within formal organizations such as MSMEs or PKK (Family Welfare Movement), but ordinary citizens face obstacles. The Merchants Group summarized Kuta Village: *"Ya, kalau pengusaha-pengusaha yang tidak masuk UMKM atau tidak masuk PKK, itu nanti dia tidak bisa terkenal. Tidak bisa dapat undangan untuk masuk di sirkuit Mandalika, bisa jualan di situ, dia tidak akan dapat setan (stand). Dia harus bayar setan di situ. Kalau dia tidak pelaku UMKM, tidak pelaku PKK, atau kelompok-kelompok komunitas usaha itu, dia harus bayar di situ"*. ["Yes, if entrepreneurs aren't part of the MSMEs or the PKK, they won't be able to become famous. They won't be able to get an invitation to the Mandalika circuit, sell there, and they won't get a booth. They have to pay the devil there. If they're not part of the MSMEs, the PKK, or any of those business community groups, they have to pay there."].

This economic exclusion is evidence that despite significant physical development, wealth is not evenly distributed. Chaniago et al. (2024) argue that the development configuration in Mandalika represents a return to state capitalism, where local residents are merely tributaries of the tourism economy, not fully sovereign primary subjects. This scenario contradicts the vision of sustainable tourism, which should ensure a highly transparent and inclusive type of economic activity.

This disconnect highlights that, without Communicative Justice: systemic transparency and accountability that can then enable equitable distribution of economic benefits, community participation will always be merely a reactive and symbolic response. Widiani et al. (2024) suggest that Kuta tourism development should place greater emphasis on real stakeholder coordination to create space for equity among local communities. Creating a transparent digital community platform that tracks the fair distribution of kiosks and prevents discrimination against informal community members is necessary to transform this from mere formality to cooperation.

CONCLUSION

Current tourism development in the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) exemplifies this paradox of development decentralization. It reflects the limits of large-scale physical infrastructure development, which does not always correlate with the quality of social transformation for the Sasak community. This problem is rooted in a highly linear and technocratic development communication paradigm that remains one-way. The example of post-hoc information is a stark illustration of how local stakeholders are often positioned as policy objects rather than sovereign subjects; citizens are generally involved only after key decision points have been reached. This is where reactive participation comes into play. The high levels of community engagement we documented in our field notes are not constructive collaboration, but rather a function of resistance and critical awareness of informational inequities and economic exclusion. The unequal distribution of development benefits, as seen around the trading stalls, is a new exacerbator of the social legitimacy crisis. This unique inverse relationship between participation and perceived development success means that the more vocally people voice protests and criticisms, the lower their perception of the success of these strategic national development projects. Mandalika tourism development is



inseparable from the transformation of the communication paradigm from informative-instructive to deliberative-transformative. We must make Communication Justice the foundation of inclusive development. This requires formalizing local cultural capital, such as customary deliberations, into established governance systems. The power of information and the assurance of open, informed decisions before they are made are essential prerequisites for bridging global market interests with the well-being and sovereignty of the local Sasak community, thus achieving truly sustainable tourism.

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