

Tourism Zoning Policies in the Mandalika Special Economic Zone: Examining Community Land Rights and Distributive Justice

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Abstract

The development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone has positioned Central Lombok as a major destination for international tourism and investment. However, large-scale tourism development may generate tensions concerning land access, relocation, compensation, and the distribution of economic benefits among local communities. This article examines tourism zoning policies within the Mandalika Special Economic Zone from the perspective of community land rights and distributive justice. Using normative juridical research and policy analysis, the study analyzes land governance, special economic zone regulation, tourism planning, community participation, and compensation mechanisms. The article argues that the designation of tourism zones can produce significant distributive consequences when communities experience restrictions on land use while investors gain enhanced development opportunities. Justice therefore requires more than formal legality of zoning decisions; it requires meaningful participation, transparent land acquisition processes, adequate compensation, livelihood restoration, and equitable access to tourism-generated benefits. The study proposes a tourism zoning justice framework that integrates community rights into spatial planning and investment governance. Such a framework would strengthen accountability in special economic zone development while reducing the risk that tourism-driven land transformation disproportionately burdens local residents. The article contributes to debates on tourism development, spatial justice, and community rights in Indonesia's emerging tourism investment zones.

[Pengembangan Kawasan Ekonomi Khusus Mandalika telah memposisikan Lombok Tengah sebagai destinasi utama pariwisata dan investasi internasional. Namun, pengembangan pariwisata skala besar dapat menimbulkan ketegangan terkait akses lahan, relokasi, kompensasi, dan

distribusi manfaat ekonomi di antara masyarakat setempat. Artikel ini mengkaji kebijakan zonasi pariwisata di dalam Kawasan Ekonomi Khusus Mandalika dari perspektif hak atas tanah masyarakat dan keadilan distributif. Dengan menggunakan penelitian yuridis normatif dan analisis kebijakan, studi ini menganalisis tata kelola lahan, regulasi kawasan ekonomi khusus, perencanaan pariwisata, partisipasi masyarakat, dan mekanisme kompensasi. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa penetapan zona pariwisata dapat menghasilkan konsekuensi distributif yang signifikan ketika masyarakat mengalami pembatasan penggunaan lahan sementara investor memperoleh peluang pengembangan yang lebih besar. Oleh karena itu, keadilan membutuhkan lebih dari sekadar legalitas formal keputusan zonasi; keadilan membutuhkan partisipasi yang bermakna, proses akuisisi lahan yang transparan, kompensasi yang memadai, pemulihan mata pencaharian, dan akses yang adil terhadap manfaat yang dihasilkan dari pariwisata. Studi ini mengusulkan kerangka kerja keadilan zonasi pariwisata yang mengintegrasikan hak masyarakat ke dalam perencanaan spasial dan tata kelola investasi. Kerangka kerja seperti itu akan memperkuat akuntabilitas dalam pengembangan zona ekonomi khusus sekaligus mengurangi risiko bahwa transformasi lahan yang didorong oleh pariwisata secara tidak proporsional membebani penduduk lokal. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada perdebatan tentang pengembangan pariwisata, keadilan spasial, dan hak-hak masyarakat di zona investasi pariwisata yang sedang berkembang di Indonesia.]

Keywords: Mandalika, special economic zone, land rights, spatial justice, tourism development

Introduction

Tourism-led spatial transformation has become an increasingly important feature of Indonesia's regional development strategy. The government has promoted special economic zones as instruments for attracting investment, accelerating infrastructure development, and concentrating economic activity in strategically selected territories. Within this policy architecture, the Mandalika Special Economic Zone in Central Lombok represents an important case because tourism development is closely intertwined with land acquisition, spatial restructuring, infrastructure construction, and the transformation of local livelihoods. Mandalika was formally established through Government Regulation No. 52 of 2014, covering 1,035.67 hectares in Pujut District and designated specifically as a tourism zone. The legal designation provides a strong institutional basis for investment and tourism development, but it does not automatically resolve questions concerning how the costs and benefits of spatial transformation should be distributed among investors, the state, and local residents. (peraturan.go.id)

The central issue is therefore not whether tourism development produces economic activity, but who obtains control over land, infrastructure, investment opportunities, and tourism-generated value after zoning decisions are implemented. Tourism zoning changes the function and economic meaning of land. Land previously used for agriculture, housing, grazing, or informal economic activities may acquire substantially higher commercial value once incorporated into a tourism-oriented spatial structure. This process creates an important distributive question because the increase in land value is not necessarily accompanied by proportional increases in the bargaining power of existing residents. Research on Bali, for example, demonstrates that tourism-driven investment can generate socio-spatial transformation, rising property values, and land-use conversion, while the benefits of tourism remain unevenly distributed (Suyadnya 2021). Similar concerns arise in Mandalika, where the formal expansion of tourism infrastructure has altered the relationship between communities and their land.

Previous studies provide important but fragmented explanations of these dynamics. Research on the Mandalika SEZ has found positive effects of tourism development on education, economic activity, and health, indicating that tourism investment cannot simply be characterized as socially harmful (Yuli et al. 2023). Other research, however, identifies difficulties surrounding land disputes, compensation, relocation, and dispute resolution. Fathin, Arba, and Putro (2024), for example, demonstrate that land disputes associated with Mandalika involve both litigation and non-litigation mechanisms, with communities frequently preferring mediation. Research concerning community readiness similarly shows that local residents need greater institutional and economic capacity to participate effectively in the tourism industry (Azizurrohman et al. 2023). These findings suggest that the distributive consequences of zoning cannot be assessed through economic indicators alone.

The literature also indicates that participation should be distinguished from mere consultation. Dolezal and Novelli (2022) demonstrate that community-based tourism in Bali is shaped by power relations between local communities and external actors, meaning that the existence of participatory institutions does not necessarily guarantee meaningful community empowerment. Research on Carangsari Tourism Village likewise found that local participation could remain largely consultative and passive despite the formal adoption of community-based tourism principles (Putra 2020). This distinction is particularly relevant to Mandalika because spatial decisions are often made within administrative and investment structures that communities do not control. The question is consequently whether residents possess sufficient institutional power to influence zoning, land acquisition, compensation, and post-development benefit allocation rather than merely whether they are invited to participate.

This article addresses a gap in the existing literature by bringing together three dimensions that are often examined separately: the legal authority underlying

tourism zoning, the transformation of community land rights, and the distributive consequences of tourism investment. Existing Mandalika studies have predominantly examined welfare, community readiness, land disputes, or tourism governance as separate questions. This article instead argues that these issues are structurally connected through zoning. Once an area is designated and planned as a tourism investment space, zoning influences land value, permissible land use, infrastructure priorities, investment access, and ultimately the distribution of development benefits. The article therefore asks how tourism zoning in Mandalika affects community land rights and whether the existing legal and institutional framework is capable of producing spatially and distributively just outcomes.

Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

The concept of spatial justice provides the principal theoretical foundation of this study. Spatial justice recognizes that space is not merely a physical container in which social and economic activities occur but is continuously produced through political, economic, and institutional relationships. Tourism zoning consequently has distributive implications because it determines access to land, infrastructure, mobility, environmental resources, and economic opportunities. Recent tourism scholarship emphasizes that tourism spaces are characterized by power geometries in which different actors possess unequal capacities to shape the production and use of space (Dredge and Jamal 2022). From this perspective, a tourism zone is not simply an administrative boundary; it represents a reconfiguration of power over territory.

Justice in tourism also requires moving beyond the assumption that aggregate economic growth automatically constitutes social progress. Figueroa-Domecq et al. (2021) emphasize that justice-oriented tourism scholarship must consider equity, recognition, participation, belonging, rights, and governance. Such an approach is particularly useful for Mandalika because economic indicators may reveal increased investment or employment without capturing whether communities have lost control over land or whether compensation enables them to reproduce their previous livelihoods. Distributive justice therefore concerns not only the quantity of benefits produced by tourism but also the allocation of costs, opportunities, risks, and decision-making authority.

A second theoretical foundation is the social exchange perspective. Tourism research demonstrates that local support for tourism development is strongly influenced by residents' perceptions of benefits, costs, participation, and community attachment (Nugroho and Numata 2022). The relevance of this framework to Mandalika lies in its ability to explain why local support should not be interpreted as an unconditional acceptance of tourism development. Communities may support tourism when employment, infrastructure, and business opportunities are accessible to them, but resistance may increase when land loss, displacement, environmental pressures, or unequal benefit distribution become

dominant experiences. Tourism governance therefore needs to account for the relationship between perceived benefits and perceived costs.

A third framework concerns recognition and substantive land rights. Formal land ownership does not exhaust the social meaning of land. Land may simultaneously function as a source of livelihood, residence, cultural identity, social security, and intergenerational inheritance. Wardana's analysis of Bali demonstrates that tourism-driven land transformation can undermine agrarian landscapes even when land transactions appear legally valid because the broader social and ecological functions of land are insufficiently recognized (Wardana 2020). This perspective is important for Mandalika because distributive justice requires consideration not only of the monetary value of acquired land but also of the livelihood systems and social relations attached to it.

These theoretical approaches converge in the concept of tourism zoning justice developed in this article. Tourism zoning justice is understood as the principle that spatial designation for tourism should distribute development opportunities fairly, recognize existing community rights, minimize involuntary burdens, and provide affected communities with meaningful authority over decisions that transform their territories. It combines distributive justice, procedural justice, and recognition justice. Distributive justice asks who receives tourism benefits and who bears the costs; procedural justice examines whether communities have meaningful influence over decisions; and recognition justice asks whether existing social, cultural, and livelihood relationships with land are adequately recognized by law and policy.

Methods

This study employs a normative juridical method supported by socio-legal and policy analysis. The normative component examines Indonesian legislation governing land, tourism, special economic zones, spatial planning, investment, and land acquisition. Particular attention is given to the interaction between Law No. 39 of 2009 on Special Economic Zones, Law No. 10 of 2009 on Tourism, Law No. 2 of 2012 on Land Acquisition for Development in the Public Interest, Government Regulation No. 52 of 2014 on the Mandalika SEZ, and Government Regulation No. 40 of 2021 on the Administration of Special Economic Zones. Law No. 39 of 2009 establishes the institutional framework for special economic zones, while Government Regulation No. 40 of 2021 regulates contemporary arrangements concerning location, development, operation, land, spatial planning, and investment facilitation.

The socio-legal component examines empirical findings from peer-reviewed research concerning Mandalika, tourism development, community participation, land conflict, and tourism-related spatial transformation. This approach is necessary because a purely doctrinal analysis could identify formal rights and procedures without adequately assessing how those mechanisms operate within the social relations of tourism development. Empirical studies concerning Mandalika provide

evidence regarding community welfare, readiness, land disputes, compensation, and participation, while studies from Bali and other Indonesian destinations provide comparative insight into tourism-induced land-use change and community participation.

The analysis uses qualitative content analysis to identify recurring relationships between zoning, land governance, community participation, compensation, livelihood change, and benefit distribution. The research does not attempt to calculate the monetary value of all tourism benefits or establish a statistical causal relationship between zoning and household welfare. Instead, it evaluates whether the legal and institutional framework is capable of reconciling tourism investment with community land rights. The analysis consequently focuses on the normative adequacy and distributive consequences of existing governance arrangements.

The article also uses a comparative literature approach to distinguish Mandalika from other Indonesian tourism contexts. Research on Bali, Gunung Ciremai, community-based tourism villages, and other tourism destinations is used not to equate their circumstances with Mandalika but to identify broader patterns concerning participation, land conversion, benefit distribution, and community empowerment. This comparative strategy strengthens the analytical basis for assessing whether Mandalika represents an isolated land governance problem or a broader structural challenge within investment-oriented tourism development.

Results and Discussion

1. Zoning as a Redistribution of Territorial Power

The designation of Mandalika as a tourism SEZ fundamentally changes the institutional meaning of territory. Government Regulation No. 52 of 2014 establishes Mandalika as a tourism-oriented special economic zone and provides a formal spatial foundation for development. The regulation identifies the zone as covering 1,035.67 hectares within Pujut District and establishes its boundaries in relation to surrounding villages and coastal areas. Although such designation is legally administrative, its practical consequences are distributive because zoning determines which economic activities are prioritized, where infrastructure is concentrated, and how land is valued and utilized.

The transformation of territorial value is particularly significant in tourism destinations. Land located within or adjacent to tourism infrastructure may experience substantial increases in commercial attractiveness, while communities whose land previously served primarily residential or agricultural purposes may find themselves operating within a rapidly commercializing property market. Research from Bali shows that tourism gentrification can increase land and property values while simultaneously transforming the socio-spatial character of local communities (Suyadnya 2021). Similar dynamics can be observed conceptually in Mandalika, where tourism zoning creates new economic possibilities but also changes the opportunity cost of retaining land for traditional livelihood activities.

This demonstrates why zoning should not be treated as a technically neutral planning decision. A zoning designation reallocates territorial opportunities. Investors gain access to a spatial environment specifically structured for tourism, while local communities may face restrictions on land use, increasing land prices, or pressure to adapt to activities that they did not initiate. The legal legitimacy of zoning therefore needs to be accompanied by substantive justice. A decision may comply with statutory procedures while still generating unequal outcomes if the distribution of resulting benefits and burdens is systematically asymmetric.

The problem becomes more pronounced when communities have limited capacity to influence the zoning process. Research on community participation in Indonesian tourism demonstrates that formal participation does not necessarily result in meaningful decision-making authority. Putra (2020), for example, found that participation in Carangsari Tourism Village remained largely consultative and passive. Dolezal and Novelli (2022) similarly demonstrate that community-based tourism in Bali operates within unequal power relations. These findings suggest that participation must be evaluated according to its actual capacity to influence decisions rather than its formal existence.

A more just zoning process would therefore require communities to participate before spatial decisions become irreversible. Participation should occur during the identification of tourism boundaries, land-use priorities, infrastructure planning, environmental assessment, and benefit-sharing design. This approach would shift communities from being recipients of predetermined development policies to co-producers of spatial governance. Such a shift is consistent with the broader principle that tourism development should enhance community capabilities rather than simply adapt communities to externally determined investment structures.

2. Land Acquisition, Compensation, and the Limits of Formal Legality

Land acquisition represents one of the most sensitive dimensions of the Mandalika development process because tourism zoning can increase the demand for land while simultaneously strengthening the institutional capacity of development authorities to acquire or reorganize land. Law No. 2 of 2012 provides the principal framework for land acquisition for development in the public interest, establishing procedures concerning planning, preparation, implementation, and compensation. However, the application of a formal land-acquisition framework does not automatically ensure distributive justice because legal compensation and actual livelihood restoration are conceptually different.

The distinction is important because land has multidimensional value. A compensation payment may reflect assessed land, buildings, plants, or other legally recognized components without fully capturing the social value of a place or the long-term income generated through access to productive land. This problem is particularly significant in communities where land provides multiple functions simultaneously. A household may lose agricultural production, residential security,

informal business opportunities, and social networks even when the financial compensation is formally calculated according to statutory procedures.

Empirical research concerning Mandalika reinforces this concern. Fathin, Arba, and Putro (2024) identify land-rights disputes between customary communities and development companies and show that dispute resolution involves both litigation and alternative dispute resolution, with mediation receiving considerable community preference. Their findings demonstrate that land conflict is not simply a disagreement over technical ownership but involves legal, social, economic, cultural, and institutional factors. The persistence of disputes therefore indicates that formal acquisition mechanisms do not necessarily eliminate questions concerning legitimacy.

Research specifically addressing justice in Mandalika similarly indicates that recognition of community land rights has not always been accompanied by effective implementation of justice principles. The analytical significance of this finding lies in the distinction between legal recognition and practical protection. A legal system can recognize land rights in principle while still producing unequal outcomes if affected communities lack information, bargaining power, legal assistance, or effective remedies. Justice therefore requires attention to the conditions under which rights are exercised, not merely the textual existence of those rights.

Compensation should consequently be reconstructed as part of a broader livelihood restoration obligation. Where tourism development changes the economic structure of a community, compensation should include measures enabling affected residents to maintain or improve their livelihood capacity. Such measures could include access to tourism employment, preferential opportunities for local businesses, training, affordable commercial space, housing security, and participation in tourism supply chains. This approach would better reflect the principle that development should not merely compensate people for what they lose but should ensure that they are capable of benefiting from what development creates.

3. Community Participation and the Problem of Unequal Capacity

Community participation is frequently presented as a solution to conflicts surrounding tourism development, yet participation itself can reproduce inequality when communities enter decision-making processes without comparable resources or institutional power. Mandalika illustrates this problem because tourism development involves national government institutions, development corporations, local governments, investors, tourism operators, landowners, and village communities. These actors do not possess equal access to technical expertise, legal information, financial resources, or decision-making institutions.

Research on Mandalika community readiness indicates that local communities are required to adapt to the tourism industry and develop the capacity necessary to participate in tourism operations (Azizurrohman et al. 2023). This

finding is significant because it reframes participation as a capacity issue rather than merely a consultation issue. A community cannot participate effectively in zoning negotiations if its members lack information about spatial plans, investment structures, legal rights, compensation methodologies, or future land-use consequences.

The same problem appears in wider Indonesian tourism research. Nugroho and Numata (2022) found that community involvement and perceived economic benefits significantly influence residents' support for community-based tourism. Their findings imply that support is closely connected to whether residents perceive themselves as participants and beneficiaries rather than passive subjects of development. Community involvement therefore has both procedural and distributive dimensions. Participation becomes meaningful when it produces tangible influence over decisions and when residents can access the economic opportunities created by tourism.

In Mandalika, meaningful participation should begin with access to information. Communities need understandable information concerning zoning maps, land-use restrictions, investment plans, infrastructure development, environmental impacts, acquisition schedules, compensation calculations, and expected economic benefits. Without such information, consultation risks becoming procedural rather than substantive. Transparency should consequently be treated as a precondition for participation rather than as a separate administrative obligation. Participation should also continue after the zoning decision has been made. Monitoring tourism development is as important as participation in initial planning because the actual consequences of development may differ from projected outcomes. If tourism generates fewer local jobs than anticipated, increases living costs, restricts community access to natural resources, or produces uneven business opportunities, communities should have institutional channels to demand policy adjustment. This requires permanent community representation within tourism governance rather than temporary consultation during project preparation.

4. From Economic Growth to Distributive Tourism Governance

The available evidence suggests that tourism development in Mandalika generates genuine economic benefits. Yuli et al. (2023) found improvements in dimensions including education, economic activity, and health among local communities. This evidence is important because a justice-oriented analysis should not assume that tourism investment is inherently exploitative. The appropriate question is instead whether the benefits generated by tourism are sufficiently accessible to communities affected by the transformation of their territory. Development should therefore be assessed according to both aggregate gains and distributional patterns.

Community readiness research reinforces this point. Azizurrohman et al. (2023) found that communities around Mandalika need to adapt to tourism industry

requirements. This adaptation creates an important policy dilemma. If residents must acquire new skills, capital, networks, and business knowledge merely to remain economically relevant within their own territory, the costs of adaptation may effectively be transferred from investors and the state to local communities. A just development strategy should therefore recognize adaptation costs as part of the public policy responsibility associated with tourism transformation.

Community-based tourism research provides an alternative institutional model. Research from Waturaka, for example, demonstrates that high levels of community participation can support tourism management while generating economic and conservation benefits (Sawu and Sugiarti 2020). Studies from other Indonesian destinations similarly emphasize the importance of community leadership, local ownership, and institutional capacity in determining whether tourism produces sustainable local benefits (Sartika and Wargadinata 2020). These findings suggest that local benefit-sharing should not depend exclusively on employment generated by large tourism companies.

A more equitable Mandalika model would therefore diversify local participation across ownership, supply chains, services, accommodation, cultural tourism, transport, agriculture, and small enterprises. Community benefits could be strengthened through preferential procurement policies, local supplier requirements, cooperative development, community-owned tourism enterprises, and access to affordable financing. Such policies would transform local communities from labor providers into economic participants with a stake in the value generated by the tourism zone.

The distributive question also extends to infrastructure. Tourism infrastructure often produces dual benefits: it serves visitors and investors while also improving local mobility and public services. However, infrastructure priorities may be designed primarily around tourism flows rather than community needs. Spatial justice requires assessing whether roads, water systems, electricity, sanitation, public spaces, digital infrastructure, and transportation systems serve local residents as well as tourists. The value of tourism development should therefore be measured partly by whether tourism infrastructure reduces or reproduces territorial inequality.

5. Toward a Tourism Zoning Justice Framework for Mandalika

The analysis indicates that the principal weakness in Mandalika is not the absence of legal authority to establish a tourism zone but the limited integration of land rights, participation, and distributive justice into zoning governance. Indonesian law provides a substantial regulatory framework for tourism and special economic zones. Law No. 10 of 2009 recognizes comprehensive and sustainable tourism development and establishes responsibilities for governments, businesses, and communities. Meanwhile, the special economic zone framework provides institutional and investment mechanisms intended to accelerate economic development. The challenge is ensuring that these investment-oriented mechanisms operate consistently with the social function of land and community rights.

The first component of a tourism zoning justice framework should be rights-sensitive spatial planning. Zoning decisions should identify existing residential areas, agricultural land, culturally significant sites, customary or community-managed resources, and livelihood spaces before development priorities are established. This would prevent the spatial plan from treating all land as interchangeable economic units. A rights-sensitive zoning process would also require cumulative impact assessments that examine how multiple tourism projects collectively influence land prices, access to resources, housing, employment, and local economic structures.

The second component should be meaningful participation. Consultation should occur before final zoning decisions and should include accessible information, sufficient preparation time, independent legal assistance, and mechanisms for communities to propose alternatives. Participation should also be institutionally continuous through community representation in monitoring and evaluation bodies. Such mechanisms are consistent with evidence showing that community involvement is a significant determinant of support for tourism development (Nugroho and Numata 2022).

The third component should be livelihood-centered compensation. Compensation should not terminate with the transfer of land. Where development causes livelihood disruption, affected communities should receive restoration measures that allow them to participate in the new tourism economy. This may require vocational training, business financing, preferential employment, local procurement, housing support, and access to tourism-related infrastructure. The principle should be straightforward: communities should not become economically weaker because their land has become more valuable for tourism investment.

The fourth component should be benefit-sharing. The Mandalika SEZ should be evaluated not only by investment volume, tourist arrivals, or infrastructure completion but also through measurable indicators of local welfare. Such indicators could include the percentage of local procurement, local employment quality, community business ownership, household income changes, access to infrastructure, livelihood restoration, and participation in tourism decision-making. A benefit-sharing system would make distributive justice measurable rather than leaving it as a general policy aspiration. Finally, zoning justice requires accessible remedies. Land disputes should not depend exclusively on prolonged litigation because affected residents often face unequal financial and institutional capacity. Mediation, independent complaint mechanisms, administrative review, and judicial remedies should operate as complementary channels. The preference for non-litigation settlement identified in Mandalika research suggests that accessible mediation may be particularly important, provided that it is genuinely voluntary and does not pressure communities to accept inadequate compensation (Fathin, Arba, and Putro 2024). Effective remedies are essential because procedural participation without the possibility of challenging unlawful or harmful decisions provides limited protection.

Conclusion

The Mandalika Special Economic Zone demonstrates that tourism zoning is not merely an instrument for organizing land uses but a mechanism capable of redistributing territorial power, economic opportunity, and social risk. The formal establishment of Mandalika as a tourism SEZ has created substantial opportunities for investment, infrastructure development, employment, and local economic growth, and existing empirical research confirms that these benefits can reach surrounding communities. At the same time, land acquisition, livelihood transformation, unequal participation, and disputes demonstrate that economic growth does not automatically produce distributive justice. The central problem is therefore not whether Mandalika should develop tourism, but how tourism development can be organized so that the transformation of land does not systematically weaken the position of the communities that historically depend upon it.

A tourism zoning justice framework requires a shift from investment-centered spatial governance toward rights-sensitive and community-responsive planning. Zoning should be accompanied by meaningful participation, transparent land governance, livelihood restoration, equitable benefit-sharing, and accessible remedies. The success of Mandalika should consequently be evaluated not only through investment realization or tourism performance but also through whether local communities retain meaningful access to land, economic opportunities, infrastructure, and decision-making. Such an approach would not undermine investment. On the contrary, it would provide greater institutional legitimacy and social sustainability for tourism development by reducing conflict and ensuring that the economic value generated by territorial transformation is more equitably distributed.

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